



A LIFE WITH A MESSAGE

RECOLLECTING SHASHI TYAGI'S LIFE

Edited by

Archna Kumar, Gary Worthington

Prakash Tyagi, R. P. Dhir



12th July, 1947

14th November, 2020

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2021

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"Be the change you want to see in the world."

Mahatma Gandhi

FOREWORD

Compiling the memories from the life of someone like Shashi Ji would never be easy. A person who was connected to thousands of hearts all across the world, who lived a life full of wonderful and long lasting memories, and someone who touched many hearts by her actions is rare and leaves the world with long-lasting and unforgettable impressions.

Soon after Shashi Ji's demise on 14th November, 2020, it was felt by her family and close friends that a memory book to remember Shashi Ji's incredible life, narrated by her friends and close acquaintances, would be a very worthwhile endeavor. Hence, this effort has been made and the collected memories are being shared. The notes collected and shared are from over 25 countries across the world and are written by people of very diverse backgrounds—coming from her family, her close friends and colleagues, from representatives of non-profit organizations and Government agencies, from academia and *Sarvodaya* or Gandhian organizations, from young researchers and students, and last but not the least from people living in rural areas, for whom Shashi Ji worked her entire life.

We have made sincere efforts to capture everything that has been expressed in full authenticity, yet there was a need to limit the length of the book. As such, some edits have been incorporated with due care. The notes presented are first-hand expressions and experiences from the contributors regarding Shashi Ji's remarkable life. The book has Shashi Ji's brief biography, 150 collected memory notes, and a picture gallery. The publication is bilingual – in Hindi and in English, to reach out to different reader groups.

Going through the memory notes is like experiencing Shashi Ji's life moments more closely. She was a truly selfless human being who tirelessly, relentlessly devoted the years of her life in the service of humanity. We hope this book is read by people around the world and inspires many to work towards creating a world full of love and humanity.

Working on this compilation was a great honour for us.

Archna Kumar

Gary Worthington

Prakash Tyagi

R. P. Dhir

CONTENTS

1. Biography09

2. Notes in memory17

3. Gallery155

4. List of contributors183

5. Afterword191

BIOGRAPHY

A legacy of love, empathy and service

Soft spoken, simple, smiling, courageous and energetic Shashi Ji was known as Shashi Behan or as Behan Ji among her friends and colleagues. Born in Lucknow in north India in 1947, she was the fourth child of her parents. At the age of about 3, Shashi Ji lost her mother to a medical emergency. Her father used to work as an accountant in the army and hence she spent her childhood with her father in various places where he was posted, and later settled in Meerut, their home town.

From her childhood, Shashi Ji was a keen and laborious student and did well in her studies. Childhood was happy memories for her. Her two elder sisters got married when she was very young and she continued her education along with her brother and her younger sister. Her father was a loving but disciplined man who used to take care of children's needs with affection and sensitivity. Shashi Ji went on to receive higher education and earned two University degrees in the late 1960s.

In 1969, Shashi Ji got married to Laxmi Chand Tyagi Ji (later known as Tyagi Ji), who came from a well to do agricultural family, was a well-educated young man and who was motivated towards social development. Inspired by Gandhian ideology, Tyagi Ji was engaged in Vinoba Bhave's land gift movement at that time. After marriage, Shashi Ji had to leave urban comforts to accompany her husband in rural and tribal areas. Soon after that, they both worked in the famine relief programme in Bihar, led by Jay Prakash Narayan (JP). They used to do long foot marches and worked hard for rural people. This is how Shashi Ji social life started with a change that was new and difficult and full of sacrifices.

In 1970, Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji joined Banwasi Sewa Ashram (BSA) led by Sh. Prem Bhai and Dr. Ragini Prem. Here, Shashi Ji worked for about 9 years, relentlessly, in the service of tribal populations living under extreme poverty. Shashi Ji used her educational qualification to teach rural children and acted as a teacher at BSA for several years. Here at the *Ashram*, life was simple, with limited facilities but was full of social bonds, and of exchanges of ideas and learning. Both Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji lived lives of hardship during their years with BSA, which was full of sacrifices and they fully devoted themselves in the service of the poor. During their stay at BSA, they became parents of their two children – Abha and Prakash.

In 1979, on the recommendation of *Acharya J. B. Kripalani*, Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji moved to Rajasthan to set up a new organization. This area was completely new and unknown for them and the climatic conditions as well geographical terrain were very difficult. At this vary time, Tyagi Ji had also been given the responsibility of doing block-level development

planning in Uttarkhand (within U. P. State of those days). While he conducted that task in Uttarakhand, Shashi Ji moved to Jodhpur, Rajasthan with her two small children and started a new life, a new organization. Tyagi Ji joined after some time. In the first year in Rajasthan, they stayed as tenants in the home of Smt. Chagan Behan in Jodhpur, a renowned social activist. A few other old colleagues namely Manik Bhai, Rama Shankar Bhai and Rudra Bhai joined them and GRAVIS was founded. It was a new area with new people for all of them but they all patiently understood the conditions and needs and went through the period of change with courage, confidence and conviction. In desert conditions, amid sand dunes, the first GRAVIS center was established in Jelu - Gagadi village in the early 1980s.

Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and *Sarvodaya* ideology, Shashi Ji dedicated her entire life to the causes of poor and under - privileged. She believed in holistic development of communities without discrimination based on gender, caste or religion. In order to know the people and their needs, she traveled extensively within the villages, on her feet, engaging and talking with rural people. On behalf of GRAVIS, Shashi Ji took very important initiatives in the spheres of health, education, water, agriculture, women empowerment, hygiene, nutrition and human rights.

GRAVIS started its work in a cluster of 20 villages of Jodhpur District in Rajasthan in 1980s. At present, GRAVIS works in more than 1,500 villages of 10 Districts of the Thar Desert of Rajasthan, India and in Uttarakhand and U. P.

The Gandhian philosophy of "*Sarvodaya*" - all rising, but the last person first - is the foundation for GRAVIS' strategy and approach to their work. Accordingly, GRAVIS works for the collective ascension of men, women, and children, regardless of economic situation, caste or religion. With the changes of modernity, this philosophy is becoming more pertinent as the incongruities of Indian society become exaggerated. Addressing the situation through the empowerment of rural communities, GRAVIS also adheres to another Gandhian notion, "*Gram Swarajya*", or village self-rule, when implementing its efforts. GRAVIS works toward the rehabilitation of the rural community, enabling village ownership and control over its environment, institutions, and relations. GRAVIS inculcates the idea of *Gram Swarajya* as a practical philosophy for integrated development. In all its activities, participation and commitment of people are ensured. The interventions made by GRAVIS have been need-based and community-driven. GRAVIS takes a holistic approach to rural reconstruction and pursues the roles of facilitator and catalyst for rural reconstruction and social development.

GRAVIS' actions focus on the poor, backward and marginalized section of Thar Desert communities with particular emphasis on women, children and elderly. GRAVIS has a deep concern for the development of children, women empowerment and gender justice. Accordingly, the participation of women has been ensured in all the programmes and activities. Major programmatic areas for GRAVIS include promoting education, improving health status, water security, agriculture and forestry and training, capacity building and human rights. GRAVIS focuses on social development issues such as adolescent health, hygiene, child health, nutrition, girl child education, water and sanitation. It also focuses on the entitlements of mineworkers which contribute a large chunk of the labour population of the Thar Desert. It intervenes with awareness and educational activities for mineworkers and their families, health and safety measure and provision of legal aid for their entitlements. The organisation has deep faith in developing appropriate partnerships with groups, organisations, government agencies and individuals working on similar ideologies.

In order to empower the desert communities of the Thar, GRAVIS organized the following activities in the leadership of Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji:

- Construction of rainwater harvesting structures
- Setting up and running schools for children
- Organization of outreach healthcare activities and running a 65-bed hospital
- Training and capacity building of rural communities on NRM, health, education and social issues.
- Empowering women through Self Help development.
- Organic farming, seed development, afforestation and horticulture development
- Support animal husbandry
- Drought relief and mitigation activities
- Promotion of Gandhian thoughts

Following have been the main accomplishments of GRAVIS in the leadership of Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji:

- Formation of over 900 Village Development Committees (VDCs), over 2,000 Self Help Groups (SHGs) of women and Village Funds (VF) in over 100 villages in order to develop leadership and self-reliance among rural communities. Further, it has set up 104 Village Older People's

A life with a message

Associations (VOPAs), 72 Village Education Committees (VECs), 500 Village Health Committees (VHCs) and 42 Village Eye Care Committees (VECC).

- GRAVIS has set up over 100 schools for primary education for the needy children, out of which 46 have been handed over to the government or the community. A total of over 7,000 children are enrolled in the schools. School children are linked with mid-day meals scheme and outreach health services. In GRAVIS schools, a strong focus is given on educating children on environmental issues, health and hygiene and sanitation.
- Construction of over 7,500 *taankas* (for drinking water storage), over 5,500 *khadins* (for agriculture), over 300 village ponds and over 600 *beries* (for drinking water storage) for water harvesting. The activities have benefited over 1 million households.
- Set up over 500 seed banks, over 5,000 fruit orchards, 67 community forests, 483 demonstration farms, 67 fodder banks, 963 compost pits and 2,400 hectares of pastures land.
- Organisation of a community-based health programme benefiting 500,000 people. GRAVIS has also set up a fully equipped rural hospital and has developed a network of over 550 Village Health Workers (VHWs).
- In over 1,500 villages, GRAVIS organizes health activities aiming at reproductive health, nutrition, eye care, malaria control, TB control, prevention of HIV/AIDS and Occupational Lung Diseases (OLD).
- Generated employment by organizing around 500,000 workdays every year under the Food for Work programme.
- Organisation of emergency drought relief measures including supply of drinking water, food grains and fodder in over 400 villages during drought years.

In the leadership of Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji, GRAVIS has grown into one of the most respected development organizations in India and is a leading Gandhian organization. The work done by GRAVIS has impacted the lives of about 1.5 million people living in the rural areas. In addition, GRAVIS has inspired many other new groups to work in the Thar Desert region as well as in other parts of India. Over the years, GRAVIS has also been able to influence local Government bodies for the replication of its development model in rural areas.

Shashi Ji was a prominent speaker in many events focusing on rural

reconstruction and community development. She inspired and trained a number of youth leaders and community leaders.

In 2005, Tyagi Ji was diagnosed with a kidney failure. Shashi Ji donated one of her kidneys to him to save his life but unfortunately after the transplant surgery, Tyagi Ji could not be saved. Shashi Ji braced the challenge with courage and took up the leadership of GRAVIS with the support from her son Prakash and other colleagues such as Roshan Ji, Rajendra Ji and Ramavtar Ji. Currently, GRAVIS is a leading voluntary organization in India and Shashi Ji's contribution has made it possible.

Over her long social life, Shashi Ji remained associated with many organizations in various capacities. Some of them are:

- President, South Asia Partnership (SAP)
- President, Rajasthan Voluntary Health Association (RVHA)
- Vice President, Rajasthan Samagra Seva Sangh
- Secretary and Founder, GRAVIS
- Member, Social Welfare Board
- Member, Council for People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) Board
- Member, International Development Exchange Board, US
- Advisor, Global Fund for Women, US
- Advisor, Grantmakers without borders, US
- Member, The School of Desert Sciences Board
- Member, Navjyoti Manovikas Kendra Board
- Member, Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI) Board

Shashi Ji was awarded by many organizations during her life. Some of the awards include Jamnalal Bajaj Award of 2017, Anadi-Kamal Award of VHAI, Indian Merchants Chambers Award and Ram Krishna Jaydayal Dalmiya Award. She travelled extensively all around the world, to over 25 countries.

In addition, she had made significant contribution to many other organizations and campaigns including her work with BSA in U. P., her founding role in Mine Labour Protection Campaign (MLPC), her involvement in creation of GRAVIS hospital and her lifelong work on Gandhian ideology through Gandhi Yuva Vahini, Sarva Sewa Sangh and other entities.

In her personal life, Shashi Ji embodied great simplicity. She wore only

A life with a message

khadi clothes her whole life, never possessed any jewelry and never accumulated any wealth. Her entire mission of life was to support poor and the causes of GRAVIS and to promote the ideology of *Sarvodaya*. She always believed in continuing the dialogue and in bridging the gaps, in creating bonds. During the last 2 years of her life, she had health limitations, first with an abdominal disease and then later with a blood cancer - Acute Leukemia. Yet, she continued being as active as possible and supported large numbers of people during COVID-19 lockdown. Finally, her life came to an end due to blood cancer, at 4 pm on 14th November, 2020 on the Diwali day in India. Her demise was felt like a huge loss for the poor and needy, for her friends and for the voluntary sector. She lived a life which is an epitome of sacrifice and commitment and has left behind a legacy of love, empathy and service

Abha Tyagi Malik

Deepak Malik

Vasundhera Tyagi

NOTES IN MEMORY

- 1 -

Remembering Shashi Ji

“My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive, and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humour, and some style.” These words of the American poet and civil rights activist, Maya Angelou, ringed loud in my ears by the time I finished meeting Ms Shashi Tyagi for the first time.

It was two decades ago when I first had the opportunity to meet Shashi Ji. She was quite a luminary in the field of social development. I had heard stories about her deep impact work from my father-in-law. So, the very thought of meeting her was intimidating.

The day finally arrived. But I was nervous. I had to take my two months old daughter with me, albeit apprehensively. Working for the Maternal and Child Nutrition and Health Program, I practised what I preached. I carried my baby daughter everywhere I went. But what if my baby began to cry or throw up? What if I would not be able to interact meaningfully with Shashi Ji? As soon as I entered the GRAVIS office, my apprehensions disappeared. It was like stepping into Bapu's *Ashram*. The peace and calm were striking. The NGO seemed to function smoothly as a well-oiled wheel. Most overwhelming was the warmth of the Tyagi family.

Clad in a green *khadi* saree, Shashi Ji appeared with an air of serenity and warmth. She welcomed me with a motherly hug and took my little daughter in her lap. Sensing my nervousness, Shashi Ji made me feel comfortable. She shared her stories of balancing her social welfare work with the needs of her two children. That infused a lot of confidence in me. In retrospect, I can hardly recollect the official talks we had that day, but I vividly remember her kindness and empathy. Over the years I would often meet her to discuss the ongoing projects. Each time I was the beneficiary of wise advice and a lot of zeal. Shashi Ji will always be my idol.

She would often tell me that the way I drove into the villages of Rajasthan in my jeep, I would leave a strong message of self-reliance among local women. “Abha, continue to mobilize and empower women,” Shashi Ji would often say. I know I have her blessings as I continue to make a meaningful impact in the community.

I feel extremely fortunate to have been shaped by a woman who had kindness as her core value. Shashi Ji was indeed a once-in-a-lifetime human. She will always be fondly remembered by me.

I have been associated with Shashi Ji and the organization in different capacities for almost two decades. Falling short of words when I start

A life with a message

describing her, I can only say she is the most magnanimous personality I have ever come across through the years.

Abha Sharma, India

Ms. Abha Sharma is a senior development consultant and has worked with several organizations including CARE.

- 2 -

Shashi Ji : A Legend

Honorable Ms. Shashi Tyagi was a legendary personality with her social life spanning the arenas of women empowerment, education, health, water security, etc. She was a very humble and courageous lady who has been instrumental in various necessary social reforms achieved through GRAVIS.

I have been privileged to work with GRAVIS under her leadership during Department of Science and Technology (DST) sponsored collaborative research project entitled, “Ground Improvement of Dune Sand Field for Water Harvesting and Moisture Retention” aimed at water conservation in the areas of Western Rajasthan, between GRAVIS and Veermata Jijabai Technological Institute (VJTI), Mumbai.

I remember her words during one of the workshops, “Jal Chetna,” organized under the project, where in she shared the kind of challenges faced by local people, especially women, due to severe water scarcity in the area. Quoting her words: “*Ghar me Badi Mahilaye Kahti hai ki Hath Kandho tak Mat Dhona, Pani Jyada Kharch Hoga*” (Elder ladies of the families say that do not wash hands up to the shoulder as more water will be used.) Women used to keep water in locks and used to carry keys with them. She further elaborated how GRAVIS has served the people by working with 50,000 desert families across over 1,000 villages in Rajasthan, reaching a population of over one million.

Her commitment towards serving the needy people can be understood from the enormous work carried out by GRAVIS under her able leadership, and I am sure with her blessings, the legacy will be carried further by Prakash Ji and his team.

Abhay Kumar S Wayal, India

Dr. Abhay Kumar S Wayal is a Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering in Mumbai and friend of GRAVIS.

- 3 -

Memories of Ms. Shashi Tyagi

I got familiar with the Tyagi family when I went to the USA for Fulbright Humphrey Fellowship in 2005. I was a housemate with Dr. Pakash Tyagi at Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine in New Orleans, Louisiana. We were there for two weeks, and then as Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans city, we were shifted to the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. In Chapel Hill, we were house mates for one year as well.

Besides courses, we had lots of professional development activities and gatherings. I would have plenty of time chatting with Dr. Prakash daily. Prakash told me about his life in India, his father and his mother and how they founded GRAVIS.

In Sept. of 2011, I went to Jodhpur city for the first time, where the Tyagi family invited me to their home, where I met Ms. Shashi Tyagi. I had the opportunity to meet that great woman who was the symbol of love, sympathy, and kindness. When we were leaving Jodhpur city, the Tyagi family gifted me a traditional waistcoat that I wear on some special occasions, provided me with food and a box of *Mithai* (sweets). I was so impressed with the hospitality of the Tyagi family and Shashi Tyagi.

It is worth mentioning that while in Jodhpur, besides visiting GRAVIS, I also visited different projects that were being implemented by GRAVIS, such as a GRAVIS-run hospital, schools for the children of mineworkers, and some water conservation projects.

In 2017, I was informed by my friend Prakash that his mother received the prestigious Jamnalal Bajaj Award of 2017 for her contribution to constructive work. I was delighted after reading the fantastic news. She truly deserved such an honor.

In November 2020, I received the sad news from Prakash that his mother had passed away through our WhatsApp group. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on travels and movements, I did not have a chance to go to India and share grief and sorrow with Prakash and his family, so I only sent a condolence message to Prakash and his family and prayed for her soul. Unfortunately, I did not have another chance to meet her in India or host her in Afghanistan after 2011.

May the Almighty Allah/Bhagwan put her soul in eternal peace

Ahmadullah Molakhail , Afghanistan

Dr. Ahmadullah Molakhail is a physician and heads RH unit of UNFPA, Afghanistan.

End of an era

I pray for Shashi Tyagi Ji who was not less than a Goddess for the Thar Desert. It is not easy to write about such a great personality in a few words. She was herself a blessing for women in the Thar. People living in poverty and scarcity will remember her for a long time. She has given a lifeline to such people. Shashi Behan easily made a family bonding with all people attached to her. Families living in remote part of villages are still affectionate towards her and remember her fondly. It was a great quality of Shashi Ji to ask about every person's health and well-being during her visit to their homes. She always felt empathy for the pain of people. After hearing the sudden demise of her, people in villages are still in shock.

She was very concerned about girl child education and she believed in educating girls, is the base of strong family. She worked on women entrepreneurship and encouraged women to join various income generation activities. She also worked on the eradication of social evils like child marriage and death feast. I was associated with her for 15 years and learnt lots of things from her. She was courageous, expressive and soft spoken. Still, people call her Amma for her unique charismatic nature. She will be always remembered for the continuation of the legacy of Tyagi Ji's work in Thar.

Akheraj Khatri, India

Sh. Akheraj Khatri is a journalist and a social worker from the Thar Desert.

In memory

Please accept my condolences on the passing of Shashi Ji. It always leaves such a gap when someone very close passes away.

I have very fond memories of my visits to GRAVIS and still follow the work that you do in your local communities. I remember Shashi Ji as being very humble and respectful of all those around her, and had a strong focus on supporting and advocating for those who had no voice of their own.

I am sure that this book will indeed help to ensure that her and Tyagi Ji's legacy continues as it is already doing through GRAVIS' leadership and dedication to rural people.

Alison Maccoll, New Zealand

Ms. Alison Maccoll is a humanitarian worker and a development consultant.

- 6 -

Moments of life

Shri Prem Bhai was working on rural development and constructive work for the tribal community in Banvasi Seva Ashram situated in the Sonbhadra District of Uttar Pradesh. Sh. Laxmi Chand Bhai and Shashi Behan were also influenced with their work and joined them in 1969. They used to come to Varanasi in Sarva Seva Sangh and I met them there the first time.

After working for 8-10 years in Banvasi Seva Ashram, the couple decided to work in the Jodhpur District of Rajasthan and started working independently from a village called Manaklav. They extended their work in other remote parts of the desert and established an organization named GRAVIS.

The work of GRAVIS started growing gradually. The couple established office cum residence in Jodhpur. The organization is intensively working in remote villages for farmers, destitute, under-privileged, and poor for drinking water, agriculture, local enterprises, education, health and sensitizing the community on various issues.

Laxmi Bhai used to talk with me about organizing camps for GRAVIS workers and rural communities and after him, Shashi Behan has also continued this service. Both of them had great affection with me and both had also great love for the last person of Gandhi Ji's vision. The couple has dedicated their lives to social services and Gandhi's vision of *Gram Swarajya*.

Shashi Behan was very humble and sensitive towards her co-workers. She was also in touch with *Sarvodaya* workers all over and used to join them in their sadness and happiness.

Her health was not in good shape for some time. I was shocked to hear about her sudden demise and it was very hard to accept this for me. It was obvious for all her admirers and their families to become sad. I pray to the God for the peace of her soul. The continuation of her work for communities will be a true tribute to her.

Amarnath Bhai, India

Sh. Amarnath Bhai is a renowned social worker and Gandhian thinker.

My experiences and my late mother's memories of Shashi Ji

I first met Shashi in late-1996. With my parents, Peter and Veronica, I had travelled to Rajasthan with the UK charity Wells for India to visit the partners and projects that they were working with. On meeting Shashi and speaking with her, one to one, I was immediately struck by what a warm, kind, strong, and caring person she was, with incredible integrity. And I was further struck by how completely non-judgemental and accepting she was of me, where I came from, and what I was doing in my life. As a musician just starting out on my career path, I felt lucky to be able to pursue my passion. However, in the context of the trip to GRAVIS, I also felt awkward to be pursuing a career that seemed unnecessary and, perhaps, even frivolous when compared to the vital work that GRAVIS was doing. But what I learned from Shashi was the sense that we can contribute in a variety of ways, and that we should do what we are able to do.

I visited GRAVIS a number of times, and Shashi always warmly encouraged me to see and hear any music-making that might be happening when we visited projects. This was a genuine privilege, and I also felt affirmed by these gestures. On one of the occasions when Shashi visited the UK, she brought me a gift, a tambourine, which I treasure for all that it represents. I felt a huge sense of affirmation, positivity and empowerment from Shashi, and I always loved to see her - I feel hugely honoured to have known such an inspirational person of huge integrity, and I remember her with respect, friendship and love.

Shashi was in frequent contact with my parents, and she and my mother, Veronica, built a strong friendship. Veronica wrote a piece about Shashi for the 'Women, Word, Spirit' newsletter, which is shared below.

Shashi - A woman of vision - by Veronica Seddon (from 2017)

In 1993 my husband, Peter and I had commissioned a headstone for the grave of our son, Dominic. Despite its beauty, we wished to do something more life giving in his memory. Alexina Murphy, one of the founder members of the Catholic Women's Network, now Women Word Spirit, told me how she and her husband had donated money for a well in India via an organisation founded by Mary and Nicholas Grey. Mary was also one of the founders of the Catholic Women's Network. She and her husband had founded Wells for India, an organisation that raised money for wells in a very poor area of Rajasthan, India. Peter and I therefore decided to fund a well in Dominic's memory.

Mary told me that there was to be a group visit early in 1994 and suggested we go. I asked whether it would be better for us to spend the money funding another well, but she replied that the people really loved to have a visit. So we went on a visit that was a life changing experience: to see such poverty and the land so degraded through lack of water. We made five visits over the next ten years; additionally, Peter worked on the Wells for India Newsletter and I worked with Mary and other women on projects for women and girls.

I think it was on the third visit to Rajasthan that we met Shashi Tyagi. In 1983, she and her husband Laxmi had founded an organisation, GRAVIS, to help the very poor in the desert of Rajasthan. Shashi, having been brought up in an urban environment, at first found it hard working in the desert but she embraced her new life. She and her husband were Gandhian Hindus and believed in total non-violence under all circumstances; they also worked with low and high caste together.

Shashi was and still is, passionate about the needs of women and girl children. The girls had to walk daily to fetch water from ponds or wells. They also collected wood for a fire on which they could cook, and thus had no time to go to school, even if there was one locally, which was rare. The boys worked with the men looking after the animals and growing crops. GRAVIS showed them how to increase the produce by trapping the water in the fields using a variety of methods. GRAVIS had also built a centre where they could hold meetings and teach the people. For example, women from the villages were trained to be Health Workers, who would teach the other villagers about basic health matters. I remember on one visit, our daughter (a doctor) was with us and was asked what she thought about the Health Workers. She thought for a moment and then replied: 'Considering the lack of facilities here in the desert, I think they do a very good job'.

On one visit we went with Shashi to a village where the people wanted GRAVIS to come and work with them, showing how to harvest the monsoon rain to grow crops and collect water for drinking. Shashi seemed to be talking very firmly to the villagers sitting on the mat in front of her. I was sitting next to one of the GRAVIS workers and I asked him what she was saying to them. He replied, 'She is saying "we will not come and work with you until those people [pointing to a group of people standing behind us] are sitting on the carpet with you"'. ('Those people' were low caste, while those on the carpet were high caste.) The people on the carpet were desperate for the help of GRAVIS in order to improve their situation with regard to water, and so agreed to work with the low caste: in fact they managed well together.

A life with a message

Sometimes the GRAVIS workers stayed at their centre overnight. In the morning they all gathered for morning meditation and prayer; we joined them when we were there.

Laxmi and Shashi had two children, both of whom trained as doctors. Prakash (their son) subsequently married a young woman, Vasundhara, who was also a Doctor. Both worked on the projects. A few years later Laxmi Chand Tyagi died and Prakash Tyagi became Director of GRAVIS. When they were able to have a hospital for the poor, Vasundhara worked there – Prakash too when he had time. Shashi continues to work for all but especially for women and girls. Shashi was desperate for a school and indeed a Wells for India supporter funded one in memory of his wife. What a wonderful memorial!

The water table from which came the water for wells became depleted and so GRAVIS found another method for providing water. A large circular hole about three to four metres in diameter and about three metres deep was dug from the sandy ground. This hole was then lined with concrete. A lid with an entrance to the '*taanka*' was made and then the entrance was surrounded by a large, concrete saucer shape, which was kept clear of animals. When the monsoon comes, water flows down the saucer and thus the '*taanka*' fills with water in just a few hours.

Shashi, now 70 years old, continues to work for all but especially for women and girls. By the time you read this, Shashi will have received a much deserved prestigious award for her work in the desert villages. To me, she is a saint.

Ambrose Seddon, UK

Veronica Seddon, UK

Dr. Ambrose Seddon is a Professor of Music and Arts in the UK

Ms. Veronica Seddon, mother of Ambrose, was an active social worker, a friend of Shashi Ji and passed away in 2019.

From old memories

Jon and I were so pleased to join the Memorial of Shashi.

We are so sad to hear that she had died. We knew she was ill when you asked for us to send her a message on her birthday. But how devastating for you and all your family. Your girls look so lovely and we are really pleased that they can remember their Grandmother and all the wonderful work that she has achieved over many years. She was always so involved with many of the projects and we remember her enthusiasm, her dedication and how the women particularly respected her knowledge, her interest in their lives and how she managed to change some of the male dominated cultural issues for the better. We of course remember so many times when we have visited Shashi you and several times stayed in Head Office in Jodhpur in your house. When I was there by myself staying in Jelu-Gagadi, Shashi took me under her wing. How very grateful I was.

*One memory was of us staying at GRAVIS office before presenting the Health Fellowship Award in 2006. I had heard that medical care was reliant on a few medical camps staffed by yourself and other partners at GRAVIS. Under the colourful Rajasthani tent I gave a speech, translated by you and Shashi.

*Later on during that trip, Shashi Ji and I went to the area of Kotra across the mountain ranges to some very remote villages in the Aravalli Hills. One school was perched up on a steep hill and I wondered how it had been built there? I walked with Shashi Ji across a small river. Both of us intrepid explorers ahead of several women in saris. They knew her but I was the first westerner (so tall) to visit them. Shashi Ji told me that some husbands had migrated to other parts of India, leaving the women. It was a high risk malaria zone and TB a major problem.

* There are many more times that Shashi Ji and I (sometimes with Jon) had in-depth talks about our cultures and our lives. Even when she visited us in England. It was always on the agenda and my respect for her dedication will always be enormous.

*There was a time when Jon and his daughter visited with Shashi Ji and the GRAVIS family to dedicate a new school in the Bhalu zone. It was in memory of Gill, Jon's wife who had been a teacher. Shashi Ji will be sorely missed not only for her dedication but also for her calm, soft kind personality.

She was one of the world's most beautiful women.

Angela Huggett and Jon Willis, UK

Ms. Angela Huggett and Mr. Jon Willis are life-partners and worked as a nurse and an engineer respectively, and are engaged in social service.

Precious memories

It is said that it is God's blessing who are the people who cross paths in ones life's journey, and I feel truly blessed that chance took me to GRAVIS, my meeting with Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji and the beginning of a new journey with them, that has deeply touched me and also my professional and personal families.

In 1997, I embarked upon a new journey of learning by deciding to do my doctoral research in Rajasthan. A bundle of ideas, passions, enthusiasm and commitments, I travelled and met different people from desert communities. But in my search for clarity and understandings, I actually found myself full of more questions and trepidations about my learning's. In the Spring of 1998, my research meandered me to Jodhpur and GRAVIS. In my initial trips to GRAVIS in interactions with Shashi ji and Tyagi ji I found an eclectic mix of the old and the new ideas, modernity and traditionalism, not two ends of a continuum but coexisting in an easy continuity. Our connect was instant and quickly I found comfort of sharing and exploring ideas however inconsistent. While Tyagi ji was always mature and serene, in Shashi Ji I always found a combination of passion and compassion, a spirited energy that enthused everyone. The complementarity between Tyagi ji and Shashi ji layered perspectives in novel ways, that I found extremely exciting. We explored not just my area of study but seamlessly also various dichotomies like personal and professional spheres of one, lives; notions of empathy and sympathy; compassion and indifference; respect and contempt and several others. In our explorations of what it means to be a '*Gandhian*' today I found challenged clichés and cleared many a cobwebs. The clarity of thought brought about with their personal 'experiments with truth' and the realism of ideas in the current context and real world challenges made so much sense and meaning and which I came to deeply respect and value.

A bond that began professionally soon extended to our families as my children, husband, parents-in-laws, even friends joined in the conversations about GRAVIS led issues. Shashi Ji's efforts to especially reach out and connect with everyone in a personalized manner endeared her and her ideas to everyone. Be it the spices of the SHG women or their embroidered bags, the plight of drought hit communities or the problem of silicosis, the easy connect and energy she brought to such diverse groups of people is something that I have always marvelled at.

As I look back I realize the journey especially with Shashi ji is something that has deeply shaped me both professionally and personally. I am

grateful to God for having enabled this 'Chance crossing of paths'. In my explorations with her, more than others, I think I have understood myself a little better. A true mentor, her ideas and support is something I will deeply miss!

Archna Kumar, India

Dr. Archna Kumar is a Professor of Development Communication with Delhi University and a close friend of Shashi Ji.

- 10 -

Tribute to Shashi Ji

I was deeply shocked by the news of Shashi Ji's untimely demise. I and my family pay a very respectful tribute to Shashi Ji.

I was very fortunate that I started my career with GRAVIS. Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji guided me and taught me the values of humanity, inspiration, discipline, dedication, social equity, kindness and punctuality. With them, I worked on the eye care project of GRAVIS, which has served thousands of people.

Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji devoted their whole life for the welfare of desert and for the social change. Their great work and sacrifices will always be remembered. They converted the small plant of GRAVIS into a big tree, even at international level. I worked with them as a small worker and I cannot describe Shashi Ji's great life in few words.

I again pay tribute to Shashi Ji's great soul. I hope all the work of GRAVIS will continue and grow further.

Arun Parihar, India

Sh. Arun Parihar, previously a coordinator with GRAVIS, is currently a Bank Manager.

Prayers and thoughts

Shashi Ji was a rare human being, who used to win all hearts with her friendly and simple personality. Her whole life remained dedicated to humanity. When ever she knew of somebody in pain, she was always there to help. She always respected good people and on her reference, I treated many patients in need. I remember, once she recommended someone else's name for Jamnalal Bajaj Award in the final round, instead of her own name as she was a finalist too. I was very deeply impressed with her personality, with her clear vision and with her great ideology.

Her motherly behavior and loving life will always be a source of guidance and inspiration for all of us. My prayers for her soul.

Arun Tyagi, India

Dr. Arun Tyagi is a renowned Ayurveda physician and a long time friend of Shashi Ji.

The world of *Sarvodaya* seems empty without Shashi Ji

She was easily identified with her *khadi* saree, lovely smile and lean body and confident posture. Shashi Behan's association was with Gandhi's *Sarvodaya* thoughts and that was also the objective of her life. She along with her husband, founded GRAVIS which is now the synonym of rural development in Thar Desert. Thousands of people have been benefited with constructive, ideological and educational programmes of GRAVIS. She used to serve Bandhu Ji (a retired educationist) in Bal Niketan which is unforgettable. The loss of Shashi Ji is not only for her family, but the entire Gandhian family feels this emptiness.

Shashi Behan and Laxmi Bhai Sahab had started their work in 1980's and they used to meet with my *Babuji* Trilok Chand Ji and *Bai* Chhagan Behan frequently. In few years, this interaction was converted into family bonding. I got opportunity to visit their work in Manaklav, Jelu - Gagadi, and many other villages where we can see the imprint of their work till date. She managed her family and social life well balanced. Often, this is challenging for a social worker to work on both dimensions but Behan Ji worked on both spheres simultaneously. It was her charisma that her children are also influenced by Gandhi *Vichar* and *Sarvodaya*. She received prestigious

Jamnallal Bajaj Award for her constructive work and we are very proud of her. Since many years, Shashi Behan was working on Gandhi *Vichar* through Sarva Seva Sangh and *Sarvodaya*. She remained active till her last breath. Due to pandemic of COVID-19, she had stooped going outside but was active from home. She used to call her staff and friends to know their well being. The life Shashi Behan lived is inspirational for everyone. We all need to follow her path and legacy

Asha Bothra, India

Smt. Asha Bothra is a well known development activist and a Gandhian thinker and has founded Meera Sansthan.

- 13 -

Shashi Didi's life

Countless people were inspired by Shashi Didi and her life. I also was one of them and learnt a lot from her. In 2016, I attended a meeting with her in Wardha after which she continued guiding me with advices and encouragement. In 2018, Shashi Ji involved me in a Gandhi *Yatra* in which I participated with great personalities like Dr. Subba Rao, Ramesh Ji, Sanjay Ji and others. During this *Yatra*, I was able to see great work of Didi and of GRAVIS. She also told stories of her life, from Banwasi Seva Ashram, from Bhudan movement – all of which were very inspiring.

Didi introduced me to Dr. Shobhna, Dr. Ravi and many other Gandhian thinkers. She guided me with Gandhian thought and *Sarvodaya* ideology. I remember how she always encouraged me to take new initiatives boldly. With her inspiration, I wrote many articles published in national level magazines. Her whole life was dedicated to service. Shashi Didi had a life full of service and humanity and an important legacy is left behind.

Ashok Choudhary, India

Sh. Ashok Choudhary is a journalist associated with the Gandhi Study Circle.

Smt. Shashi Tyagi – A humble souvenir

The decision of developing a souvenir about Smt. Shashi Tyagi, who is also fondly called Shashi Behan, is not only absolutely correct but also very relevant for future social endeavours. This book will be helpful for fellow friends, for those who are selflessly engaged in social services, to get an opportunity to pick precious gems from her life. It is said that an organization is like a garden and a variety of flowers flourish when distinguished persons work together. It's like a honey bee that collects honey from even toxic flowers. She was the unique amalgam of truth and strength. She was always firm on her truth.

It is written in Sarvadharm prayer, "I shall do good behavior even with those who has not done good to me." Shashi Behan always thrived to inhale this in her personality. Her family including her children followed her teaching. Her son is currently leading the organization and is recognized and honoured by national and international agencies.

People who have either worked with her or stayed in touch with her are blessed. Though I am 90 years old, but I learnt a lot from the couple and I consider them as my mentors. I remember the prayer of Gandhi Ji in which we pray to be always with people for whom we work. As I noticed, Shashi Behan has followed this truly and God helped her in this persuasion.

I observed the work of the late couple from Banvasi Seva Ashram to Sucheta Kriplani Memorial Trust and then to the formation of Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti. Here, destiny provided them the opportunity to serve desert community with scientific innovations. The couple faced many challenges but also received immense love. They suffered with heat waves but also witnessed cool breeze of love. In prayer, we wish good for all. We shall become loveable, nonviolent, auspicious, brave, and friendly to all.

Jai Jagat

Awadhesh Kumar, India

Sh. Awadhesh Kumar is a well known social activist and Gandhian thinker, and a founding member of GRAVIS.

- 15 -

Motherly Shashi Ji

Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji sowed a plant by the name of GRAVIS, which has now grown into a big tree. Tyagi Ji was like a father and Shashi Ji was like a mother to me.

There is a saying – there is no shadow, support, protector and dear like a mother, like Shashi Ji was the tree of GRAVIS will remain immortal. Shashi Ji always believed in solving the problems at its roots, a great ability to have.

In project *KHOJ*, I got an opportunity of working with her. She always gave great attention to primary health care which I will always remember, and will respect Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji for their vision. Tyagi Ji and Shashi Ji founded a health center in Gagadi village. I was fortunate to give my services at that center.

Awadhesh Kumar Pandey, India

Dr. Awadhesh Kumar Pandey is an Ayurvedic physician, who worked for GRAVIS in the past.

- 16 -

An Inspiration

I had an honor of working with Shashi Behan Ji, which I will never forget. She was a courageous person and worked for humanity her whole life. I remember, visiting a *Sarvodaya* Sammelan with her, where she delivered a very inspiring speech. She always worked for the poor, downtrodden, women and girls.

She also was deeply connected with the families of her colleagues – in happy and sad moments. I am not highly educated but she always gave me important opportunities which I will never forget.

Babu Lal Lakhani, India

Sh. Babu Lal Lakhani has been a part of GRAVIS team for about 30 years.

Life changing friendship

My parents Veronica and Peter Seddon first travelled to India as part of a group taken by Mary and Nicholas Grey for the charity Wells for India in the early 1990s. This was following the death of my brother Dominic in 1992, as they had decided to fund a well in his memory.

They travelled to India several times in the following years, experiences that they found very affecting, especially in the people that they met and the projects that they visited. During these trips they met Shashi Ji and her husband Laxmi Chand Tyagi, which was the start of a long lasting friendship that continued, especially between my mother and Shashi Ji, until the last visit that Shashi Ji made to London on October 2018, before my mother's death in 2019.

There was a great mutual respect between Shashi Ji and Veronica, as they were both strong women, working hard to improve the lives of others. I know how pleased my parents were to have Shashi Ji visit them and to be able to spend time with her, especially when they themselves were unable to travel to India any longer, and she visited them in London on several occasions.

I feel great sadness that these four people who shared so much in outlook, principles and things that they felt were important, despite living so far apart, have now all died. Certainly I know that for Veronica and Peter, their friendship with Shashi Ji and Laxmi Ji was life changing.

Beatrice Seddon, UK

Dr. Beatrice Seddon is an oncologist from London and has been associated with GRAVIS for over 20 years.

- 18 -

Our Shashi Behan Ji

Shashi Ji had a simple personality, embodied sacrifice, believed in cause and worked for women empowerment, that cannot be forgotten. I met her for the first time in 2000 with Late Sh. Sohan Lal Modi. Shashi Ji then encouraged me to form an organization. Over the years, I learnt a lot from her working with poor villagers. My bonding with her was of a mother-daughter. In her last days, I was hospitalized with a fracture and could not meet her. Time spent with her is an unforgettable part of my life. I pay my respect and tributes to our dear Behan Ji.

Begi Sukhani, India

Smt. Begi Sukhani is a gender activist and the Founder of Kshsetriya Gramothan Samiti (KGS).

- 19 -

Shashi Ji- our mother

“In non-violence you must go full steam ahead, if you want the good to come speedily you must go about it with vigor.” -- Vinoba Bhawe

Shashi Ji was a force of fearless kindness and love. She worked tirelessly for the rights of women to control their own destiny and establish their place at the table for planning the future of families, villages, cities, and the global society. Shashi Ji was the engine behind GRAVIS persistently infusing women's social issues into Tyagi Ji's practical rural social work projects, and later guiding Prakash Ji in his social work.

Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji both had become motivated by the *Sarvodaya* work of Vinoba Bhawe's Bhoodan land redistribution and Gramdan movements that became the source of many great contemporary Gandhian social workers and non-governmental social work organizations through out India. These organizations always served the village people as catalysts to educate and empower the people to solve their own problems and hold truth to power to motivate the government to work for them. Both Tyagi Ji and his beloved Shashi Ji committed their lives with great sacrifices to their family in the early years to help the rural communities of the Thar Desert rise and protect the fragile environment they depend upon. Their success is obvious to us today yet it is the product of the work of a lifetime imbued by their persistent faith in the goodness and generosity of others to help each other.

A life with a message

I first learned about Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti (now known as GRAVIS) and their Gandhian social work in 1994 when I was a student at the University of Washington in Seattle. I had found a flyer at the university left by People For Progress in India (PPI) asking for volunteers to help observe and write about desert agriculture and Gandhian village social work projects. I interviewed with Gary Worthington from PPI about the opportunity and then found myself quitting my job and taking time out from the university to travel to Jodhpur as a volunteer at GRAVIS for nine months.

I first met Shashi Ji on Diwali in 1994 at the Tyagi's house in Jodhpur. I had been staying with Tyagi Ji for about one month already while Shashi Ji had been traveling abroad at a women's rights conference in Europe. That day Tyagi Ji and many of the staff were out at one of the village field centers and Shashi Ji suddenly arrived at the house in the afternoon. I remember her shining eyes, warm smile, and comforting laughter. Though she was tired from the long journey we had tea and shared biscuits that she had brought from the airline. Her kindness and warmth made me feel like a small child and I have ever since regarded her as my Indian mother.

I have returned to India to visit the Tyagi's on several occasions, the last time in 2005 when I visited Tyagi Ji in the hospital soon before his death in Ahmedabad. Over the years we have been lucky enough on a few occasions to be able to entertain Shashi Ji, Tyagi Ji, and Prakash Ji at our home in Seattle as they were taking a break from their travels to conferences and visiting local organizations. These were times when she was happy to take a break from the intensity of her work and truly relax for a short time. We used to cook together and catch up on life as if she lived right in our neighborhood. I find this so difficult to write because to me Shashi Ji is so very much alive. When I think of her now, I see the light in her eyes shining so bright and her smile and can hear her laughter. I hear her voice reminding me to stop running the water. I see her demonstrating how rice grains are cooked by separating them between her fingers. I smell the cumin seed in my kitchen and I remember how she used to pack some Rajasthani cumin and jaggery in my luggage when I was returning home. I have been thinking that next year I will light a diya for her on Diwali, but now I realize that she has lit the diya within us all and this has made our lives so much brighter. Sleep on dear Shashi Ji your love and life fire our souls. You are dearly missed Amma.

Ben Falk, US

Mr. Ben Falk is an Extracellular Immunologist living and working in Los Angeles and is a past GRAVIS volunteer.

- 20 -

A commanding presence and a force for good

When I first joined GRAVIS as a foreign research fellow, the founding of the organization seemed to me like the stuff of legend. An origin story full of heroic inspiration. Driven by steadfast Gandhian ideals and an all-encompassing sense of purpose, Shashi Ji and Laxmi Chand Tyagi came to Rajasthan to empower poor and marginalized communities in the rural Thar Desert, building their efforts from the ground up.

It was a great honor to finally meet Shashi Ji in person. She had a tenacious and commanding presence but with a clear undercurrent of compassion. Shortly after we met, I traveled with her to a conference in Jaisalmer. As we passed through a landscape of sandstone and sewan grass and khejri trees, she told me stories of the places and people of the Thar. She imparted wisdom that reflected a lifetime of service and leadership.

I continued to hold Shashi Ji's achievements and dedication in high esteem while I completed my research with GRAVIS, exploring the vulnerability of rural villages to the impacts of climate change.

I was deeply saddened to learn of her passing in November. Less than one month after she succumbed to her illness, in a tragic coincidence, my own father passed away from the same rare and aggressive form of leukemia.

Over the past four decades, Shashi Ji's work with GRAVIS has saved many lives from harmful diseases and other untimely fates, but there was no way for her good deeds to save her from her own misfortune. Similarly, my father was a biological scientist who spent his life helping humanity to better understand cancer, but in the end, the course of his disease outpaced the science of his treatment. It is one of the great ironies of life that one can pour his or her whole heart and soul into a cause, without ever seeing or receiving the benefits of that labor.

The arc of human progress often exceeds the capacity of a single individual or even an entire generation, yet that is no reason to stop striving for change. In fact, it is a reason to strive even harder. That is a lesson I have learned from Shashi Ji that I will carry with me always.

Ben Soltoff, US

Mr. Ben Soltoff is Environmental Innovation Manager at Yale University and is a past GRAVIS volunteer.

Heart with poor

I come from Badi Dhani village and have been associated with GRAVIS since 2000. Work done by Shashi Ji in our village is a great example of her dedication. She worked tirelessly for development of our village. She empowered our women and girls with a deep faith in women empowerment. She was a true iron lady. I remember her with moist eyes. Shashi Ji's heart was always with rural and poor people. My humble and heartfelt tribute to her.

Bhai Khan, India

Sh. Bhai Khan is a Village Development Committee (VDC) leader from the Thar Desert.

Shashi Ji – simple and loving nature

Shashi Ji had a long experience of working with rural women. After the demise of Tyagi Ji, Shashi Behan Ji took the responsibility of GRAVIS in her hands and expanded it very successfully. Astha Sansthan and GRAVIS have long association of 30 years. When GRAVIS started work for the rights and entitlement of mine workers, I took part in many meetings at various levels. GRAVIS is a pioneer to raise the issue of silicosis in Rajasthan.

I found that every staff member was very comfortable with Shashi Ji on discussing various issues related to programmes, and personal matters too. I also consulted with Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji whenever we met in Jodhpur. She always invited me to her house and never let me have lunch outside. Shashi Ji always sent me annual report of GRAVIS year after year. The sacrifice, attachment and determination of Shashi Ji towards social work are inspirational for women and others also. Our future generations will always take guidance from her life's journey.

Bhanwar Singh Chandana, India

Sh. Bhanwar Singh Chandana is a social activist and heads Astha Sansthan in Udaipur.

- 23 -

Continue the vision

I had known Shashi Ji since 1991 and worked with her since then. Her whole life focused on GRAVIS and on *Sarvodaya* ideology. In many villages, she did great work on water, education and health. She remained committed for poor and needy people her whole life.

Her demise on 14th November, 2020 is a great loss for GRAVIS and for the *Sarvodaya* world. She always selflessly worked for the society. Shashi Ji will always live in people's hearts. I pray for her soul and will continue to work on her vision.

Bhura Ram Dewasi, India

Sh. Bhura Ram Dewasi is a senior team member of GRAVIS.

- 24 -

Shashi Behan Ji : A fearless guiding star of voluntary organisations

It is an honor and privilege for me to write about Shashi Behan Ji. I met the Tyagi's (honorable Shri L C Tyagi Ji and Smt. Shashi Ji) in early 1990s. This incredible couple have their own distinctive personalities. However, at home they came across as one loving and welcoming unit in every visit of mine to their house at Milkmen Colony in Jodhpur. They just moved to this house after years of stay in the village of Gagadi, which is also their first field center. I was showered by love, care and affection. In my morning visits, they shared home-cooked simple breakfast and in winter times, I was asked if I am warm enough. They knew that I was coming from Ahmedabad where it is not that cold.

Shashi Behan Ji was an ideal, upright, frank and fearless torch-bearer of voluntary organizations, including the Gandhian-Sarvodayee organizations. Their house used to be the focal point for discussions and chalking out programs and activities. Behan Ji was always concerned about the protection of core values of the sector, particularly on issues of commitment to the poor and marginalized and 'Sadgi Jeevan' (simple living). They worked fearlessly against caste discrimination and atrocities. Many will not know that the Gagadi campus was attacked by dominant caste groups.

When it was planned that UNNATI would work in Western Rajasthan as a support organization, I received her maximum backing. Shashi Behan Ji told me to learn about the land and people by walking and spending time in the villages. She introduced me to all the Gandhian organisations and a large number of organisations they have promoted under Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti (GVVS) which was latter known as GRAVIS. Following her advice, in UNNATI, even today, we have been continuing padayatras to understand various issues. Just recently, in one of our telephonic conversations, she spoke about the need for orienting the youth on Gandhian values and gave details of a course being run at Wardha.

Shashi Behan Ji knew my wife Mirai Chatterjee who is a public health professional through their association with Rajasthan Voluntary Health Association—a state chapter of VHAI. The present health programme of GRAVIS which is vastly expanded and headed by Dr. Prakash Tyagi is rooted with the vision of Shashi Behan Ji. During my visits, while she enquired about Mirai and our children, the conversation would go back to reproductive health, how to strengthen public health care services, nutrition, safe water, and sanitation in the villages of the Thar Desert region.

I have always had very high respect for the Tyagis, for their deep Gandhian ideological conviction and practice. Both of them worked directly with Jayapraksh Narayan and Vikas Bhai at Banwasi Sewa Ashram and imbibed all the positive values that made them distinctive and respected leaders of the voluntary sector and among the both the Gandhian-Sarvodayee and emerging local organisations. Behan ji will always be remembered!

Binoy Acharya, India

Sh. Binoy Acharya is a well known development practitioner and is the Founder and Head of UNNATI.

- 25 -

My association with Shashi Ji

I remember Late Smt. Shashi Ji Tyagi as a serene, simple and soft spoken person. She was composed in any situation and her advice was always respected and regarded. As I have been given to understand by our former teachers that her husband, Late Shri L C Tyagi along with Dr. Manorma Patwardhan and a few others, were the founding members of Navjyoti Manovikas Kendra (School for the Mentally Deficient). Shri Tyagi and Shashi Ji founded GRAVIS, a social institution in Jodhpur, and amidst other workload, she visited Navjyoti regularly and advised Late Dr. G M Singhvi, then the Chairman, on day to day activities and on running of the institution. Mr Singhvi often sought her advice which was invaluable in the formative years of Navjyoti. Her son Dr. Prakash Tyagi was the Vice Chairman of Navjyoti and is helping us with his regular advice. We shall continue to remember her contribution in the cause and working of our organization, Navjyoti. In her demise, we have lost an invaluable guide and well-wisher. May God grant her eternal peace.

C.P. Sancheti, India

Sh. C.P. Sancheti is a Chartered Accountant, a social worker and the President of Navjyoti Manovikas Kendra.

- 26 -

Shashi Tyagi : A unique fighter

Ms. Shashi Tyagi, whom I used to call Shashi Behan, was a modest, courteous, humble, gentle but a courageous lady. I was privileged to know Shashi Behan from the days of Gandhi Peace Foundation (GPF) sometime in the year 1984 and by which time, she was already well known for her work for the poor and marginalized. But I knew her life-partner, Laxmi Chand Tyagi Ji, then with Banwasi Seva Ashram, right from the year 1979 through respected Prem Bhai.

Shashi Behan's was a true Gandhian and well known for her remarkable and constructive contributions for the cause. The unique feature of her life was her hunger to reach to the unreached sections of the community, to empower them and to go all the way to help them at times calamity through Gramin Vikash Vigyan Samiti (GRAVIS), the association she founded and nurtured with her husband. Her strength was her empathy and compassion

which made her tirelessly and fearlessly work for the cause of the poor and downtrodden. She discharged with great ability and responsibility her duties with Sarva Seva Sangh (SSS) as one of the Trustees and in other capacities. What she liked the most, was to help the community groups. She was also sensitive about women related issues, health, water conservation and management. She hardly failed to fulfil her commitments. I don't know what was her secret for the thought and energy needed to reach out to the people in distress all over the country. Prakash Tyagi is a committed fellow who has lot of capacity to carry on the torch of her mother's vision.

Personally, she was most affectionate and encouraging about my activities, particularly when I was involved in peace work at Kokrajhar, Assam. Very often, she used to telephone me and enquired about my health and the activities when I was there. She was an optimist. It was this exceptional quality that during her last days when she could not talk properly and I was unable to hear her properly, she repeatedly mentioned how she tried to motivate others to see me at the helm of SSS. She inspired many *Sarvodaya* activists across the country. She was very much concerned about the revival of SSS and the *Sarvodaya* movement. She was fully aware about the challenging situation in SSS and yet she believed that SSS would play an effective role in near future in enabling the voices, right up to her last breath. This was due to her strong belief in the devotion and capacity of her *Sarvodaya* colleagues. I sincerely wish and hope those will fulfil this belief even though she is no more with us. When we think of two women leaders in *Sarvodaya* of Rajasthan State, these are Shashi Behan and Asha Behan. Both of them have contributed a lot to lead the struggle for women's rights.

I am sure her legacy will inspire several young activists in future. Her absence is certainly a big blow to the Gandhian friends. On her demise, I have lost a close friend and a real compassionate colleague. I, on behalf of Sarva Seva Sangh, and on my personal behalf, pay deepest, heartfelt respects to beloved Shashi Behan.

Chandan Pal, India

Sh. Chandan Pal is a renowned Gandhian thinker and is the current Preseident of Sarva Seva Sangh.

- 27 -

Shashi Tyagi – one of the few GREAT ONES of magnificent character

Shashi Ji is truly one of the few GREAT ONES I have had the blessed privilege of crossing paths with - three times, so far - in this incarnation! Like Gandhi, her life is her message. And that message, to my powers of observation, has been one of physical, mental, moral and spiritual uplift-*Sarvodaya* - to the oppressed and dispossessed-particularly women - in her expansive orbit of influence ! In other words, in our Kali Yuga world of suppression and abuse she has been that fearless feminist who so many girls and women - not just in Rajasthan, but throughout the world-have quietly looked to for courage in their own inner and outer battles for dignity and equality.

I am reminded of the words of Martin Luther King that “unearned suffering is redemptive.” I have to think that when a person like Shashi Ji, whose whole life has been one of unconditional service, goes through a very painful experience or period, it is for the purpose of transmuting and purifying a larger, and as yet unaddressed, reservoir of burdening, collective karma.

With love, admiration and a crore of blessings!

Cliff Tillotson, US

Such a sweet-natured, self-sacrificing being, Shashi Ji, who always put others' interest ahead of her own. Truly an exemplar of noble, Gandhian living. What a huge loss to the world, to her community, friends, and especially to her loving family. It brings me to tears thinking we will not see her in that same form again. So for Shashi Ji, we can only send our love along with her until we meet anew, content that she is now free from the cares of life in a body, while we strive to emulate her magnificent character.

My sincerest condolences and appreciation,

Renée Tillotson, US

Shashi Ji continues to be an inspiration of compassion, determination, and courage for me, and so many others. Her stories, teachings and wisdom have guided my path more than I can even express. Servant leadership, empowering others toward self-sufficiency, genuine community building, equity and justice, and women-power—are values that she helped instill in me and guide my actions every day.

Her spirit lives on in the empowering example she set for those around her, near and far. The ripple effects of Shashi Ji's actions and generosity will go on for generations, I believe, especially for the village women of Rajasthan. We hold Shashi's great spirit in our hearts always.

In 2008, Sandhya traveled from the United States to volunteer with GRAVIS for three months during her junior year of college. Her father, Cliff,

A life with a message

accompanied her to the destination at GRAVIS, and met the Tyagi family for the first time.

Sleeping on a rooftop at one of GRAVIS's field centers, gazing up at the constellations of stars – Sandhya and Shashi discussed bringing Gandhi's message of non-violence and selfless service to the United States.

With the immense help of Sandhya's mother Renee, and father Cliff, together they made that rooftop dream a reality by co-hosting a Hands-On Gandhian Retreat in Santa Barbara, California in January 2009 with the Institute of World Culture. The retreat attendees built a walking meditation labyrinth on the retreat ground, made chapatis, and participated in workshops led by Shashi and others. In the fall of 2018, the Tillotson family joined Shashi in San Francisco for a trip to the Metta Center for Non-violence and Thousand Currents. Their deep mutual love of the Tyagi family and the GRAVIS cause provide lasting inspiration to their lives

Sandhya Tillotson, US

Cliff, Renee and Sandhya Tillotson are close friends of Shashi Ji and of GRAVIS. Cliff and Renee live in Hawaii and their daughter Sandhya lives in Colorado.

- 28 -

A true friend

My name is Connie Mery and I live in California, USA. My husband Michael was the fortunate guest of the Tyagi family several times in India around 20 or 30 years ago, and Michael would come back from those trips with glowing tales of the good work that GRAVIS is doing in Rajasthan. His community work here in our small California town was partly inspired by what he had seen accomplished in India. A few times, we were blessed with Shashi Ji staying with us in California. To me she seemed to carry with her an unstoppable energy, to do the right thing, whether it was cooking up medicinal healing herbs on the stove or phoning to thank supporters, or making plans to travel all over this country to make contacts for GRAVIS. But this unstoppable energy was always couched in grace, kindness, and warm feeling. So all around her felt welcomed.

I always felt that the gift that she gave the world was more than her unflagging accomplishments with GRAVIS, but was also the effect of her presence, which said to me, "You can get to where you're going. You can keep your head and be respectful and at the same time finish the job."

Connie Mery, US

Ms. Connie Mery lives in California and she and her late husband Michael have been GRAVIS friends for long time.

A special lady

I first came to Jodhpur in 2007 with my wife (Revd Jean Boulton-Reynolds), who was at that time a trustee of Wells for India (now Water Harvest). It was during this trip that I first met Shashi Ji and whilst the meeting was brief, what stayed with me was the way she spoke to me as me, and not as my wife's husband. Something that wasn't that common for me being married to a priest, especially a female one!

Since then, visits to Jodhpur and GRAVIS have become increasingly frequent in our support of various projects. I have had the opportunity to spend more time talking with Shashi Ji, and on one of our regular long journeys out into the desert I remember talking with her about how they first came to the Thar. I have never forgotten how humbled I was to hear that she and Mr. Tyagi had actively sought the places where few other NGOs operated, and where the work was most challenging to set up their area of operation.

She has inspired my wife and I in many ways including a regular decluttering on our return home, when we realise how much we actually have that we don't need. Friends and colleagues are always interested to hear of our travels and purpose, and Shashi Ji has certainly cemented my belief in the importance of women's empowerment as much as being married to a female priest has. This inspiration also prompted us to return with our daughter in law in 2020 to celebrate and affirm International Women's' Day with the rural women of the Thar, who gathered at Gagadi. Our daughter in law, herself an inspirational speaker for women in construction, found meeting Shashi Ji unforgettable.

It was Shashi Ji who also managed what many books had failed to do, tell me how to cook an authentic curry dish! Simply put, it has been a pleasure and a privilege to know Shashi Ji and we will miss her.

My connection with India and Shashi Ji came about through my first visit on a *pani yatra* with Wells for India (now Water Harvest), and now through my involvement with the project group of St Clare & St Francis Trust.

Denis Barrow, UK

Mr. Denis Barrow works for London Public Transport and has been a GRAVIS friend for many years.

Shashi Ji: an exemplary life of humility and calmness, dedicated to empowerment of marginalised rural communities

Years before I experienced GRAVIS in action in marginalised rural communities in the Thar Desert in Rajasthan and years before I personally met the visionary founders of GRAVIS, the names of the Late Tyagi Ji and the Late Shashi Ji and their illustrious work and achievements were all too familiar to me mainly through the publications of GRAVIS and HelpAge International, and through deliberations at the HelpAge network gatherings in Asia.

Later, during my visits to Rajasthan, I had the good fortune of closely interacting with Tyagi Ji and Shashi Ji at their family home, at the GRAVIS office and more importantly when they were among the people and the leaders in the local marginalised communities GRAVIS served. The lasting thoughts in me about Shashi Ji are her humility, calmness, a somewhat discreet firmness in taking decisions and delivering results, and a charming respect and affection towards all who worked with her and the marginalised communities she served.

Many a time we see that one's personality, values and behavioural styles are more dominant in determining success than even one's levels of knowhow and technical skills. In Shashi Ji, my HelpAge colleagues and I witnessed firsthand a healthy balance of all these attributes. As an invited guest at a GRAVIS Governing Board meeting, I was struck by the ease with which Shashi Ji related to the highly qualified professionals on the GRAVIS Board from a down-to-earth pragmatic perspective. Her sense of humility was at its best when she was in the field interacting as one among equals with project officers and local community members. Coming from *Sarvodaya* background, her commitment to participatory endeavours was inspiring. Shashi Ji's many achievements and outstanding contribution for the common good, well documented in GRAVIS annals, were deservedly acknowledged and recognised by the Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation as distinguished recipient of the Jamnalal Bajaj Award in the year 2017.

I was so inspired with the simple Gandhian lifestyle of the Tyagi family as they dedicated themselves to uplift the lives of the vulnerable families persevering in the difficult environment of the Thar Desert, and especially the leading role Shashi Ji played in women's empowerment, that I was excited to share that experience with my wife, Nirmali. We have lasting memories of our visit to GRAVIS, including of course, the warm

hospitality extended to us by Tyagi Ji and Shashi Ji at their home with home cooked Rajasthan delicacies.

May the legacy of Late Shashi Ji in GRAVIS and the local communities she worked with grow from strength to strength.

Dharmapriya Wesumperuma, Australia

Dr. Dharmapriya Wesumperuma was formerly a University lecturer, Executive Director of Sri Lanka Foundation Institute, Director of Asia Training Centre on Ageing (ATCOA), and Asia-Pacific Regional Head of Programmes, HelpAge International. Currently, he is a Consultant, Social Protection Adviser, Department of Social Welfare, Myanmar.

- 31 -

Example of fearlessness, courage and confidence: Shashi Behan

I don't remember when I met Shashi Behan Ji for the first time and attached with her emotionally. Her sudden demise has developed big vacuum in my life. I feel emptiness as I lost a mentor in my life. She used to tell me that we should make our path ourselves. In 2006, *Sarvodaya Sammelen* was organized at Kalron Sharif in the leadership of Shashi Behan. She shared various challenges of rural lives of Western Rajasthan during the meeting. Because of strong winds of desert, people used to stop their stoves and would start cooking after wind is passed. Unfortunately, a huge storm came that night and we witnessed tents, chairs, all flying in the air. All people were astonished to see what is happening here. But Shashi Behan again joined with her team to re-establish things with calmness and fixed every thing in few hours. We witnessed the real challenges faced by people living in Rajasthan for the first time.

When Shashi Ji started her work in Thar Desert, both geographical and social challenges were there. Caste system, feudalism, veil system, illiteracy and other social evils were all around. She struggled for the rights of under - privileged and backward communities with higher caste and received threats also from them. She solved this problem with Gandhian way of non-violence and made them realize their faults. This seems to be a simple approach but it was not. The couple exhibited great courage during adversity. I was very blessed to meet Shashi Behan every time she came to Jaipur. She also invited me to visit her project areas and to address people on Gandhi *Vichar* and de-addiction. She was always

A life with a message

busy in her work like *Ba*. The way she felt for poor and hugged them is inexpressible. Her untimely departure is great loss to the society. We all should work to continue her vision and Gandhi *Vichar* in society.

Dharmveer Katewa, India

Sh. Dharmveer Katewa is a well known social activist and Gandhian thinker of India.

- 32 -

Respect to Shashi Ji

I am honored to write words in the memory of Shashi Tyagi- a great human, a Gandhian thinker and a social worker. She enlightened the Thar Desert with her work on health, education, water and women empowerment. She was very disciplined with organizational work but was very soft on personal and family matters of her colleagues. It felt like working with a mother with her. Once, I had dengue and she always used to check with me about my condition till I recovered.

During COVID-19 lockdown, she was always worried about poor people and helped them till the end of her life. I pay my respectful tributes to Shashi Ji.

Digvijay Singh, India

Sh. Digvijay Singh is a Finance Officer with GRAVIS

- 33 -

Tribute to Shashi Jiji

Sahshi Jiji had become the member of our family in 1971 when his only brother Late Shyam Narayan Tyagi was married to my eldest sister Smt. Rajeshwari Tyagi. Late Shyam Jiji Ji had left this world for his heavenly abode in October, 2019. My personal association with Shashi Jiji had started in 1973 when my Jiji Ji had taken me to Meerut for my further education. I took admission in 8th standard and since then till today, I had her affection and love. Shashi Jiji was supportive to me and my family from day one. She loved me like her younger brother throughout my journey so far from schooling to my college days of Post Graduation and of Doctorate and then to selection and joining Indian Forest Service in 1987, training, marriage

and my long service with Govt. of India. Shashi Jiji had been the source of inspiration and showered her blessings through out my entire journey.

I was very much impressed by the simplicity of Late Laxmi Jija Ji and Shashi Jiji and by their dedication to the community service since their working in Mirjapur, Uttar Pradesh with *Sarvodaya* ideology. I first met both of them in 1973 in Meerut at our Jija ji's residence and still remember L.C. Jija Ji's *khadhi kurta payajama* and Shashi Jiji's *khadi* saree. Abha and Prakash also used to wear *khadi* clothes only. L.C. Jija Ji had joined *Sarvodaya* for community service after his post graduation in agriculture science in 70s and that shows his ideology and commitment to the community service. Abha and Prakash both have grown, progressed and settled in life in front of us. I had visited Jodhpur twice once in 1983/84, and then in 1988 when I was under - going training in Indian Forest Service and stayed with late L.C. Jija Ji and Shashi Jiji. I remember in 1983/84, Shashi Jiji had introduced me to Mr. Anil Bordia, the Education Secretary, Govt. of Rajasthan. Shashi Jiji had visited us when I was posted in Pune as Deputy Conservator of Forests in 1994/95 and second time in 2010 when I was in Delhi working in the Ministry of Defence, Govt. of India. Shashi Jiji's social works were acknowledged at various platforms and by various organizations though she never wanted any felicitation or publicity for her achievements. I was shocked when we came to know that Shashi Jiji was suffering from blood cancer. We could not speak to her during her illness though we were in touch with Prakash and got feedback about her health. The destiny did not allow us as Shashi Jiji left all of us for her heavenly abode on 14th November, 2020. Her departure is a great loss to the family and the community. Prakash and Abha both had looked after her very well and provided the best medical facilities to her. We hope and wish that Prakash and Abha both will take the social services legacy of late Shashi Jiji and Late L.C. Jija Ji further and earn name and fame. We convey our heartfelt condolences and floral tribute to Late Shashi Jiji and L.C. Jija Ji and pray to the God to give strength to the family to bear this irreparable loss.

Dinesh Kumar Tyagi, India

Dr. Dinesh Kumar Tyagi is a relative of Shashi Ji and had served Government of India in Indian Forest Services.

- 34 -

Words in memory

I came to know about the sudden demise of Shashi Behan from Gandhi Marg magazine in Nov-Dec edition. I had a long bond with her family over a long period. Soon after my marriage, we reached Banvasi Seva Ashram and met Prem Bhai and Laxmi Chand Bhai. My wife Anjali had started teaching in *Ashram* school. My family was always in touch with Laxmi Bhai and Shashi Behan even after their arrival in Rajasthan. I know that when Laxmi Bhai was suffering with kidney failure, Shashi Behan had given one kidney to him to save his life. Though we could not save Laxmi Bhai but Shashi Behan continued her work for almost 15 years just on one kidney. She used to come to Wardha, Sevagram Ashram often. She left this mortal world on 14th November, 2020 and left all us with her memories. We pay our tributes with teary eyes.

Dinkar Choudhary, India

Sh. Dinkar Choudhary is a social worker and Gandhian thinker from Maharashtra in India.

- 35 -

Great loss

My eyes fill with tears as I remember Shashi Ji. Shashi Ji was a unique light who dedicated her whole life to other's welfare. She believed that a woman is a strong foundation of every family. Hence, she worked tirelessly to empower women. For me, she was like a mother who always guided me and helped me in becoming a teacher.

In many years once, a light comes and gives life to others. Shashi Ji was like that who always encouraged and uplifted others. Her demise is a great loss.

Ekta Tyagi, India

Smt. Ekta Tyagi is a teacher and has been associated with GRAVIS for about 20 years.

- 36 -

When you strongly believe in what you do, it is not work, but your purpose

Smt. Shashi Tyagi (or Shashi Ji as we called her fondly) was a rare leader and human being: strong, kind and gentle, who worked hard in circumstances that very few women would have the courage, passion or determination to venture into.

A social reformer and educator, she and her late husband, Sh. L.C. Tyagi, dedicated their lives to the social and economic betterment of vulnerable communities in the Thar region of Western Rajasthan in India, in alignment with the Gandhian principles of *Sarvodaya* that promoted equality for all.

I have wonderful memories of my visits to Jodhpur over fifteen years ago and my travels with Shashi Ji to visit communities that GRAVIS and Sightsavers worked with in the magnificent Thar. Witnessing her devotion to building the lives of desert communities through critical issues such as health, substance abuse, caste and gender discrimination, the purdah system, women seclusion, illiteracy, water scarcity has been an inspiring and heart-warming experience.

I especially remember with much warmth our first meeting; which to my luck and good fortune continued longer than expected, and she graciously invited me to lunch that day. I joined her in her cosy kitchen as she quickly cooked us a delicious, simple meal while we chatted. I admired the way in which she moved with such ease from one role to the other. Right from a professional, to a homemaker and hostess. That day is still warmly etched in my memory. Hers was an extraordinary life, and with her passing, the world has lost a truly incredible woman who spent her life putting others first without expecting much in return. A woman who cared deeply for her team and the communities she worked with. Hers was a unique dedication and determination.

Her legacy lives on amongst the communities she helped transform, in her team at GRAVIS, and in her son, Dr Prakash Tyagi, and their family. The work of GRAVIS stands as a testament to the power of grassroots organising, evidence of the transformational impact that a woman's determination and gentle leadership can enable. Her legacy will stand as an example to all of us to persist in our pursuit of progress.

I am grateful to have worked with Shashi Ji and to have learnt so much from her.

Elizabeth Kurian, India

Ms. Elizabeth Kurian is the CEO of Mission for Vision and is a long time friend of GRAVIS and of Tyagi family.

A great human

Ms. Shashi Tyagi spent her whole life as a gender activist. Knowing her, truly inspired me as a humanitarian myself, to learn and adopt from Ms. Tyagi, the approach she took in connecting and listening to the voices of communities she supported with the deepest of her heart. In her life, she had a special place for poor, marginalised and older people. I hope her legacy will inspire and preach people around the world despite caste, ethnicity, and other differences. Her demise is a big loss and I pay my tribute to her.

Fadhillah Hanum, Indonesia

Ms. Fadhillah Hanum is a humanitarian worker, formerly with HelpAge International and a friend of GRAVIS.

An angel whom I met

Back in my childhood days, there was a very modest and soft spoken couple who often accompanied my father to our home. One day, my father introduced me and my younger sibling to them and said to the lady, "these are my daughters. Please enlighten them with the importance of education and simplicity in life." The lady embraced us and elucidated to us the role education and hard work had played to make her life better. I and my sister were highly impressed and promised her that we would obey our parents and work hard in our lives.

This lady was Ms. Shashi Tyagi, a great social worker. Her simplicity and dynamic and charismatic personality always inspired me and my sister. Ms. Tyagi was a gracious, industrious and dedicated person. Throughout her life, unflaggingly, she worked for women empowerment and upliftment of indigenous people. She was benevolent and considerate when it came to helping those who were less fortunate than her. Her strength lay in her ability to co-operate even in extreme situations. She was not only held in high esteem but was also praised and cherished for her commitment. She was an angel, a true role model who inspired me and supported me in my times of emotional crisis. She was no less than a mother to me, who will live in my heart forever.

Farah Khan, India

Ms. Farah Khan is a lecturer and a long time GRAVIS friend and supporter.

- 39 -

Shashi Ji – a shadow of hard work, sincerity

Challani family was introduced to Tyagi family many years ago. My father Sh. Bhero Das Challani used to meet them and they used to come to our village Diyatra. They used to talk about social issues and *khadi* development etc, in which I was also very interested. When I met Shashi Ji for the first time, I was very impressed with her simplicity. She used to adjust herself to any condition even in rural areas. She was very keen on women empowerment and rights. She used to go to small and remote villages to solve problems.

She was hard working and had a lot of self-respect. She used to wear *khadi* clothes and live very simply. All her work was selfless services. Her life was dedicated to Gandhi Ji's ideologies and we used to invite her to many programmes. She was associated with many social organizations and was very active her entire life. Despite of being critically ill, she had a strong will power and was never morally affected by her disease. Like a mother, she continued supporting everyone like a family member till the end.

Her untimely demise is an irreparable loss. We pray to the God for her soul and dedicate our tributes. We will continue her legacy and promoting her work with Gandhi Vichar Yuva Vahini.

Fusraj Challani, India

Sh. Fusraj Challani is a businessman and a Gandhian thinker and has been associated with GRAVIS and Tyagi family for about 20 years.

- 40 -

A mentor – Shashi Ji

In 1980s, Tyagi Ji and Shashi Ji started working in Western Rajasthan and pioneered social development in this area. Till then, there were no NGOs working in this area. They both fully dedicated their lives to the mission and the ideology of Mahatma Gandhi, Vinoba Ji and Jai Prakash Narayan.

Behan Ji's simple life and her engagement with everyone were exemplary. She was fully committed to social causes and community development. As she worked, she trained a lot of people and developed a cadre of community workers. I worked with them since 1983, as GRAVIS set up its first center. During this period, 1983-1990, I participated with her in prayers, meetings, *shram dan* and various projects. With affection, she used to call me Ganpat Bhai. Later on, she started calling me *Neta Ji* to appreciate my leadership ability and continued calling me *Neta Ji* her whole life.

A life with a message

In Rajasthan, she worked relentlessly with women and poor for education, health, employment, water, land and human service. Her able leadership made her very popular and she was known as a strong woman power. I pay tribute to motherly and inspiring Shashi Ji.

Ganpat Lal Mehra, India

Sh. Ganpat Lal Mehra is a past GRAVIS team member and later founded IDEA.

- 41 -

Some memories of Shashi Ji, over thirty-plus years' time

Although our first contact with GRAVIS was in 1988 in India, we first got to know Shashi Ji when she and her husband Tyagi Ji stayed with us for six days in our home near Olympia, Washington state, in 1992. During that time we drove the Tyagis on an overnight trip across the Cascade Mountains to the drier eastern part of the state to visit some examples of farming in arid regions. Although Shashi wasn't feeling well at the time, she actively participated in all the visits. She and Tyagi Ji also spoke to a class at The Evergreen State College and to a group at our local public library, and they met with People for Progress in India (PPI) in Seattle.

Tyagis again visited us in 2001, where we hosted a group at our home for them to meet with, as well as meeting with PPI in Seattle again. Attendees at all the events were impressed with her dedicated work, and with her particular interest in the uplift of women.

What I personally remember most often about Shashi Ji is her generous nature. On all our many meetings, both in India and in America, she gave us lovely craft items made by Thar villagers. In 2002, Shashi hosted us on a tour to two pilgrimage temple sites in the Thar that I'd been wanting to visit. At Ram Devra, widows were begging at a deep step well near the temple. Despite our being on a tight schedule, she took time to talk with one of the women as well as giving her some coins.

On a 2007 visit to our home, Shashi Ji carried an array of craft items, and we contacted a local business selling fair-traded crafts from around the world, in the hope of arranging a market for craft items made by woman in the villages of the Thar.

We were very impressed with the nation-wide recognition and awards she

received for her work in India, which was accomplished despite the unfortunate serious health issues in later decades.

We will miss her very much, as will the many, many people whose lives she touched in such positive ways over the years.

Gary Worthington, aided by Sandra Worthington, US

Mr. Gary Worthington is a lawyer, author (India Treasures/The Mangarh Chronicles), leader of adult education courses, environmentalist, and co-trustee with his wife Sandra of the Worthington Foundation.

- 42 -

A note from a friend and “colleague in the cause” of Shashi Tyagi

GRAVIS was formed in 1983, and I had started my work with women, in Seva Mandir, Udaipur, in 1981, and was keen to meet and collaborate, when possible, with others working on rural development and women welfare in Rajasthan. I had come to Rajasthan in 1970, just after marriage, in Canada, to Om Shrivastava, who returned from his studies in Toronto with a degree in Adult Education, and a Canadian wife, who had been his “fellow student”! We were a “development couple”, just as Shashi and Laxmi Chand were. I met them both in the early days, when I think they were working on opium addiction near Jodhpur. Over the years, theirs and our work grew, and we would meet at all-Rajasthan events, or women's events, and share personal and professional news of what all had happened since we last met.

When we were supporting the process of the formation of Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan, Rajasthan, I met Shashi at the campus of GRAVIS, and we discussed possible collaboration. The approach was to build a women's organization that could continue its work with low-income widows, separated, divorced, and older-never-married women, even if there was no funded NGO supporting them. That would mean that the culture of the organization would have to be simple – for meetings, a mutka of water and maybe a cup of tea. Shashi Ji and I discussed collaborating on this, but unfortunately, it didn't work out.

And just a few months ago, I got a letter from a Canadian friend associated with a Foundation that supports women and girls. She had been approached to give money for a project in the Thar Desert of Rajasthan with school-going girls! The approach was to get at the root cause of why girls drop out of school. One major reason is that the girls have to spend too much time bringing water for their family use, from too far away. The

time taken, (estimated 7 hours a day) prevents school attendance! The Thar Desert NGO working with the girls, helps girls and their families to solve their “fetching water” problems by building *taankas* and *khadins*, increase agriculture income, grow kitchen gardens. The girls get school supplies and a bicycle to go to and from school. I asked who the local NGO was working on this project, and it was GRAVIS! So, each in our own way, we have been working with women and girls in Rajasthan with effective strategies.

Shashi's deep commitment to Gandhian values, her commitment to the work, her friendship, will be remembered always.

Ginny Shrivastava, India

Ms. Ginny Shrivastava, originally from Canada, has spent her life for social development in India and had co-founded ASTHA.

- 43 -

Always for colleagues

I remember Shashi Ji as someone with a very kind heart and someone who was very caring. When she used to visit GRAVIS centers, she always met with workers with warmth. They had a lot of respect and affection for her. Her focus was always on poor and underprivileged. I remember her helping a poor villager once with her own money who was a victim of electrocution.

She was a courageous woman and also believed in the God and prayers. For her colleagues and co-workers, she was always a source of great inspiration.

Girja Shanker Giri, India

Sh. Girja Shanker Giri is a member of GRAVIS team over many years.

A people's leader

My first meeting with Shashi Ji was in early 2000's in the GRAVIS office. Walking into the house and the office, I had the feeling that the family atmosphere was so strong throughout. When I met her, it was like meeting the mother in the house. She was so warm and approachable and had a unique ability to make visitors feel at home right away. She was friendly with her staff and us in the meeting yet firm when she had to make her points. She had that ability to smoothly move into her role as a matriarch and as the founder and a secretary of GRAVIS.

In Indian culture, mothers have a special status and central to the entire family around her. Besides, Shashi Ji was warm, loving, trustworthy, dependable, approachable and had time to listen to everyone and make her “children” feel valued. All qualities Shashi Ji had in abundance and gave of her time selflessly to others to help people grow and prosper. She had that charisma about her that made people to just follow her example and bask in the radiance of her glow. She truly demonstrated the qualities of a Leader that says: “Before you are a Leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about helping others grow”.

Shashi Ji's work can be seen and felt all around the communities and the people she worked with. She was a powerful leader who worked for the empowerment of women particularly, and it is her work and leadership that has led to many women in villages across Rajasthan in rising to leadership positions. Her many contributions to improve the lives of older women and men and their families have been commendable. She was a strong votary of inclusive models of social development and forcefully advocated with the Government, the UN and community forums, both nationally and internationally. She received many awards for her meritorious work, yet when you met her you never heard her mention any of her accomplishments. Her humility was real and she was a true champion of the poor. I was an ardent student whenever I was with her and learnt many things which have helped me in my own life. Shashi Ji has left a lasting legacy of true social work that is a lesson for everyone in the development field. I pray that all the work she has done will be a light that will grow and reach far and wide for the benefit of thousands in India and abroad.

With high respects

Godfred Paul, Myanmar

Mr. Godfred Paul is a senior development professional working with HelpAge International.

Alive in memories

Shashi Ji was known as Shashi Behan with respect. Her friendly behavior and soft speech were very pleasant. She always believed in encouraging youth, and she always supported me also. She always used to tell me that you have to be a strong leader in social work. When a Gandhi *Vichar Yatra* was organized with Dr. Subba Rao and Indra Bhai and others, I had contributed to all the arrangements on her encouragement.

With Shashi Ji, I participated in many youth camps. Her glimpse can be seen even today in many social programmes. She used to highly appreciate my singing and writing. I will always remember her and will follow her path.

Goutam K. Guts, India

Sh. Goutam K. Guts is a social worker and Gandhian thinker from Rajasthan.

Moments from Shashi Ji's life

Ms. Shashi Tyagi, a lady with a vision and a kind heart, so humane to the world around. She was a benevolent and strong personality to support people in need.

So courageous that she kept her serving spirit high even during the most critical time of her illness. Her civilizing and supporting gestures touched many hearts. Her demise has created a void not only for GRAVIS but in many lives that she helped and influenced.

We are externally proud of her vision and grace that will be the legacy for GRAVIS .

Gulam Ali, India

Dr. Gulam Ali is a senior ophthalmologist and had served GRAVIS in the past.

A legacy of service

Shashi Tyagi was a dedicated social activist and a transformative leader. For more than three decades, she worked tirelessly to bring sustainable development to the people of the Thar Desert. Under her leadership, GRAVIS became one of the leading non-profit organizations in Rajasthan. Shashi Ji distinguished herself through her quiet fortitude. The Thar Desert can be a forbidding place to work. She forged connections with the people of the region because she showed up, listened to their needs and concerns, and demonstrated her commitment to their well being across years. She worked across the lines of gender, religion, and caste to bring uplift to all. She did not focus on accolades, even though she earned many over the course of her life. Throughout her years of service, her overarching motivation was doing work for the people of the Thar Desert.

Shashi Ji set the tone for the entire organization: She was self-effacing, humble, and unostentatious. She fostered a sense of common purpose and connection that made the organization a family instead of just a place to work. Shashi Ji was a role model for employees of GRAVIS and the people of the region-especially the women. Many women from the villages, seeing the example of a bold woman standing up and putting her ideas forward, joined a self-help group, village development committee, or became a health worker. They in turn have inspired many others followed in her footsteps. In this sense, Shashi Ji's legacy is the social uplift of countless girls and women in the region.

During my year at GRAVIS, Shashi Ji welcome me warmly into the family, just as she did for all volunteers and visitors. She often invited me to her home for meals. A delicious Diwali feast particularly sticks out in my mind. Whenever we would meet, she would share stories with me about the early years building the organization. She helped me with my research, asked questions, and was open to new ideas. She had a wonderful smile and laugh, and a great sense of humor. Her support helped propel my own career forward. She did all this just after the passing of Tyagi Ji, when she was a steadying force for the entire organization.

Shashi Ji often worked quietly, but the results were transformative. She lived according to a few simple principles: respect for all persons, uplift of the downtrodden, and work with joy in the daily service of others.

Hayden Kantor, US

*Dr. Hayden Kantor was a Research Associate at GRAVIS from 2005-2006. He authored two books for the organization: *Sitting on One Carpet* and *The Story of GRAVIS*. He now teaches at Stanford University and is the Treasurer of GRAVIS USA.*

Shashi Tyagi – A dedicated social worker

Shashi Ji was a dedicated social worker who spent over four decades of her life working for poor people of Marwar. With her late husband Tyagi Ji, she led the activities to alleviate poverty in rural areas. Marwar is a very backward region where GRAVIS has been doing very important work related to water, women empowerment, health, natural resources management and agriculture.

My association with Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji started in 1980s. It was during the formation of Rajasthan Voluntary Health Association (RVHA) that we got informed that there was an attack on GRAVIS center. After the attack, we provided solitarily and support to GRAVIS.

Later on, we continued interaction with GRAVIS in 1990's on natural resource management programmes. After Tyagi Ji's death, Shashi Ji took the full responsibility of leading GRAVIS. Social change is an ongoing process. Shashi Ji contributed to GRAVIS and to rural community with great sincerity and commitment. Her path should be followed. Our society is always in need of people working for justice, truth and peace.

Heera Lal Sharma, India

Sh. Heera Lal Sharma is a well known social activist and the Founder of Sahyog.

Shashi Ji, a human rights advocate, a friend and a role model

Our team at HelpAge learnt about the passing of Shashi Ji with great sadness.

Shashi Ji was a wonderful person who never failed to impress those who met her. "I remember well when I met Tyagi Ji and Sashi Ji, back in 2004, I was impressed by how they complemented each other" said Eduardo Klien, Regional Director, Asia Pacific, HelpAge International, a longtime friend of the Tyagi family. "They both expressed in their daily lives the Gandhian principles of truth, simplicity and service" he added.

Many of the issues she was passionate about and advocated for, such as gender equality, literacy and not linking well being to material possessions, remain relevant and crucial for the world today, perhaps more now than ever before.

She has been one of the most active female human rights activists we have come to know. In 2018, HelpAge was honoured to have her joining our team to represent older people at the United Nations in New York as Governments gathered to review the implementation of the 2002 Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. Travelling for more than 20 hours from Rajasthan to New York, she was as enthusiastic and full of energy as ever. Shashi Ji went there to speak about the situation of older people in the Thar Desert, Rajasthan where she dedicated her life-long journey to promote the well being of older people. She was a strong activist in the quest to eliminate discrimination against women and people of lower castes in India.

Shashi Ji leaves a legacy. She was ahead of her time and set a role model for women of all generations, including the younger ones. She taught us that changes can be made with determination and you have to have belief in them.

Shashi Ji has lived a remarkable life. We share the loss with the Tyagi family but also have the shared pride of having learned from her. We at HelpAge International are very honored to have known and worked with Shashi Ji. We will surely miss the long years of friendship with her.

Help Age International Asia Office Team, Thailand

HelpAge International is a global network of organizations working for the rights and entitlements of older people.

- 50 -

Memories

We remember our first meeting with Shashi Ji. We all were sitting in a small lawn and listening to her; stories and experiences. She shared one story with us - "sharing gifts or essential items with needy person on birthdays". We were so inspired that since then, we are always trying to contribute whatever we can, especially on birthday instead of spending on parties.

Below are few thoughts from our side for Shashi Ji.

"Being immature students, coming from a developed country background, 4 girls arriving in Jodhpur, for the first time, worried about working in a new context, your appeasing and consoling words like a guide,

Relaxed our heartbeat, showing us the pathway, embraced us through our journey, Returning to our homes, you comforted and reassured your blessings, like a mother to us"

A life with a message

"A woman of extreme strength, courage and love,

Who was beautiful, soft and now peaceful and free as a dove.

Someone on whom our admiration was built around, for her womanhood, wife, friend and mother since she was brought into this ground.

Dear Shashi Ji, we will forever hold in our hearts in which we have truly learned the most from, Your strength-as a wonderful mother, women to others":

"I have met many people in my life but Shashi Ji was truly an inspiration for the young people like me; she was a phenomenal woman. She was the kindest and nicest person I have ever met in my life. Her services, dedication and love for mankind were unbelievable. She will always remain in our heart. She is a great example of women empowerment. When I met her she shared her experiences and journey and it gave me strength, courage and wisdom encouraged me to be more, to strive harder, to have confidence and most importantly to seek divine knowledge and understanding. I am forever grateful that I met her"

We will always remember you as a leader, social scientist, woman with courage, love and strength. Shashi Ji will always be remembered.

Thank you.

Hemlata Yadav, Manisha, Tanvi, India

Students of Lady Irwin College, University of Delhi who had volunteered for GRAVIS.

Diwali- a festival of lights to remember Shashi Tyagi, November 2020

As Indians around the globe celebrate the festival that shines and brings people who for years haven't connected but remember a light that brought them together in times of doubt and in the search for knowledge. Last night Shashi Tyagi light shone bright as the Diwali festival began. Shashi finally succumbed to her fight against Leukaemia.

I don't usually discuss my personal life on a public forum but this obituary requires a personal touch as you will see as the story unfolds about this remarkable family. If my memory serves me correctly 1991 was the year when I first went to India with my then girlfriend Susanna Niinivaara, a Finnish up and coming journalist. It seems she was also there to develop some sort of collaboration with TAMY, The Tampere Student's Association. I of course was there for my own curiosity of trying to find out a bit more about my own culture and what Indian adventures I could get up to.

We eventually headed to Rajasthan to meet with GRAVIS and set up some collaboration with Tampere University. Here it was much more basic and very poor looking as we headed to meet with Laxmi Ji and Shashi Ji and found it to be very calm and relaxed. We talked for days which in today's world seems to be impossible as people are always too busy. I left India still hating it but with a touch of questions still not answered.

Every year after 1991 I saved up and travelled to India as I felt a need to know more about this mass of humanity that seems to keep going regardless of the difficulties of its predicament. The start and the end of each year's journey would be at Tyagi ji's house. We would sit sometimes for weeks just discussing people, the environment and the essence of what development really means? The scope of discussion was wide but also personal mind set how we look at each other how we inter-act. It was truly a time of character building for me as a 23-year-old. The years passed and the love for each other grew stronger.

In 1992, I was in India and Tyagi's had visited Tampere and I had an issue with the Finnish authorities not taking discrimination and especially institutionalised discrimination seriously. There was also the other issue of the immigrants to Finland were not unified to battle this scourge in Finnish society. This was due to the fact that the immigrants were from very diverse groups and the only thing they had in common was they all immigrated to Finland.

I asked my two wonderful friends from India what I should do? There

A life with a message

wasn't any leadership in the immigrants. Laxmi looked at me and said "if there is no leadership then take the leadership and take the reins, if your heart is in the right place people will come around and support you, don't fear ". After that discussion I set up NEON (National Equal Opportunities Network) Association. The people did come around to support the efforts from all walks of life. There have been many times when the Tyagi's had been my counsel and friends who seem to know how to activate me and I them.

In November 2000 my mother died my father had already passed away in November 1994. I was in Brussels working with an organisation I co-founded with other like-minded colleagues ENAR (European Network Against Racism).

November has never been my favourite month since both my father and mother died in November.

I was headed to India with my mother's ashes to do the ceremonial task of releasing her ashes in the sacred Ganges. I was not happy one reason being that my mother had passed away and the other was the bureaucratic nature of the work in Brussels and the fact we were not changing anything in reality. I was at a whole time low.

I talked to Shashi and Laxmi and they said something which touched me to tears. They said "Come to India you will be our son we will look after you whatever work you want to engage in we will support you". To be honest I have had very little support from anyone and just to hear those words and how they expressed it led me to tears. It was with that sentence I decided to move to India. Shashi and Laxmi were my parents they did all the things parents do even though I lost my own parents. I was very lucky to have a new and larger family. I am now 53 years of age 30 years ago I met these two wonderful people and all of their friends.

It is simply amazing and a credit to their lives that so many of us are connected because of them a kindred spirit of kindness, love and understanding in times of crisis like today we are all together to show our love! Rest in Peace Shashi as we will continue to give others what you gave us!

Hoslo Jiwa, Switzerland

Mr. Hoslo Jiwa is an environmentalist and has been a friend of GRAVIS and Tyagi family for a long time.

Great life of Shashi Tyagi

We did not know Shashi Tyagi personally for a very long time. Face to face, we met here only once. We were lucky and blessed to spend one whole day with her on a field trip visiting the GRAVIS projects. We are geographically very distant from all of her living-context and her family.

Therefore we are not the first ones to speak out in terms of memories addressing her, as many knew her much better. What we do know and feel close to is GRAVIS, her dedicated live-engagement and gift for the world. We are in deep admiration for the persons who have such love, that they give their lives for the poor and the needy. We saw how she engages with the people in the villages, we listened when she spoke to children in the Kerala-Bhakar-School or to the girls in the education-center and we understood, that in her a generous and loving spirit is speaking. For us, Shashi Tyagi is one of the "lighthouse-persons" who stand out for others and who cast their light in the darkness for people to see what is humane and merciful.

When the message of her passing away reached us and we were able to attend the commemoration of her through video-conference, we spread the word to all our fellow supporters of the Kerala-Bhakar-School and the general work of GRAVIS here in our region and in all Germany. We ask everyone to have a look and commemorate her work. We did not ask for money, but that was obviously the way people wanted to say thank you to Shashi Tyagi and her work. To our big surprise, we could collect 15.000 EUROS within a few days and we took this wave of generosity as a measurement of compassion to her passing away.

This we want to share with you as a contribution for the collected memories of her friends and family. We feel very honored, not only that we were asked to share our memories, but also and furthermore, that we are able to contribute to GRAVIS' and Shashi Tyagi's work.

Yours in admiration,

Imke Frodermann and Ralph Lang, Germany

Ms.Imke Frodermann and Mr. Ralph Lang are a German couple, teachers, who traveled the globe on bicycles.

In the memory of Late Smt. Shashi Tyagi

I had the privilege of knowing the Late Shri L.C. Tyagi and Late Smt. Shashi Tyagi since 1995. Both of them were hard working, gentle, soft spoken devoted to the welfare of humanity following on the foot-steps of Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave. They started their journey from Manaklao (Jodhpur) by working against drugs, atrocities on women folk, early marriages and other social evils against many odds from the village community. They sacrificed all the comforts and pleasures of urban life and lived a very simple and dedicated life. Smt. Shashi Tyagi worked on the upliftment of the poor and downtrodden. She worked on the malnutrition of the women and the children. She was particularly interested in the health, adult education and the education of the girls. For this, she helped in starting a hospital in Tinwari and schools for the girls at many places in imparting primary education.

The Tyagis widely traveled whole of Western Rajasthan and surveyed and studied the problems faced by the people of the region. They developed an organization namely GRAVIS at Jodhpur and also a network of substations. The organization and the substations worked on the problems of drought mitigation through construction of *khadins*, afforestation, dry land crop production, pasture development, agro forestry, kitchen gardens, etc. This helped a lot in poverty alleviation and in improving the lifestyle of the communities.

All these activities helped a lot and improved the life of the people living in Western Rajasthan. Ms. Tyagi traveled a lot within the country and outside and communicated this message to all. It helped in attracting many projects at the national and international levels. As a result of this, Ms. Tyagi was awarded with many national and international awards.

I pay my humble homage to Ms. Tyagi and pray to the God for her soul to rest in peace.

J. P. Gupta, India

Dr. J. P. Gupta is an agriculture scientist and had worked with the Government of India, and is a Board member of GRAVIS.

- 54 -

Our Behan Ji

Shashi Ji was a great human being who gave her life to others. She believed in saying and doing the same thing and worked for people living in remote villages and under poverty. She was a unique light who enlightened homes of many poor. It will be difficult to describe in few words what I learnt from her. GRAVIS is my own family and I will continue the journey of my life with Shashi Ji's inspiration.

Jagdish Meghwal, India

Sh. Jagdish Meghwal is a member of GRAVIS team.

- 55 -

Commitment and passion

Shashi Ji was from the generation of social workers about whom we have heard about a lot and also met some of them in flesh and blood. That generation of social workers were inspired by Gandhi Ji, Vinoba Bhave and people like them. Basically, totally committed for the cause of poor and marginalized sections of society, simple in thinking, simple life style and doing service without any personal gain! I first met Shashi Ji sometime in 1999. I was also a new entrant in the world of voluntary organisations. I had heard that the people working in voluntary sector have big egos. But when I met her, I did not find any ego but yes, there was lots of respect and passion for poor, especially for women.

I happened to travel with her from Jodhpur to a few villages where GRAVIS was working. It was a memorable visit and I really learned a lot from her during that brief one-day visit. She had the special quality of building support with people and I observed that in the field. Wherever we visited, the rural women were treating her as 'one of them'. Though we were meeting first time, but very soon, she was treating me like a friend or a younger brother. I asked her how she got into this sector and that too in Rajasthan. (If I remember correctly, she told me that she was basically from UP). She gave a very honest and simple reply. She told that, "I married Tyagi Ji and with that I also married his ideals and ideas, his work and his passion. I had no prior knowledge about poverty or the problems that women faced in Rajasthan, especially in Western Rajasthan where women have to walk miles to even fetch water! I started liking the work which Tyagi Ji was doing"

I was working in ARAVALI and we met many times in various meetings. When I started working in the State Government, GRAVIS was one of our partners in MPOWER project. That gave me another opportunity to work with her, though only as a partner. I found her extremely straight forward, very honest in her approach and open to learn.

Once, I think in 2018, I got a call from Shashi Ji and she asked me, “Jaipal Ji, where are you? I am in Jaipur and I wanted to meet you.” We were not in touch for almost 3-4 years and I was pleasantly surprised to get her call. I said that I am at home and would love to meet you. I didn't ask her about the purpose of the meeting. Later, I was wondering why Shashi Ji wanted to meet me? Anyway, she came, it was in morning. She had brought some sweets as gift. She met Sunita (my wife) and Alapana (my daughter). I asked her about the breakfast, and she said that I have had my breakfast but can take little. We chatted for about 90 minutes about Western Rajasthan, about Government's approach towards rural development, about GRAVIS and so on. Then she said, “Thanks Jaipal Ji, I need to leave now. I really liked meeting with you.” I was really curious to know as why she wanted to meet. I asked her. I said, “Shashi Ji, I am also so happy to see you and talk to you, but what was the purpose of this meeting?”

She replied, “why? I just thought of meeting you! Isn't it a good purpose?” She was such simple soul. Prakash is one of the blessed one to have mother like her.

Jaipal Singh, India

Sh. Jaipal Singh is a senior development consultant and has worked with many organizations.

Memories with love from Africa

Where can I start on Shashi Ji? Before coming to India for the exchange visit, the word India for me had the connotation of chronic diseases, fundraising for the terminally ill. This is because from my country Kenya, families with terminally ill family members used to visit India for treatment. The second part of India I knew was the natives in Kenya. Unfortunately, I knew them as being rude, arrogant, and very mean. So when the visit to Rajasthan came up, I had a negative perception of Indians. My goodness? Upon landing in Delhi I found totally different people - warm, welcoming, generous with a smile. I was mesmerized.

Shashi Ji and GRAVIS - I can only liken her with proverbs 27:17 (As iron sharpen iron, so one person sharpens another), she changed my world completely, she made me have brothers and sisters in another continent . For this woman, I can only write - where are the boundaries of a mother? In Africa, mothers take up orphaned babies and breast feed them to preserve life. This is what I can define Shashi Tyagi for GRAVIS to be. She was the visionary woman whose dreams inspired Maasai Kajiado women dairy members from Kenya. The visit to Rajasthan and her determination created water dams in Kajiado, Kenya. Her touch and impact are beyond geographical boundaries. This woman of golden heart has made women, children and animals miles away from her home get water to quench thirst-what a legacy beyond boundaries. Trees planted by GRAVIS in Kenya will forever continue to sow seeds that will disperse in the world and sprout and germinate into the forest that will conserve our environment.

Jane Kathure Biashara, Kenya

Ms. Jane Kathure Biashara is a development activist and a women leader from Kenya.

- 57 -

Memories of meeting Shashi Ji

I remember Shashi Ji being warm and kind, especially to a young American boy that was particularly lost at the beginning of a summer in India, that would be incredibly influential for him. I remember her translating for me as I learned more about GRAVIS and the places and people it served. I remember asking her what her childhood dream was - she said to travel -, and I remember thinking how successful she had been in attaining that.

She was a special person, and no doubt one the world will miss.

Jasdeep Garcha, US

Mr. Jasdeep Garcha is an IT professional and had volunteered with GRAVIS in the past.

- 58 -

Prayers

On the day of Diwali last year, I came to know about Shashi Ji's demise. I felt like losing a member from my own family. I had known Shashi Ji and Tyagi ji, Shri Kashyap Ji and GRAVIS since 2004. Great work done by Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji is visible on ground. I learnt a lot from both Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji and am leading a life with those values given by them. I pay her my respectful tributes.

Jassa Ram, India

Sh. Jassa Ram has a long association with GRAVIS as a community worker.

- 59 -

Our experience

In 2016, we had the extraordinary opportunity to spend a number of days and nights moving from community to community and home to home in the Thar Desert guided by Shashi Tyagi, witnessing first-hand the profound impact that she has had on the life and well-being of the desert people. Her presence - both physical and spiritual - was palpable as she moved gracefully amongst the people she chose to devote her life to. To say that this time with Shashi Ji, soaking in her wisdom, intelligence, warmth and good humour was life changing is to understate the profundity of our experience.

Jenni Tipper and David Cork, Canada

Ms. Jenni Tipper and Mr. David Cork are a couple from Ottawa, and a leadership coach and a banker respectively. They are GRAVIS friends since last 5 years.

- 60 -

My day with Shashi Ji

I got to know Shashi Tyagi from her visits to Seattle to meet with People for Progress in India (PPI), and from my visits to Jodhpur in 2001 and 2016. On the last of these trips, Shashi Ji took a day from her busy schedule to take me to see the work that GRAVIS had been doing in the Baap area, with a stop along the way to see the picturesque town of Osiyan.

We went to GRAVIS's field office in Baap and to some nearby villages, where I got to see the impressive improvements in agricultural productivity that GRAVIS's water management projects had produced, as well as the ongoing project supported by PPI to introduce effective water filtration for home use. Shashi Ji used the occasion to renew her friendship with the villagers and discuss matters with the field workers, while providing me with a running commentary on everything we were seeing. It was one of the most enjoyable and rewarding days among the many that I have spent in India.

Accompanying this note is a photo that I took of Shashi Ji in the environment where she thrived: in the courtyard of a village house, accompanied by a field worker, and surrounded by adoring local children. It does more than my poor words can to show the luminous influence she had on everyone around her.

Jerry Folland, US

Mr. Jerry Folland is a mathematician, associated with People for Progress in India (PPI) and is a GRAVIS friend of long time.

Vocation rooted in Gandhi's vision

Shashi Tyagi and L C Tyagi, and I met in 2001. It was the time of globalization. In 1999, the great anti-globalization demonstration took place in Seattle, Washington, United States. International Development Exchange (IDEX) was present on three continents, and in its strategy it espoused the need for justice, the social subject, and the need for donors to get closer to ground reality and to the social processes of communities.

It was through the Tyagi's and GRAVIS that I learned about the meaning of Gandhi for India and for the world; of his philosophy and of the social system for which he gave his life.

I also learned that GRAVIS was created in 1983 based on the Gandhian vision to improve lives in a harsh desert environment of India. GRAVIS worked to improve livelihoods while regenerating the environment, and with the hard work of women while strengthening their rights and changing policies. I have saved photos and the presentation made by GRAVIS during a meeting of advisors of IDEX.

In memory of Shashi, I want to say that the time which does not end is that of the Light that is produced while walking on the path to find the very sources of life.

Our relationship and introduction became possible because we were both the advisors of IDEX which had called us to a meeting in San Francisco in the month of May, 2001.

Jorge Santiago S., Mexico

Mr. Jorge Santiago S. is a human rights and development activist and a GRAVIS friend.

A life lasting impression

Going to India in my early twenties with a group of Finnish University students was a life changing experience for me. The little activism I had in me was strongly encouraged by meeting GRAVIS workers, Laxmi Ji and Shashi Ji in particular. To see what Shashi Ji and courageous people at GRAVIS had achieved against such adversities made me realise that one can really change things, and at least it's worthwhile to try one's best.

Here are some of my initial impressions on her according to my diary more

than twenty years ago. “Shashi is a very charismatic and strong willed person. She and Laxmi seem to be very highly revered in the desert villages. Age seems to be weighing on Mr Tyagi at 54, but Shashi travels the country with enormous energy. Her hair is thick and gorgeous, dyed with henna colour.”

Shashi Ji would talk straight from the shoulder, but in a warm way. A person’s social standing did not matter to her; she was the same with a politician or a goat herder.

Later on when I got to know Shashi Ji a little better and met her in Finland, I noticed other things in her. Now that I reminisce about her, it is the smile that comes to my mind first. The smile and laughter, they were really infectious. She had that commanding aura about her, but you would listen to her out of respect, not of fear. The sense of humour and little pranks were all the more endearing against that other aspect of her. She was very attentive towards our children Olli and Vappu.

All and all, I am so happy to have known her and been able to call her my friend. She was one of those rare people that leave a lasting impression, no matter if you are years and thousands of miles apart.

Jussi Nousiainen, Finland

Mr. Jussi Nousiainen is a communication specialist and has volunteered with GRAVIS in the past.

Unforgettable memories

First of all, I pay my respect to Shashi Ji and pray to the God that her soul rests in peace. I have known Shashi Ji for over 30 years. She dedicated her whole life in human welfare and social service. With her sincere efforts, she raised GRAVIS to very high position.

In rural areas, there is a lot of water crisis and women are the main sufferers. Shashi Ji and GRAVIS realized these problems and helped rural people with a large number of *taankas*. Shashi Ji was a *messiah* for poor people. She used to connect directly with rural women and children and promoted health and education among them. She also helped the rural people in getting the benefit of Government programmes. I also remember her great work in eye care sector and in distribution of woolen clothes to rural people. In Tinwari village, she constructed a hospital for poor people.

Shashi Ji also worked for mine workers' welfare. She played a big role in highlighting the problems of silicosis which kills many mine workers. She was fully Gandhian and always wore a *khadi* saree. Where there was any injustice with poor and rural people, she always supported them in getting the help of police. Tyagi Ji and Shashi Ji were two main wheels of GRAVIS. After Tyagi Ji's demise in 2005, Shashi Ji took all responsibilities with courage and continued the service.

Life and death is decided by the God. Death is the last truth. On Diwali 14th November, 2020, Shashi Ji left the world but her work will always be remembered. Shashi Ji's children are both doctors and are continuing her work. For me, Shashi Ji will always be a source of great inspiration.

Kalyan Singh, India

Sh. Kalyan Singh is a close associate of Shashi Ji and had worked for Rajasthan Police.

- 64 -

A note of tribute

In 2006, I met with a fatal accident. Shashi Ji got me hospitalized and paid for my treatment. Otherwise, I would have died. Shashi Ji gave me a second life that I am now living.

Her demise is a great loss and is difficult to bear. Her values and ideology are with us and will continue guiding us. She relentlessly worked for poor and weaker people. My sincere tribute to her.

Kana Ram, India

Sh. Kana Ram is a long time member of GRAVIS team.

- 65 -

Immortal memories

Sometimes, words fall short to describe a life. A personality like the GRAVIS founder, Shashi Ji, was one of such a large hearted person. It is very difficult to follow Mahatma Gandhi's path in life, but Shashi Ji always did that. Good behavior with everyone, kind speech and friendly attitude were a part of Shashi Ji's pleasant personality

Whenever she called me to her office, I always used to go. She would always ask about my family first, would get me some tea and then would discuss the purpose of the meeting. Her affectionate behavior always gave a lot of comfort. Because of this, all villagers used to call her Behan Ji with love. My father used to tell me about Tyagi Ji and I got to know Shashi Ji only after Tyagi Ji's death. I remember she could not attend my wedding but she came to visit me and my wife later with a gift and with an apology. It was a great gesture from her.

Once we went to Jaipur for some programme, and she took care of me with some homemade food during journey. She told me to stay at her daughter's home in Jaipur like a family member. There are many more memories and experiences that cannot be described in words. She was like a moon who always gave light. I remember her large heart, simplicity and affection with deep respect.

Kishor Kumar Vyas, India

Sh. Kishor Kumar Vyas is a lawyer at the Rajasthan High Court and a long time friend of GRAVIS.

Woman of courage

Shashi Ji was a woman of courage. She had great leadership quality. There are some people in the world who we respect whole heartedly, Shashi Ji was one of them for me. I used to go to take blessings from Shashi Ji on my birthday. I had joined GRAVIS in 2018 and ever since then, I used to talk to Shashi Ji on phone every day to seek guidance. I was lucky to have the privilege of her guidance every day.

This is a prayer to the God that her soul may rest in peace.

Krishna Joshi, India

Ms. Krishna Joshi is a part of GRAVIS team for over 3 years.

Shashi Tyagi – a special light that stays with us

I have always admired leaders who are wise. Not the kind of wise men and women who have learned their wisdom from books, but especially those who have learned it by living with others in a society around them, by learning from life and from nature. Those who carry a special aura or light that brings others to them. The aura that you cannot buy, learn or explain. The aura that is rare because it is innate.

Shashi Ji carried this kind of light with her. She was a strong and wise woman who attracted everyone's attention wherever she went - she brought people together. She welcomed them regardless of their origins, gender, social class, caste or religion, listened to what they had to say and acted accordingly. That is why she was respected, admired and loved by many.

I met Shashi Ji for the first time in 2004, when I was a student, when I visited GRAVIS in India with six other students from the Students' Union at University of Tampere in Finland. It was the first time I had travelled outside Europe. Everything in India was new and exciting for me, but also very different. We were warmly welcomed by the Tyagi - Laxmi Chand Ji, Shashi Ji, Prakash Ji and Vasundhara Ji - and the whole GRAVIS team. Shashi Ji and L.C Ji and the team opened their house to us, gave their time, took care of us, and allowed us to travel with them to learn more about the people living in the villages of Thar in Rajasthan and the challenges they daily faced due to this remote, arid desert region. They helped us open our eyes to the privilege we had and to what is ultimately crucial in life. They

taught us probably much more about life than we had ever learned before.

In 2007, I returned to India as a volunteer for GRAVIS and spent a few months collecting testimonies from women in Rajasthan for my master's thesis. I was happy to see the other side of Shashi Ji as a loving grandmother to Kashvi and Prisha. Despite her responsibilities as a new grandmother for the second time, she still had the energy to travel and devote time to others. I will always remember the day she invited my husband who was visiting India and I, to join her as special guests to celebrate Gandhi's birthday, a memorable birthday that brought together people from different Thar villages to listen together to the speech of this wise lady with a special aura around her - a speech that touched the souls of hundreds of people. We naturally tried to follow in her footsteps while making our speeches, but we were unable to really do so.

I am now the mother of two daughters and I have often told them about my stay in India, because after all these years a part of my heart is still with the Tyagi and GRAVIS. I wish to pass on to my children the same kind of humble, caring, selfless but strong and daring attitude that I noticed in Shashi Ji when I first met her fifteen years ago, that is to say devoting time to helping and being there for others. When it is cold outside and I put a blanket I received from Shashi Ji on my shoulders, I can still feel some of her light next to me. Thank you Shashi Tyagi for being an inspiring woman you were, and you continue to be! May your soul rest in peace!

Laura Paulus , Belgium

Ms. Laura Paulus is a consultant, working for the non-governmental and international organizations and lives in Brussels, Belgium.

- 68 -

Old memories

I have known GRAVIS since 1995. Tyagi Ji and Shashi Ji gave me the opportunity of working with GRAVIS and of serving village women. Shashi Ji was a great guide and supporter to me and helped me live with dignity and independence. I will always remember her role in my life and I pray for her soul.

Lila Bai, India

Ms. Lila Bai is a part of GRAVIS team and a Board member of GRAVIS.

Remembering her friendly attitude

I met Shashi Ji only one time, as she came to participate in a HelpAge workshop in Siam Riep in Cambodia. There were Pakistanis, Indians, Bangladeshis, and others from the subcontinent of South Asia.

She talked passionately about the work of GRAVIS with older people, with women and girls and with most poor sections of society. Her commitment and dedication were very inspiring. Then, we would speak to each other often during the conference. Only after that, I came to know Prakash, her son, who became my good friend, which I cherish up to now.

And every time when we meet at any event, in afterthought, by her friendly attitude I realized that Indians and Pakistanis can think alike on important issues, if they would communicate with each other. This, I noticed then with my other Indian colleagues as well.

I shall always remember Mrs Tyagi as my personal experience was! My prayers and tributes to a great person.

M. S. Boikhan, Pakistan

Dr. M.S. Boikhan is a physician and the Founder of Pakistan Medicos International.

A special person

For an ordinary person like me, it is difficult to fully describe the magnanimity of respected Shashi Ji. Her heart was like a deep ocean. Over 20 years, I worked with her very closely. The work she did in very remote villages for poor people, is a milestone and will be remembered for long.

I saw a teacher and guide in her like Gandhi Ji. She always taught me to follow forgiveness and non-violence. The vacuum created by her death is difficult to fill. Continuing all her work forward will be the sincere tribute. I will always remember Shashi Ji in my heart.

Mahendra Rajpurohit, India

Sh. Mahendra Rajpurohit is a close GRAVIS associate for nearly 20 years.

- 71 -

Selfless work

In 1980s, inspired by Vinoba Bhave, *Sarvodaya* ideology, Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji co – founded GRAVIS. Both of them sacrificed physical comforts and dedicated their entire life to support poor, underprivileged and *dalit* people. Shashi Ji proved through her life that she was an extraordinary human being.

I received her motherly love, guidance and support over the last 20 years. In voluntary sector of Rajasthan, she had a very high place and was also awarded with Jamnalal Bajaj Award. She had a unique ability to understand development and to promote good values. She gifted all of us a message of working selflessly, with humanity and with sincerity, which will keep inspiring us for a long time.

Mahesh Panpalia, India

Sh. Mahesh Panpalia is a social activist and founded DHARA Sansthan.

- 72 -

Like a rainbow

Reminiscing times spent with Shashi Ji are golden and laced with learning. I first met Shashi Ji in the year 2005 in professional capacity. My initial interactions with her made me aware of “The Gandhian Philosophy” that she dearly imbibed and never left a moment to share its principles with others. Shashi Ji believed in every one's potential and her watchful eye always saw “a hidden talent “in all. She promoted the young, encouraging new ideas and nurturing them to spring and blossom in the Gandhian perspective. When I first joined GRAVIS, I was unsure of the new undertaking but Shashi Ji believed in my abilities and gave me the responsibility of the Kalron Field Center. The projects implemented there were technical and extensive and it is the great faith that Tyagi Ji and Shashi Ji showed in me that gave me the strength to fulfilled the required tasks. They also provided me the opportunity to represent GRAVIS at the HelpAge International Asia Pacific Meeting in Vietnam and to organise the “All India *Sarvodaya Sammelan* “at the Kalron Field Center.

She gave importance to all big and small members in age and post. She believed in collective power and beautifully showed this by discussing the organisational issues with all members patiently, taking and assessing each one's input.

A life with a message

For Shashi Ji, the people working in GRAVIS were part of their “Gandhian Family” and the welfare of each family member was paramount to her. She spent time inquiring about the wellbeing of each one's family and like an elder sister, patiently extended the required help to them.

I was personally touched by her kindness when my family and I were faced with an adversity. In our situation of strife, she took out time to enquire about the situation. She extended emotional support and timely help that diverted huge misfortune from our family.

Her help at that time was like the only “Ray of Hope” that lit our path. Even after I moved on from GRAVIS, Shashi Ji would call and enquire regarding the well-being of me and my family. Even after leaving GRAVIS, we shared a special bond in which she would discuss matters and provide guidance. Like the vibrant colours of the rainbow, she brightened my life as boss, mentor, elder sister and confidant. I feel very fortunate to have met her and be touched by her gracious presence.

Mahipal Singh, India

Sh. Mahipal Singh is a former team member of GRAVIS and a close associate.

- 73 -

Words of remembrance

I was shocked to know about Shashi Ji's demise on 14th November, 2020. It is nearly impossible to describe my association of 20 years with her in limited words. I will always feel vacuum created by her absence. She was a great guide to me.

I remember an incident in Delhi when we had to go to the railway station and there still was plenty of time left. I asked, if I should call a taxi but she waited and stopped an old man riding a bicycle rickshaw on the road. He slowly took us to the station and Shashi Ji paid more than what he had asked for. Later she told me, we used our available time and helped a needy family. This is just one example of the kind of life Shashi Ji lived, finding joy in helping people in need.

Mahitosh Bagoria, India

Sh. Mahitosh Bagoria works for Health, Environment and Development Consortium (HEDCON) and is associated with GRAVIS for long time.

- 74 -

Charismatic Shashi Ji

Clad in simple *khadi* clothes, with full of confidence and enthusiasm, dedicated to the causes of society and underprivileged, Shashi Ji had indomitable will. With her total commitment and sincerity, she was a true companion of Tyagi ji.

With her children - Abha and Prakash, she gave her motherly love to everyone and empowered women, enlightened their life. Shashi Ji was a precious human being. With Tyagi Ji, through hard work and sincere efforts, she created many social programmes in many villages. Her initiatives are benefiting a large number of rural people. The achievements of Shashi Ji's work are immortal.

She had enormous respect for Late. Sh.Bandhu Ji. The mutual respect and trust between them, continued over a long period. I remember Shashi Ji telling Bandhu Ji once that this world is full of struggle. In reply, Bandhu Ji said that it is true but the world also has people like you to fight with the challenges. Shashi Ji had smiled in response.

Once I was travelling with her after Tyagi Ji's demise and Shashi Ji was feeling very sad. I recited a few lines of Ajat Shatru's play from Jai Shanker Prasad, to uplift her spirit. She was very pleased and requested me to write down those lines in her note book.

Today, as I remember Shashi Ji and her life, the work done by her for social development, stands like a strong memory.

Manju Lata Mishra, India

Dr. Manju Lata Mishra is a lecturer and a member of GRAVIS Board.

- 75 -

“Shashi Ji inspires me”

At the age of 43, I feel I have already lived several lives. Such is the luxury of being a Finnish woman whose days are not spent on survival—a luxury that my relation with and my first visit to GRAVIS in the Thar made me acutely aware of. In a previous life, I was an English major with a fledgling social consciousness at Tampere University, Finland. Indeed, my relation with GRAVIS is but a side story for the story of GRAVIS ' relation with TAMY, the then Student Union of Tampere University.

“Shashi Ji inspires me, with her work, her life and her 'tirelessness'. I

respect and admire her, and I like her as a human being”, I wrote in my journal after GRAVIS' visit to Tampere in 2006. I must have placed “tirelessness” in quotation marks because having just dedicated a week to her and GRAVIS, I knew she, too, experienced tiredness but was devoted to her work or service of *Sarvodaya*. The “tirelessness” must have appeared as superhuman to me because I was recovering from a long major depressive episode, my first one, or at least my first diagnosed one. I was searching, for identity and meaning, for love, really – the love that is our true identity. And Shashi Ji allowed me to love her, to serve her and GRAVIS.

I became involved in the GRAVIS -TAMY cooperation in 2000–2001, and few years later in 2004, I became but one of the number of students who had visited GRAVIS in the Thar since the 1990s. Yet, through the years of meeting in Finland and in India, Shashi Ji often made me feel like I was the one. Certainly my first visit to GRAVIS—my first visit to India—with six other students including my now husband, Ville, was a memorable one not only to me but to anybody involved; it earned me a reputation as the Girl who Fell from the Camel – and the fall was but the start of my misfortunes.

I fell ill with a high fever, and to this day my strongest memory of Shashi Ji is the memory of her presence by the bed in which I was lying, half-conscious, in the Kalron field centre—of the softness of her voice and her saree. She took such sweet care of me. Shashi Maa, my Indian mother, is how I often think of her. The whole Tyagi and GRAVIS family took care of me and showed their warm sense of humour by gifting Ville and me a tapestry of *Dhola* and *Maru* riding a camel when we returned to India and the Thar as husband and wife in 2005.

Was it all leela, divine play? From 2005 onwards the focus of the GRAVIS -TAMY cooperation was health. Whatever it was, it formed a part of the force that led me to transforming from an office professional to a health care professional. In my current life, I work as a radiographer at the Tampere University Hospital. I find deep meaning in working with and for people in public health care, in being present to people. I last met Shashi Ji in Finland in the autumn of 2016. It was a dear wish of mine to meet her once more in India, but even though she's no longer present in the body, she's always with me in spirit, as the love that we all are. Most of what I know of devotion and service I learnt from Shashi Ji and GRAVIS.

Mari Karinen, Finland

Ms. Mari Karinen is a radiographer in Finland and a long – time GRAVIS friend.

- 76 -

To A Timeless Heroine

Although I did not meet you Shashi Ji in person, I was opportune to know her through, the wonderful works of her life time. This includes my dearest friend and comrade Dr. Prakash Tyagi and his lovely family as well as the GRAVIS community, the projects and programs you created, worked on and spent many years of your life building and spreading love and bringing joy to.

I created an image of you in my mind of a selfless, dynamic, loving, giving, committed, intelligent visionary leader. A strong woman, who against all odds fought against social injustice, gender injustice, inequality and the liberation of human kind.

I saw a leader whose activism was inspired by the struggles of ordinary people, young, old, women and men. I saw a leader whose understanding of power and the injustices it brings was not learnt in an organization but in the passion, empathy, and understanding that she brought to the organization. A woman of strong conviction, a loving mother and grandmother not only to your family but also to the many families and communities that you served.

Dear Shashi Ji - I know the journey was not always easy, I understand there were downfalls, lots of tear, broken hearts and broken families, but I admire your spirit to take the struggles of the poor to different levels, trusting in the process , building resilience , holding out your hands to catch the tears of the oppressed, digging deep into the desert to give fresh clean water to the thirsty , watering the dry earth to plant a seed to feed the hungry, bringing comfort and friendship to the sick and needy .

I salute you my Timeless Heroine - as I ponder on how you addressed some of the intersecting injustices of the world, how you managed to avoid reproducing the power dynamics that the struggle was challenging, and finally what your vision of the world was, and how you translated that into your daily practice. Your legacy lives on, your vision continues to inspire and multiply all around the world, from Asia to Africa. I am a Cameroonian born activist, founder / CEO of Whole World Women Association, a South African based NGO that provides comprehensive services to displaced, asylum seekers and refugee women in Cape Town South Africa. Shashi Ji , Like you I believe that "For as long as women are in chains , oppressed , abused , and exploited , I can never claim to be totally free and unchained , because another woman's pain is mine too. " (From the book Sparkling women).

Mary Tal, South Africa / Cameroon

Ms. Mary Tal is a human rights and gender activist and the Founder of Whole World Women Association

Shashi Tyagi – A Gandhian pioneer

Birmingham University, 1993 – Ms Shashi Tyagi, simply dressed in a *khadi* saree is speaking on a cold morning to professors and academics on sustainable living and life style is a key to build a non- violent world. I was in the audience and was spellbound by the simple rendition of Gandhian values. I was representing OXFAM and was remembering my first visit to Jelu- Gagadi in the year 1987, when a big drought was killing their livestock animals, cows and goats, a severe shortage of fodder and no water.

I leave the Jodhpur – Jaisalmer road a few kilometres away from Osian (a small town) and then take a dusty track through sand tracks, dotted bushes of thorny trees and *khejri* trees occasionally, After a few kilometres we came across a few huts called “Bhungas” (small mud huts with a dried grass roof) in the Desert and here in one of the huts came out Shashi Tyagi and L. C. Tyagi dressed in their simple *khadi* and welcomed us. There on charpoys we were given sweet tea and heard about the work they were doing in the Great Indian Desert and the drought relief work. The work was building *khadins* in the desert which were three way embankments to hold water and you could grow *bajra* (pearl millet) if there was rains. In some villages they were deepening “*nadis*” almost deep tanks which could hold water if there was rains.

Here was Shashi Tyagi working with the Rajasthani women who were all covered in purdah and she was talking of empowerment and equality. It was almost like *Gandhi* and *Kasturba* trying to make development a reality in a grim hard Desert where life was with less water, very hot and no fodder or food. Today the work has blossomed in Western Rajasthan and is there for all to see.

In many ways Shashi Ji was a true inspiration to all of us and too many young activists in India. I will close with the following verse.

*“You meant so much to all of us
You were special and that's no lie
You brightened up the darkest day
And the cloudiest sky”*

Mathew Cherian, India

Mr. Mathew Cherian is a renowned development activist and is the former CEO of HelpAge India, a long time friend of Tyagis.

- 78 -

My impressions

Shashi Tyagi was a great lady. Her work in helping the poor in rural Rajasthan brought vital relief. All of this was achieved with thoughtfulness, kindness and great humility. Shashi Ji's support for women in the villages stands out. I remember seeing her talking to women in a vet camp. It was clear that she had huge empathy with their situation and was intent on providing them with the support that they needed through GRAVIS. Background I first met Shashi Ji in 2007 when my late wife, Anna, and I visited Rajasthan on a *Pani Yatra* with Wells for India. I was very impressed by the welcome to GRAVIS that Shashi Ji gave us and her gentle explanation of its work. Since 2007, I have visited Rajasthan many times and have been very impressed by the work of GRAVIS, notably in the Jaisalmer area under Shashi Ji's stewardship.

Max Wilson, UK

Dr. Max Wilson is the former Chairperson of Water Harvest and has been a long - time GRAVIS friend.

- 79 -

Shashi Ji and the loving world she created

Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji were remarkable teachers, unassuming and calm, with embraceable smiles and dogged commitment. Against all odds, they built an enduring network of social workers based on Gandhian principles across the vast Thar Desert; they were undeterred by harsh climate, money politics, and deep social barriers. I first met them in 1988, not long after they started Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti later to become GRAVIS. Introduced by a mutual friend, I spent a few weeks living with them on their small new campus in Jelu-Gagadi, a remote village outside of Jodhpur, where the Tyagi's introduced me to interwoven worlds of beauty and justice: *Gandhian* philosophy and history, social work, agronomy, hydrology, pastoralism and weaving, public health, elementary school pedagogy, public health clinical work, and the volatile worlds of caste and development. The world of development is multifaceted and charitable but also ridden with misconceptions, hierarchies, and historical biases. Shashi Ji taught me how to think through these shortcomings with her resolute focus and principles; she helped me develop a research agenda over my career that reflected the needs and values which she found in these desert communities.

I observed this wonderful couple participating in countless public and semi-private meetings surrounded by men who had quick and easy answers to complex ethical questions. As disagreements would emerge that would wear down people's patience, especially when senior government or party officials would dominate and misdirect public discussion, I always got the sense that Tyagi Ji and Shashi Ji were playing chess while everyone else was playing cards. They would wait until the speakers were at a standstill, there'd be a pause and Shashi Ji who would break the tension in the room with a joke or a story and somehow find the way to resolution. Later back at home, Shashi Ji would sit and Tyagi Ji would recline, with enchanting Ghazals playing in the background, we would recount with satisfaction the day's success. Shashi Ji could command a roomful of men with such calm and humorhumour, even as she demanded equality and justice for women and girls of all backgrounds.

They worked extremely long days, covering vast desert territory visiting villages and GRAVIS centres, settling disputes and offering support to their staff. No one was unimportant to Shashi Ji, she greeted everyone as if they mattered the most on earth. Suffering widows, sickened street orphans, pastoralists with little fodder, farmers lacking water. Everyone was equal and important to Shashi Ji; no one was forgotten. Everyone was fed from the same plate, everyone received a concerned ear, patience, humorhumour, and a sweet. I learned as much about the politics of the desert and the making of water catchments as I did about love and generosity and equity. She jokingly tested my California spirit on my very first breakfast in Jelu-Gagadi by cooking up local cuisine of a large green chili pepper deep fried in chili batter and chapati, a test I barely passed. She taught me how to clean dishes with sand, how to survive 16-hour workdays, how to enjoy Jodhpur sweets on a Sunday afternoon. Amidst a schedule in which she and Tyagi Ji built up a strong network of remote campuses, hiring and training local graduates, mediating deep-seated conflicts in the villages while introducing solutions to serious ecological and social problems by overcoming caste inequalities, her days were further stretched thin by her generosity to help out every individual in need, including my own.

One early Sunday morning in town picking up supplies at various stores before heading out for a long day in the field, we noticed a very young boy sleeping on the threshold of a closed shop who, as we drew near, had been beaten, semi-conscious, and wounded. We lifted him into the jeep and took him to the local hospital. At the end of each subsequent day, Shashi Ji checked up on him, brought him food and medicine and reported back to me his rehabilitation, eventually arranging for him to live in a home. Amidst invitations to international conferences and national emergency

meetings in Delhi, Shashi Ji's heart and commitment rested with the people most often left ignored.

Above all, Shashi Ji taught me how to love all aspects of life and society, however harsh and disagreeable they may seem. The Tyagi's were both loving and caring parents, beautiful traits they passed onto to their amazing children. I try to channel their deep commitment to social justice and love in my work and life; they live on as teachers to so many people in Rajasthan, across India, and around the world.

After living with the Tyagis that first summer, I returned many times to pursue projects of research with the support of the GRAVIS community (e.g., Cultivating hot peppers and water crisis in India's desert: Toward a theory of understanding ecological crisis and Privatizing Nature: Political Struggles over the Global Commons). The Tyagis were leaders in striving for social and ecological justice and have influenced so many lives, including my own, over their lifetimes.

Michael Goldman, US

Dr. Michael Goldman is a Professor of Sociology and Global Studies at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities and a long-time friend of GRAVIS.

- 80 -

Shashi Tyagi: her life is her message

It is our tribute to late Smt. Shashi Tyagi to celebrate her life's journey and for her iconic contributions to the betterment of mankind and nature. It is our deep affection and gratitude to her for bringing smiles to the faces of thousands of rural women, girls and the youth.

Smt. Tyagi is a name to reckon with in the Gandhian fraternity, who selflessly devoted her life till her last to big social causes by going against the tide and weathered difficulties. We remember the day we had spent time with Smt. Tyagi in Rajasthan, during which she had expressed that her journey of life and work has been full of struggle and challenges, yet inspirational in many ways.

Smt. Tyagi walked hundreds of miles in the scorching desert heat to feel and sense the pain and plight of the women of the Thar Desert region and to address their concerns with concrete, sustainable solutions. As she helped transform the lives of the people of the rural community, Smt Tyagi's efforts especially to remove the drudgery of these women and to propagate girl child education, is truly touching and inspiring.

A life with a message

Being a dear friend, a humble and passionate human being, an exemplar, Smt. Shashi Tyagi was also a lighthouse illuminating and guiding many, many young minds.

We look forward to her kind of legacy in the coming years.

With warm wishes,

(The Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation in a span of over four decades has been respected as a Gandhian establishment in areas of developing the socio economic arena in our country. It strives to serve the ideals of Shri Jamnalal Bajaj and promotes Gandhian constructive activities in India and abroad. Shri Jamnalal Bajaj was adopted by Mahatma Gandhi as his fifth son and was the alter ego of the Mahatma, so far as the Gandhian Constructive Movement was concerned.

(www.jamnalalbajajfoundation.org ; www.jamnalalbajajawards.org)

Minal Bajaj, India

Ms. Minal Bajaj is the Hon. Director, Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation, India

- 81 -

Remembering Shashi Behan

There are few people you meet in life, being with whom makes you feel happy. Shashi Behan was such a person. It was not just what she did, deeply committed work, but what she was as a human being, simple, warm, dignified, selfless, empathetic to the needs and suffering of others specially women and authentic .

First time I ever met Shashi Ji, it was along with Tyagi Ji, it was in Rajasthan in the context of health work when I had gone there from Delhi , when I was still in VHAI, where I was for 28 years . Both Tyagi Ji and Shashi Behan were kindred souls, colleagues, besides being life partners, complementing each other. They subscribed to the Gandhian way of life as did my late mother, and that was an additional reason for building of spontaneous understanding, acceptance, appreciation and respect in my heart and mind. I recall my first visit to Jelu - Gagadi in Jodhpur. For me Jodhpur was and still is associated with Tyagi Ji and Shashi Ji and their program in Jelu - Gagadi. It was much later when a younger colleague mentioned about the fame of Umaid Bhawan in Jodhpur as a famous place, however for me. Even today in my mind Jodhpur is associated mainly with Shashi Ji because of all the memories. It included sharing of meals and warmth of her home with two sweet grand children around.

There was so much I learnt from Shashi Ji specially about the traditional water harvesting and conservation work in which she and her colleagues were involved in, not as theory but as practice. This was at a time that very few organizations were working giving priority to responding to their community 's needs giving due importance to constructive and positive traditional knowledge systems and traditions. It was such a rich experience meeting, interacting spending time with the village women, with whom she had worked to set up Self Help Groups to work on gender issues, against discrimination, violence and neglect , listening to them and Shashi Ji's insights. What has also stuck in my mind were the numerous plants in the campus which had been planted and from very little greenery and foliage had developed beautifully in this sandy land . One of the concerns I shared deeply with Shashi Behan was women and child health concerns, women's health their reproductive health and rights, and gender concerns were close to her heart and mine .

It was for a meeting organized by her and GRAVIS on " Aging in Rajasthan desert area "in Jaipur that was the last time we were together. I came the evening earlier and left the day after the program just to be with her. We could spend some happy together in between all the numerous phone calls and meeting of people related to work. Shashi Ji 's mind was fully occupied with what needed to be done .

had watched her over the decades working tirelessly to improve the lot of others , the marginalized and the vulnerable, especially women who were victims of patriarchy , feudalism , caste discrimination , poverty , ill health , illiteracy ,curtailment of their many rights in the name of " customs." She was as active and energetic as she was decades ago , physically and mentally .

Shashi Behan would tell about her experience when she had started her village work in the area about neglect of a young mother during her pregnancy and childbirth, and how even when she was seriously ill almost dying, she was not taken to the hospital because of costs involved and life of a daughter in law not being considered worth the cost. This had revolted Shashi Ji and it had also motivated her to do whatever she could for the women . This shared concern besides other things had created a bond between us .

The fact that Shashi Ji had donated her kidney to Tyagi Ji was of course an inspiring act , but more inspiring was the great physical , mental and social work and contribution she kept making after that with energy and enthusiasm that would put many youngsters to shame. I remember purchasing several colourful hand stitched bags that the women's group she was working with had made. They became my birthday and other

A life with a message

presents for friends which I gifted to them with love, because each bag was with a memory of dear Shashi Behan and the village women's labour and effort. I strongly believe each such thing has a history and a geography associated with it and real value lies in who makes it and how and the purpose behind it.

I came to know that Shashi Behan was unwell last year from Prakash only when I tried to call and talk to Shashi Behan to wish her a very Happy Birthday her voice sounded very weak and low, totally unlike her usual self. On asking Prakash what was wrong with Shashi Behan, he shared the painful news that Shashi Behan had been diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukemia (AML). She was getting treatment but had lost her appetite. It was COVID -19 period unfolding. I regret not having been able to meet her, meet Prakash, Abha and the families, the grand children for whom it must have been such a difficult period. I could only send her my love and prayers and Amaranth Ramdana as it is nutritious and light as she was not eating properly.

The sad news of Shashi Behan passing away came as a message from Prakash and it was received with extreme sadness. The solace was that for the life that she lived she would definitely be in a happier, kinder and more peaceful world, with Tyagi Ji

She would be sending her blessings to Prakash and Abha, their families, the grandchildren and the bigger GRAVIS family and also to all her friends and well-wishers who loved, and respected Shashi Ji for who she was and what she did with her life. Miss her very much.

Mira Shiva, India

Dr. Mira Shiva is a noted physician and public health activist and a long time friend of Shashi Ji.

- 82-

A strong woman leader

For a long period of time, men have dominated our society. Yet, women play all the important role of a mother. Dominance of men over women continues and there is a lot of imbalance of power between men and women. In all of this, I met a remarkable family.

In Bikaner, I met Tyagi Ji for the first time during a *Sarvodaya* meeting. Our similar ideology helped us to remain very good friends. Later on, Tyagi Ji nominated me to become the Vice President of Samgra Seva Sangh. In

2005, Tyagi Ji became critically ill with a kidney disease. I went to meet him in the hospital in Ahamdabad. At that time I was a part of GRAVIS general body and since then my association with Shashi Ji started.

Shashi Behan was full of humanity. With her, I used to visit mines in Makrana area and villages in Phalodi and GRAVIS hospital and other centers. She showed me GRAVIS work on water and with women. We used to discuss about children education, how to cultivate their values and about health issues of women and children. She was very deeply connected with rural women and talked to them with open heart. It is difficult to describe her simplicity, politeness and tolerance.

She introduced me to her daughter Abha and HEDCON. Shashi Ji rightly deserved national and global honor. There is no shadow, no support, no protector and no one dear like a mother and Shashi Ji was like that. My heart gives tribute to her. Saints die on Diwali. She used to speak in few words but her work always spoke loudly.

Mridula Samvedi, India

Smt. Mridula Samvedi is a gender activist, a Gandhian thinker and a close associate of GRAVIS

- 83 -

My bond with Shashi Behan Ji

Gandhian thinker Shashi Behan's social life was spread over about 50 years. She and Tyagi Ji were a great couple and together did very meaningful work for rural people. I worked with them for about 3 years. I saw Shashi Ji as a capable and experienced social worker. One example of her strength was that she used to reach the places immediately, where there was any problem. Soon after she arrived, she would settle all problems and would energize all workers through her able leadership.

She was a leader with great simplicity. She had a great image all over the world and there was no difference between her saying and doing. We have lost a very progressive woman, thinker and her absence will always be felt.

Narendra Singh, India

Sh. Narendra Singh is a social activist and a former GRAVIS team member.

Shashi Tyagi – A true Gandhian inspiration

"Each one's death diminishes me" (John Donne).

We, friends of Shashi Ji, feel this diminishment very acutely.

Mary and I, as founders of Wells for India, now Water Harvest, first met Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji in 1995. We instantly formed a bond. We were struck by their deep Gandhian spirituality and the simplicity of their life style.

With them it was the beginning of a life journey for us. It took us along the sand pathways across the Thar Desert. It took us to isolated villages with communities desperate for water. Then in 1995 - 2005, tragically, Tyagi Ji died. The journey continued with Shashi Ji, but in our thoughts Tyagi Ji was always close by. Remarkably, Shashi was able to step into the leadership role, and did so with great courage. With Shashi Ji we saw the women, the widows, the Self Help Groups, her deep compassion for them and their mutual respect and love. It was striking how well she knew them and how warmly they responded to her. In autumn 1999 we spent 3 weeks together; we saw the impending drought and became determined to work in the Baap Block and to expand Kalron and build the field centres at BAP to store food, and another at Pabupura. We saw the broad vision of the GRAVIS team, their morning prayer at the Field Centres and how Tyagi Ji and Shashi Ji worked together with a unique togetherness for the uplift of the poorest communities.

Now Nicholas and I are not often able to visit India, but in each day our minds our prayers travel across the desert, watching lives transformed, new sources of water and eager children on their way to school.

We know the memory of Shashi Ji will live on in our minds and hearts, as well as in the minds and hearts of those who seek to keep alive the spirit of the Mahatma. It will continue to inspire the GRAVIS team and all who seek the upliftment of the poor – especially the people of the Thar Desert.

Nicholas and Mary now feel diminished by their deaths, but we live in the hope and the joy that arises from the unique lives of Shashi Ji and Tyagi ji.

Shashi Ji died on 14th November 2020 on Diwali, The festival of light. She was a shining star.

Nicholas Grey and Mary Grey, UK

Dr. Nicholas Greys and Prof. Mary Grey are a British couple and worked in their respective fields with doctoral degrees. Post retirement, they had devoted themselves to social work and Gandhian ideology.

- 85 -

Simple living, high thinking

I met senior *Savodaya* Gandhian social worker respected Shashi Ji on 2nd October 2014 at Gandhi Bhanwan. Social worker Guatam K. Guts introduced me with her. Shashi Ji felt immense happiness on knowing that I am from Assam Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust. She told me that she has visited our organization many times but could not visit me. After that, I met Shashi Ji in many programmes at Gandhi Bhawan. I always observed smile on her face with balanced speech. I talked to her about my social projects and she invited me to visit GRAVIS office in Jodhpur. She talked with me in detail at GRAVIS office. I came to know that organization she has founded is working on water conservation, health, education and self-reliance of community. In 2015, I got an opportunity to live with her in a programme of Sarva Sewa Sangh in Rajasthan. We discussed many things on Gandhi *Darshan* and *Sarvodaya*. She asked me to join GRAVIS but that time, I had also founded an organization therefore it was difficult for me. But I was continuously in touch with her. Last time, I met her in March 2020 at Gandhi Bhawan. I found her very weak but as usual a smile was always on her face. I have never thought that this would be our last time to meet each other. We know she is not here with us but her values and ethos will be always be inspirational to all of us.

Niru Hazarika, India

Ms. Niru Hazarika is a social activist from Assam in India.

- 86 -

The great teacher and caring mother

My first meeting with Shashi Ji with her Late husband L.C. Tyagi Ji was in late 1996 and since 2001, I had been frequently meeting with her during my present assignment with Water Harvest (earlier known as Wells for India).

Shashi Ji and her Late husband L.C. Tyagi Ji were a great inspiration to myself and my whole family. I do remember their visit to our house and how their presence has made all of us so motivated and inspired.

For me, Shashi Ji was like a motherly figure: Tough enough to teach you and soft enough to take care. I do remember visiting with her and the wisdom she carries about the desert lives and water related work. She was an ocean of knowledge. Her passion to change lives of desert women could be seen while her meetings in remote *dhanis* of the villages.

Shashi Ji was also great inspiration for all of us on how to live a simple life. She with L.C. Tyagi Ji had lived simple life. I learned something which I am still carrying- is giving respect to every individual what ever ladder/ hierarchy they have in the organization. I do remember how she was taking care of everyone right from the lowest grassroot cadre / team members in the organization to the top executives. She never differentiated in her action based on the position you have/ owned.

Her belief that everyone should sit on one platform / level while meeting with the village groups and meetings is something I learned and carried in my professional work. Sitting on one platform looks remarkably simple at the beginning, but when you see you start believing that how her action liberated so many from a deprived underprivileged to a dignified life by just promoting and inspiring them to sit on one platform/ level.

For me, Shashi Ji will be remembered for her commitment to uplifting the lives of women, her suggestions like naming the water infrastructure in the name of a women member of the household brought pride in many women folks lives. As the development sector is undergoing tough times, I think greatest tribute to her will be to continue the work with values and principles, which she lived for her entire life.

Om Prakash Sharma, India

Sh. Om Prakash Sharma is an engineer and a development activist with over 30 years of experience in the sector and heads Water Harvest, India office.

- 87 -

Fond memories

Shashi Ji believed in *Sarvodaya* and Gandhian ideology, which was evident in her personality and in the work of her life. My first meeting with her was in Gandhi Peace Foundation, Jodhpur where she shared with me her concern about women and about widening gap between rich and poor. She was deeply concerned about poverty and inequality in our society. She was given Jamnalal Bajaj Award which was an appreciation of her ideology and in work.

She dedicated her whole life to social services and worked in the areas where the need is the greatest. We all hope that her family will continue this service and we hope that her son Prakash Ji will continue her legacy. Shashi Ji practiced Mahatma Gandhi philosophy in her life. She had very little interest in fault finding and her work used to speak for her ideology.

Our conversations were very frequent and great. I regret that I was never able to visit villages with her where GRAVIS works. Shashi Ji's work inspires me and all of us to continue doing good work and to live for others.

Padmaja Sharma, India

Dr. Padmaja Sharma is a Professor from JNV University of Jodhpur and a long – time friend of Shashi Ji.

- 88 -

Like a loving mother

Shashi Ji's simplicity was my inspiration. Since my student life, I have been fortunate to be associated with Shashi Ji, Tyagi Ji and many other *Sarvodaya* leaders. God gave me this opportunity.

She gave a lot of affection and support to ordinary workers like me. I remember two incidents of her humility. First, she came to visit me after my mother's death and spent a lot of time with me. Second, she herself informed me on phone that I was elected in GRAVIS' General Body. These were beyond my imagination. My sincere tribute to such a great soul.

Pawan Bhargav, India

Sh. Pawan Bhargav is a social worker and a close associate of GRAVIS.

- 89 -

Shashi Tyagi - A great personality from GRAVIS, India

It is a great shock and sadness to me when I was informed that Ms. Shashi Tyagi passed away on 14th November 2020, All I know about Ms. Shashi Tyagi – Co-founder and Secretary of GRAVIS is that she lived a life full of dedication and commitment as a strong leader to her organization GRAVIS and was a bright example of a woman activist who strived for the rights and better life of older people and women in the hardest living condition of the Thar Desert of India. I also know her son - Dr. Prakash Tyagi who is the Executive Director of GRAVIS and Founder-Director of GRAVIS Hospital, whom I met in some meetings and events of HelpAge International. I found Dr. Prakash inherits the valuable legacy of his beloved mother. To my heart, Ms. Shashi Tyagi also symbolized a great loving, caring and successful Indian mother to her children and to the younger staff generation in GRAVIS and the community.

A life with a message

I still remember meeting with Ms. Shashi Tyagi briefly on just few occasions. The first time is when I was with HelpAge International (HAI) delegation visiting GRAVIS and attending its community development activities in the Thar Desert of India, back in the late 2000's. As a leader of GRAVIS, Ms. Shashi received us with great enthusiasm when she talked about the work of GRAVIS. Her warm smile and opened heart are always in my mind ever since. The more I was impressed by GRAVIS great efforts and achievements in supporting the desert people and their community in terms of water conservation (against drought), health care for the old people, education of the children, equal rights for women, capacity building and poverty alleviation of the disadvantaged villagers through thousands of community based organizations (CBOs), the more I felt the very important role played by her valuable wisdom, leadership and guidance endowed to GRAVIS with the caring heart of a woman, - a mother. I appreciated and understood her contribution has created and made such a successful GRAVIS so far!

The second time I met her was when she visited Vietnam Women's Union in June 2012. By that time, I had just retired from the VWU and worked in the field of HIV/AIDS prevention at work place. Fortunately, I was kindly invited by my colleagues at VWU to join the meeting with Ms. Tyagi. Needless to say, how happy I was to see her in person again, but this time in Vietnam! My heart sung as I could again hear her voice and see her smile and felt her enthusiasm when we shared our stories. I knew her visit to Vietnam including her field trip to attend VWU's activities in support of old women and the community would be a great inspiration to the staff of VWU at all levels she met and with the beneficiaries of VWU's development projects in the communes where she visited as she could share her immense and valuable experience.

I felt so proud of knowing Ms. Shashi Tyagi, a woman leader, a mother from India - a great personality, intellectual yet humble, noble yet simple. To her, I always feel respectful and close. I wish Ms. Shashi Tyagi Rests in Peace and I am sure her successors in GRAVIS would always love her and follow her spirit and ideology!

Pham Thi Hoai Giang, Vietnam

Mrs. Pham Thi Hoai Giang is the former Presidium member, Head of International Relations Department of Vietnam Women's Union (1997-2012), a Former Board member of HelpAge International (2008-2016) and a noted gender activist.

Memories from childhood, till date

I have many memories of Shashi Bua Ji as I along with my siblings spent most of our summer holidays with Bua Ji, Prakash and Abha Didi. I would like to share two memories, as these in particular had a profound impact on me.

In 1988 school summer holidays, we were visiting Bua Ji's place in Gagadi, Rajasthan. She and Fufa Ji (known as Tyagi Ji) planned to show us around Rajasthan. We were quite excited to see so many historical places and popular tourist destinations e.g. Mount Abu and beautiful Soorpagla. But Bua Ji had a plan to also show us the rural Rajasthan and the problems faced by people in their daily lives. We were initially a bit disappointed but gradually it became quite an adventure for us. We visited one village and I think we stayed overnight which was not planned and next morning I asked if I could take a bath. I was given very little water just to wash my face I guess and when asked for a comb, I was told that there is no comb. I was perplexed by this situation and then Bua Ji told me this is the life for many in Rajasthan due to water scarcity. She told me that we should appreciate what we have and should share with others who don't have these privileges. This incident made me realise how lucky we were to have so many facilities in our life without doing much. I started respecting what we had and since then, have been always thankful to my parents for working hard to ensure we had enough to live comfortably.

The second memory is from 1991. After scoring good marks in 12th class (A levels), I had been trying to get through to Engineering Colleges' National Entrance Exams but was not successful. I was looking for easier ways to get an admission to any engineering school. Bua Ji visited my home in Meerut and took me to one of the Engineering Colleges (HBTI, Kanpur) I was trying for. She knew a Professor there. It was an almost 9-hour train journey and she didn't talk about this topic at all. We met the Professor over there (known as *Acharya Ji*), she told *Acharya Ji* that I have been trying to get through Engineering College and if he could check my last attempt marks and advice me. Marks were not shared with candidates, only a rank if they have passed the Exam. So, it was difficult to assess where you stood and which topic to focus on. He went out for some time and said that in my last attempt, I have been unsuccessful only by 3 marks and said that I have potential to get through. On way back in train, Bua Ji asked me what do I think about this meeting. I didn't say much. She asked me to promise her that I will work hard and put my sincere efforts one more time and it does not matter whether I get through or not. It reminded me what my grandfather told me once that the God help those who help them selves.

A life with a message

I worked hard and with full commitment that year, got through almost all the Engineering Colleges' Entrance Exams. Finally, I chose HBTI, Kanpur and when I went there, I realised it was not possible to find out any candidate's marks of the Entrance Exam. I wondered whether Bua Ji had faked the whole scenario to put me back on track. Thank you so much for everything.

Pratap N. Tyagi, UK

Mr. Pratap N. Tyagi is a software engineer living in London and is the nephew of Shashi Ji.

- 91 -

A life of values

I came to know of GRAVIS in the year 2000 when a friend in the US (late Dr. Maharaj Kaul) recommended them for support to IFA, a non-profit organization in California run by NRIs. Soon thereafter I, along with my wife Surekha traveled to Jodhpur during our visit to India. Sh. L. C. Tyagi being out of town we had the good fortune to be hosted by his wife, Smt. Shashi Tyagi. That began an association that lasted for all these years and included a second longer visit to Jodhpur and several other meetings including two visits by Shashi Ji to our area the last one being only a couple of years ago. During these years we found highly effective and purposeful use of our limited funds via GRAVIS particularly in the area of watershed development and conservation. We also learned an incredible lot about the issues most relevant to the rural poor in Rajasthan including mining, health and poverty in general.

Shashi Ji was a staunch Gandhian who devoted her entire life to the cause of the marginalized. Under her calm and non-assuming demeanor she carried an extreme sensitivity for the underdogs and an unrelenting rage against exploitation. She understood how the system worked and was part of numerous efforts to bring about lasting change. This included being part of various Gandhian organizations and campaigns. We were fortunate to have her join us in the Indian Community Activists Network for several years. True to her Gandhian roots, she nurtured the GRAVIS organization as a shining example of *seva*, *nirman* and *sangharsh*.

We were deeply saddened to learn of her passing away a few months ago. Only last July, I had a chance to be part of the virtual celebration of her birthday and had scarce inkling that we would lose her so soon.

Surekha, myself and our friends in IFA deeply cherish our times together

in her warm and affectionate company. She will be ever remembered for her life long service to the cause of humanity in general and more specifically for the under privileged in Rajasthan.

Prithvi Raj Sharma, US

Dr. Prithvi Raj Sharma is a physician from California and the General Secretary of India Friends Association.

- 92 -

Immortal Shashi Ji

A human being, who sacrifices everything to live for others, becomes a source of great inspiration. Such a human becomes immortal. There are very few people in this world, who live this kind of life and Shashi Ji was one of them.

I saw so many different aspects of her life including her commitment to women and small farmers, her simplicity and hard work and her concern for rural patients. Working as a doctor with GRAVIS, I learnt a lot from her. Till her last breath on 14th November 2020, she devoted every moment of her life to the society. I am indebted to her for the love and support to me and my family and I am determined to follow her path.

R.S. Chaturvedi, India

Dr. R.S. Chaturvedi is a physician, manager of GRAVIS hospital and long –time associate of Shashi Ji.

- 93 -

My long association with Shashi Ji

My job in early years of my service at a governmental scientific research institution at Jodhpur involved lot of field work and unlike several of my colleagues, I enjoyed this job as it provided me a wealth of information in my area of specialization, namely soil and landscape evolutionary history. As a side interest wherever I went in the desert, somehow, I enjoyed interacting with peasantry and to learn as to what they were doing and uniqueness of their management in making a living in an environmentally hostile environment marked by scarcity and even

famines. Besides a new knowledge, this interaction with the farmers taught me patience and provided me a useful diversion in an otherwise then existing immense hardship both in field work and in camping in near wilderness. It was during this phase of my career in mid-eighties that I happened to get a surprise invite from Late Shri L.C. Tyagi, a founder of GRAVIS, to a small get together of young and struggling social workers. I never knew why me from amongst the large number of specialists, including some well established sociologists at my parent research institution. But I enjoyed this two-day meeting for it provided me an insight to the then unfamiliar voluntary organization sector and in getting introduced to enthusiastic young people, driven largely by an instinct to do something for the poor and needy. I had little in common but enjoyed sharing the grass-root knowledge about the desert and its people. Importantly, this introduction in the busiest schedule of my professional life, satisfied an urge in me to be of some use to the economically and environmentally disadvantaged desert dwellers.

The Tyagi's continued the contact and my role initially was occasional as an adviser in programme development, giving scientific presentation before visitors and potential funding agencies. Over time my role advanced to organizational management issues, offering technical comments on field practices and acting as a guide to scholars and students coming to GRAVIS for training or project work. I know whether all decisions and consultations I provided worked well but I enjoyed all through the trust of the GRAVIS. Besides else, what made me do my bit with GRAVIS was the immense sacrifice that Tyagi's were making for the cause of the poor, their simplicity of living and genuineness of their thinking and work ethics. Besides, both of them were well-educated, receptive / tolerant to contrarian views and modest to the core.

The life partner and co-founder of GRAVIS, Shri L.C. Tyagi Ji passed away due to health complication in the year 2005 and this led to transfer of a huge burden of running GRAVIS, the largest Voluntary Organization in the West Rajasthan with no surety of funding, on the shoulders of Shashi Behan Ji. Besides, she already had large load as a prominent leader of a *Sarvodaya* movement to carry forward the ideas and philosophy of Gandhi Ji and Vinoba Bhave Ji. If Shashi Ji gave such an efficient, unparalleled and wise account of herself in these onerous responsibilities, I believe it was entirely her commitment to a cause and an exemplary courage. At times her job required interaction with high and mighty in the Government in form of meetings and other platforms but it was a treat to see that she never shied away from giving her views fearlessly, knowing fully well that her observations will rub wrongly the political leaders and

the bureaucracy alike. Despite her busy life, she found time to provide succor and moral support to her ideological-related partners, needy staff in the GRAVIS and individuals she came across in the rural community.

In course of her service to the disadvantaged people, she, like most in this area of activity, was exposed at times to unsavory/unjust comments from people or face failures. But not all realize that during work in a disorganized society and on multidimensional programmes, one has to depend on situations and persons on whom you do not have full control. I did not find Shashi Behan Ji dismayed or disheartened. But the career at times has awards to offer. Behan Ji in her career got several such recognitions and that included one of the coveted being "Jamna Lal Bajaj Award". Soon after return from the award function at Mumbai I went to congratulate her but it was amazing that she behave just as we met on any other day. It seemed to me that her hard life has made her immune to successes and failures a like. An eloquent expression of her mental training and expectations for self, if one is needed, has been very littler by way of comfort. Much of her life span as a mother, host to several small and big social workers was in a modest dwelling unit in the old building. Even when a comfortable alternative was available, she felt comfortable in small room in the old living quarter that housed field workers.

I have no doubt that the legacy of such a stalwart will continue to inspire and guide GRAVIS and many such organization she had committed herself.

R.P. Dhir (Fellow and Hony. Member, Indian Society of Soil Science),

Formerly, Principal Scientist and Director, Central Arid Zone Research Institute, ICAR, Jodhpur, Head, Regional Remote Sensing Centre, Deptt of Space, GOI, Director, INRIMT (Hyderabad),

R.P. Dhir, India

Dr. R. P. Dhir is an eminent scientist, the Chairperson of GRAVIS Board, former Director of Central Arid Zone Research Institute (CAZRI) and is a close friend of Tyagis.

Our dear Shashi Behan

I don't remember when exactly I first met Shashi Ji. It was probably during some meeting but what I do remember clearly is that she represented a personality that was simple, natural and believed in equality.

My friendship with her was of about two decades. Her untimely demise took away from us a simple, hard working and dedicated soul. GRAVIS organization has a large number of programmes on water, agriculture, animal husbandry sectors. In all of this, Shashi Ji had a great role and she was connected with poor and rich on the same level in rural society. Once I had an opportunity of visiting Rajasthan villages with her and I noticed how deeply she was connected with rural people, as if she was a family member for them.

On the same day, we heard that a husband of a young Muslim woman died by electrocution. Shashi Ji was immediately restless to meet that woman by the name of Zohra. She told me that, Zohra has been mobilizing rural women and advocating for girls' education. We must go to her home, she said. We all went to her home and met Zohra, shared her grief. During the same visit, I noticed a lot of poverty and a lot of gender inequality in those villages. There was no greenery and very harsh, dusty winds were blowing. In these difficult conditions, Shashi Ji was spiritually connected with the villagers.

A rare disease ended Shashi Ji's life before time but her memories will live forever. I pay my tributes.

Radha Bhatt, India

Ms. Radha Bhatt is a noted Gandhian thinker and former Chairperson of Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi.

- 95 -

My memories

As a driver, I worked with Shashi Ji for about 12 years. She was above religions and caste and loved younger people as a mother. She always treated me like her own son. It was my great fortune to be closely associated with a great soul. I will always be indebted to her and to her family. My tributes to Behan Ji.

Raheem Khan, India

Sh. Raheem Khan worked with GRAVIS as a community worker and driver for 12 years.

- 96 -

Epitome of womanhood: An example of courage, compassion and discipline

It is an honour to write about the lady of unparalleled courage and compassion for downtrodden people whom I witnessed closely. I first met her when I joined GRAVIS in 2008. A lady in cotton *khadi* saree with a magnificent smile, these are just sufficient to draw your attention and respect for her. I first saw her in our community dining and exchanged few words of introduction. I started knowing her after discussion happened there. Many times, we went to field visit together and it is very surprising that she knew every person and their family members. Such affection towards community is incomparable that they still remember her though they know she has attained higher abode. Her physical appearance is now ceased to mortal eyes but still we feel her presence in everything we do to keep vision of community development alive.

She was more than a Secretary of GRAVIS to all of us. The professional discipline and personal compassion are together and many time at a same time. While discussing many organizational matters, she never failed to inquire about me and my family well-being. She always talked about my daughters and their activities. I feel very affectionate to hear her quest to my health and well-being. Many time due to her age she had to take some rest but her phone was always available for everyone. I was fortunate that even in her resting time she never refused my request to meet her without being bothered of her health. The courage she delivered is unspoken. I have accompanied her in many regional and national meetings. She never deviated from vision and core value in which she believed. I have seen her putting strong views in front of administration and Foundations and

donor agencies. I learnt that working in an NGO does mean we are obliged to do everything asked by benefactor. She always emphasized that we all are partners and stakeholders not mere receivers. She always believed that the work we do is not just a project but it is implementation of our values among communities. We carry image of organizational values and it should not be compromised in any situation.

When I visualize women of all courage and compassion, her name comes first that inspires women of all ages to fight for their rights and values they have faith in. She was a true example of epitome of womanhood. Defining such a personality in words is very difficult. I pray higher spiritual abode for such an unblemished and spotless soul. May she bless all of us.

Rahul Mishra, India

Sh. Rahul Mishra is a Programme Coordination with GRAVIS since 2008.

- 97 -

The guiding sprit of Shashi Ji

Highly respected Shashi Ji was an intellectual person, who was very loving and caring. With love, empathy, justice, equality, non- violence, truth, she worked for empowerment and development. I, my wife and my family have all been very deeply inspired by her life and are committed to live our life as per her values.

I had many opportunities of being with her during important events – such as Jamnalal Bajaj Award event of 2017 presided by Sh. Arun Jaitly and Sh. Rahul Bajaj and on a visit to Europe. Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji always treated all their colleagues like a family. We will always gratefully remember her and will follow her path.

Rajendra Kumar and Chandrawati, India

Sh. Rajendra Kumar and Smt. Chandrawati are a couple associated with Shashi Ji and GRAVIS for over 35 years.

A 42 years old, spiritual association

Shashi Ji was a true reflection of clear speech, self-respect and sacrifice. I had met her for the first time 42 years ago in Jodhpur. Clad in *khadi* cloths, she had arrived in Jodhpur with her family. This first meeting converted into a long friendship and constructive work, common understanding and positive thinking. Those days, I was fully involved with *Sarvodaya* and students' movements.

The Tyagi couple started their work in Manaklav village. They started training and capacity building of rural workers, of poor member, of rural communities and of women and youth. Gradually, they founded more centers and started working on drought mitigation. In this approach, they started collaborating with Sh. Anupam Mishra, Sh. Siddhraj Dadha, Sh. Arun Ji, Sh. Rajendra Singh, Sh. Swami Ji, Sh. Maheshwari Ji and other *Sarvodaya* thinkers. I had also visited them many times from Rani, where I live.

Because their work focused on poor and *dalit* people, they also had to face attacks from higher caste people. Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji were also very committed in opium dedication programme. They organized many camps on this, in some of which I also served as a doctor.

Through GRAVIS and Tyagi couple, I was able to meet many renowned *Sarvodaya* leaders and was deeply inspired. I was also given several coordination responsibilities for *Sarvodaya* work and I visited many organizations.

After Tyagi Ji passed away in 2005, Shashi Ji took on the responsibility of GRAVIS with courage and conviction. All the work of GRAVIS continued in her leadership. During COVID - 19 lockdown also, she helped a lot of people. During her illness also, she continued talking to me and checking about my family. She was very kind.

She left us on 14th November 2020 but her work for women and poor people will always be remembered. For youth dedicated to *Sarvodaya*, she will always be a great inspiration.

Rajkamal Pareek, India

Dr. Rajkamal Pareek is a medical doctor and is the Founder of Social Service Society.

Beacon of hope

I represent One Prosper International-a Canadian charitable organization focused on girls' education and women's empowerment. One Prosper International has been working with GRAVIS since 2013 to empower women and girls living in the Thar Desert of India.

I feel extremely fortunate to have GRAVIS as our partner in changing lives of women and girls in the Thar Desert of India. Thanks to the work performed by GRAVIS, many girls from low income families in the Thar Desert are now attending school rather than walking hours to collect water. In addition, the girls and their families are now drinking clean water and eating more nutritious food. The girls' mothers are very happy and believe their daughters have a bright future thanks to the work performed by GRAVIS.

Shashi Ji, as the leader of GRAVIS, dedicated her life to empowering communities of the Thar Desert. She empowered marginalized women by organizing them into Self Help Groups and helped them to have a greater voice in decision making in the family and in the village committee.

In a region suffering from scarcity of food and water and where women and girls are tasked with water collection; Shashi Ji was a beacon of hope. Thanks to Shashi' Ji's efforts, tens of thousands of families in the Thar Desert now have clean water, nutritious food and increased prosperity. Shashi Ji will be greatly missed.

Raju Agarwal, Canada

Mr. Raju Agarwal is an entrepreneur from Ottawa and is the Founder and Executive Director of One Prosper International, and a long-time associate of GRAVIS.

A life of sacrifices – Shashi Ji

In 1993, I was selected as a training fellow at GRAVIS. This was my first such experience and I met Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji. They told about their struggle, about their life and their work with GRAVIS. I was so impressed that I started working for the voluntary sector. Shashi Ji kept guiding me all the time.

Our organization, Rajasthan Mahila Kalyan Mandal Sanstha in Ajmer organized a three days annual meeting at GRAVIS in 2017. Shashi Ji told

me that due to poor health, she will not be able to join but she joined and told me, I would have felt very sad if I didn't join. She guided us and honored our team. We were deeply touched. Shashi Ji's dedication and simplicity will always be remembered. While she is not with us physically, her sacrifices will always remind us of her humanity.

Rakesh Kumar Kaushik, India

Sh. Rakesh Kumar Kaushik is a development activist and heads Rajasthan Mahila Kalyan Mandal Sanstha.

- 101 -

Lasting memories

Shashi Ji, fondly known as Behan Ji, lived a life of service, dedication and simplicity. She gave her whole life to rural people, to children and social causes. I spent many years of my life working with her.

On last Diwali, when I heard of her demise, my heart felt very empty. Behan Ji will be immortal like *Ganga* Water and will continue to live in our hearts as a statue of sacrifices and motherhood.

Ram Akbal Singh, India

Sh. Ram Akbal Singh is a teacher, a social worker and a former team member of GRAVIS.

- 102 -

In our hearts

Shashi Ji came to Rajasthan to work for poor leaving her State and relatives behind. Poor people were always in her heart and she always worked for them. Her life was inspired by the principles of Gandhi Ji, Vinoba Ji and Jai Prakash Ji. On 14th November 2020, the day of Diwali, Shashi Ji left us, but she will always remain in our hearts.

Ram Swarth Prasad, India

Sh. Ram Swarth Prasad is a team member of GRAVIS for over 25 years.

Shashi Tyagi; My beloved Didi

I find it very difficult to write few words about my beloved Didi (Shashi Tyagi). I have an irreparable loss by losing her who was more than my elder sister. My association with her goes back sometimes during 1977-78 while she and beloved Bhaiya Late Sh. Laxmi Chand Tyagi happened to be at Banwasi Sewa Ashram, District Sonbhadra, UP, a legendary institution, working for the empowerment of tribal people.

While I was Executive Director at UP Voluntary Health Association (UPVHA), we used to frequently meet at VHAI regarding the *KHOJ* project (an initiative for health intervention). She frequently used to call me as resource person in workshops/seminars on child rights and education.

What makes me to recall about her is very strong stand and firm positioning for right based intervention, honesty in intervention and commitment for down trodden masses. She was a great thinker and follower of Gandhian thoughts, *Sarvodaya* spirit and a promoter of non-violence principles in all her deliberations.

By her sudden journey for heavenly abode, the *Sarvodaya Jagat* will always miss her. At present juncture, when the socio political environment needs people like Didi to propagate the non-violence, Gandhian constructive thoughts and social harmony, this irreparable loss will remain as a vacuum forever.

She was more than my elder sister and a guardian for my daughter. She had facilitated the marriage of my daughter Dr. Kiran Rai at Jodhpur. More so, she used to frequently visit my daughter to ascertain her well being. My daughter also lost her guardian as “Bua”.

I am at this age of 73 years missing her as one of my senior sister who used to always keep an eye on me, lovingly scolding for my health and care of my wife. Perhaps this loss cannot be reversed.

I pray that the happy memories of Didi's life with all of you will, with time, overcome the sadness and pain that have accompanied you all as you lived these later years with Didi. I particularly remember her dedication for the poor and downtrodden people. Please be assured of my prayers and support always.

Rama Kant Rai, India

Sh. Rama Kant Rai is the Country Convener of National Coalition for Education and a long time associate of Shashi Ji.

- 104 -

Respectful tributes

Shashi Ji was fondly known as Behan Ji. Deeply inspired by Gandhian ideology, she worked for the poorest families of rural areas. She was a great woman, who took up the challenge of empowering all women. Behan Ji was a social and encouraging human being and spent her whole life with simple living and high thinking. Even during her last days, she used to discuss with me about the accounts and other matters.

On 14th November, 2020, she had her last breath. It is important for us to follow her path and legacy. During her entire life, she worked against social evils. I pay my respect and tributes.

Ramavtar Singh, India

Sh. Ramavtar Singh has been a part of GRAVIS team for over 30 years.

- 105 -

Memorial

I met Shashi Behan in 1991 when I left the job of Air Force and joined Rajasthan Voluntary Health Association (RVHA). After that, we were continuously in touch. Whenever I came to Jodhpur, she never let me take food outside. I was always impressed with her ability of taking decision at very right time.

I had to go to Gagadi for evaluation of *KHOJ* project. I was in dilemma how to work in given assignment because Laxmi Bhai was the President of RVHA - the organization to be evaluated by me. I discussed this with Shashi Behan and she told me to work impartially and calmly. There is no need to worry about it, she said and encouraged me to write whatever is the progress.

In 1997, there was a two days programme on malaria eradication in Jodhpur and I was invited to address the programme. A cyclone was predicted on very next day. We were very anxious about organizing programme. Shashi Behan quickly suggested not to postpone the event but to reduce the lunch hour and complete the sessions by late evening so that everyone can go to their home till night. Such was her quick action with courage and wisdom.

First Tyagi Ji and now her sudden demise have shocked me. I found

A life with a message

myself unable to express my emotions but writing few words about her is my tribute to her. Tough she is not with us in physical form, but her spirit is with us. Her affection will always be with us.

Rambabu Bhatt, India

Sh. Rambabu Bhatt is a senior development consultant and has been associated with many organisations.

- 106 -

Emissary of girl child

I am so sorry to hear about the passing of Ms. Shashi Tyagi. Dr. Prakash Tyagi, Abha and Vasundhra, the entire GRAVIS family, and the communities with whom she has been closely associated with for over three decades are still in my thoughts and prayers. She is a mother not only to Dr. Prakash and Dr. Abha, but to the entire GRAVIS family, and its partner institutions. My sincerest condolences on the passing of Ms. Shashi Tyagi. She was a special woman, and will be missed by many. Every brick of GRAVIS reminds me of her simplicity, empathy for the voiceless rural peasants. I know this is the difficult time for everyone, and I wish I have better words to make it easier.

I take this opportunity to recall a few good moments of my association with Ms. Shashi Tyagi, fondly called as Shashi Ji. Our journey started a decade back in 1997 during my stint in Rajasthan managing a large-scale health and nutrition programme. Started with a small collaboration to help the vulnerable women and children of Phalodi area, soon the partnership expanded for a wider area covering the Bap region also. She was affectionate of working for the vulnerable women and girl children, and never compromised on her principles for the cause. Today being the National Girl Child Day, I thought this is the best tribute to remember, and ink my thoughts about such a great legendary. Although it is too long a period to recall my memory, I still have a few reeling in my mind. Because of her interest and persistence, we could successfully negotiate with the Indira Gandhi National Open University to open a study center in the Phalodi GRAVIS complex to empower the women with a nutrition certificate. She always thinks women centric and used hammer on the need to have proportionate women representation in the community-based organizations/groups.

Shashi Ji never hesitated to highlight on the importance of promoting locally available foods, and opt for traditional foods instead of prophylactic doses, which the Government of India is advocating now.

Aayush is the buzz word now for the Government, but Shashi Ji never left any opportunity to highlight this aspect. I really admire her foresight. It is not out of place for me to mention of her active advocacy role on the adolescent health, and promoting locally made low-cost sanitary pads to the young girls, and treatment of minor ailments by training the local health volunteers of the desert area three decades back. I had the opportunity of working from the Gagadi complex to the Milkman Colony office, the Phalodi and Bap field offices. Each of these premises echoes her vision. Her inspiring thoughts motivated me to continue my association with her in different capacities too.

Because of Shashi Ji's undivided attention, GRAVIS, subsequently established a girl's hostel to promote higher education, and provided bicycles to the young girls to make them highly mobile, and self-sufficient. This is yet another example of her faith on the Girl Child, who would be the future pillars to reform our society. When I think of her, the *Sarvodaya* ideology of 'sharing', and Gandhian principles – 'simple living, love and empathy for the village peasants, and determination to work for the girl child' comes to my mind. The most unforgettable thing is, Sh. L.C. Tyagi always addressed her as Shashi Ji, the importance she commanded from her husband too. This is one of the many examples of her personality. The vacuum created by her can never be filled, but the journey has to be continued. The best way to move is taking forward her agenda by taking care of every Girl Child in the GRAVIS territory.

I take the opportunity to appreciate Dr. Prakash for his innovative idea of bringing out a compendium of experiences with her. The document will serve as a living document for the generations to come, and can be a good reference/resource material for many research scholars. Last but not the least is my sincere thanks to Dr. Prakash for providing me with this opportunity. Before concluding I would like to make a suggestion to the GRAVIS Board. Please explore the possibilities of creating an award for a Girl Children on Shashi Ji's name for her aspirations and untiring efforts about the girl child. This can be awarded every year on January 24, on the eve of National Girl Child Day.

As said above, my association with both Mr. L.C. Tyagi and Ms. Shashi Tyagi started in 1997 in managing USAID-funded program implemented through CARE in the capacity of a State Coordinator. Later, in another capacity as a USAID Nutrition Officer, my association continued with GRAVIS, as an implementing partner for both the CARE and CRS programmes until 2008.

Ramesh Babu V, India

Sh. Ramesh Babu V is a Technical Consultant, World Bank, formerly with CARE, USAID and CDC.

Journey of memories

Shashi Ji's body has now met the Almighty. The news of her demise was shocking. My conversation with her was ongoing. Some planned events had to be cancelled.

In the entire country, she was connected with colleagues through ideology. A calm, jolly yet sincere personality who always believed in uniting people and innovating experiences. Shashi Ji, Tyagi Ji did exemplary work in rural areas on youth training, integrated development, agriculture, cottage industry, natural resource management, women empowerment, labor issues, health and social and cultural development.

In Ba-Bapu 150 campaign also, I worked together with Shashi Ji. Despite of her poor health, she was very active and supportive which shows her commitment and dedication. I have very vivid memories of my association with her which was over 5 decades long. It is hard to believe that I would be unable to meet her again. From Banwasi Seva Ashram, UP, Sucheta Kriplani Shiksha Niketan, Rajasthan Samgra Seva Sangh – in all these organizations - one can see her active contribution and support.

I remember an incident of 25 years ago, when there was a challenge in organizing events on 125th Gandhi anniversary. This was because of the resistance of some local leaders in Rajasthan but Tyagi Ji, Shashi Ji and Sawai Singh Ji resolved all issues. Couples like Tyagi Ji and Shashi Ji are rarely seen who gave their entire life to social work, rural development and Gandhian ideology.

Sadar Jai Jagat

Ramesh Chand Sharma, India

Sh. Ramesh Chand Sharma is a noted Gandhian thinker and a long – time friend of Shashi Ji and of GRAVIS.

- 108 -

Love for everyone

I remember my first meeting with Shashi Ji in August 2004 at GRAVIS office. I was a little nervous but she met me with a lot of warmth and affection. Since then, I have been working with GRAVIS and was always inspired by Shashi Ji. Very few people have simplicity, courage and kindness that she had.

Her family was very large as she was with everyone whom she knew in their joys and sorrow. She gave high respect to co-workers and to rural and poor people. Her memories will always be there.

Ramesh Parihar, India

Sh. Ramesh Parihar is a part of GRAVIS team for over 15 years

- 109 -

Shashi Tyagi Ji, a visionary and dedicated social worker

There are many things for which Shashi Ji will be remembered, but what we will never forget is her commitment to empower the downtrodden communities. Shashi Ji had the very essence of compassion for the deprived communities. All over the community development fraternity, she was a symbol of selfless humanity. She was a true standard bearer for the rights of the downtrodden. She was someone with natural ability to brighten the lives of thousands of deprived families.

I met Shashi Ji when an integrated development project titled “VIKALP” was in implementation in Jodhpur district. I didn't know much about GRAVIS when I met her at GRAVIS training centre, Gagadi, in 2009. I came to know that she was a social activist trained in *Sarvodaya*. With her husband Sh. Laxmi Chand Tyagi Ji, she arrived in Jodhpur, the Thar Desert in 1980. Along with her husband, they decided to dedicate themselves to empower this economically and socially disadvantaged region. They started visiting and surveying local community during long marches on feet. Finding deep poverty, illiteracy and discrimination among the castes in harsh desert region, they both realized that they needed to engage in long term association with the local community. Then Shashi Ji along with her husband, founded GRAVIS, a platform to connect and serve the locals in Gagadi village in 1983. The organization, GRAVIS, founded by them, empowered thousands of families in Thar through integrated community development. GRAVIS has been active for

community development by addressing communities' felt needs- health care, natural resource management, integrated agriculture development, community based organizations, education, and many more.

Shashi Ji demonstrated the discipline of long-term commitment and setting the ground for relationships and enabling opportunities for empowering of the needy communities.

She has gone. There is a feeling among Dr. Prakash and family members, GRAVIS, community based organizations, local communities and all over the development fraternity of having been left isolated. All of us sense that feeling, and we do not know when we shall be able to get rid of it. And yet together, with that feeling, there is also a feeling of proud thankfulness that it has been given to us to be associated with her.

I strongly feel that there is a need to ensure continuity of her initiations, teachings and work towards the deprived section of the community.

My association with Shashi Ji:

Supported by Suzlon Foundation, an integrated development approach based project titled, "VIKALP" was implemented by GRAVIS in Jodhpur District since 2008. I was associated as Assistant General Manager, CSR at SUZLON Foundation and my responsibility was to coordinate the project operations.

Ranveer Singh, India

Dr. Ranveer Singh is a senior development consultant, a long – time friend of GRAVIS and has worked with several organizations.

“My Guruma!! Who built up volunteers”

In the year 1982, Sh. Laxmi Chand Tyagi and Smt. Shashi Tyagi started a six months duration training programme for social workers selected from North, South, East and West India. The major objective was enhancing knowledge and skills in Gandhian Philosophy (Gandhi's thoughts and dreams) and his constructive works. Experienced Gandhian workers and leaders were invited from different parts of India to share their experiences with the trainees. In addition, the trainees visited work places of Gandhian institutions located in different States. I and Madhumita joined the first batch of the training programme. At her residence, Shashi Ji re-discussed the subject that was shared by the resource persons on different days.

Once, the subject was Gandhian constructive work. During that discussion, I commented in a lighter vein on being a jack of all trades, master of none. Shashi Ji responded positively, "Social workers should try to gain knowledge on as many subjects related to basic needs of people or villagers, and to acquire skills on one or two of those subjects. Gandhi Ji had mastery in the freedom movement with the weapon of non-violence, truth, and justice. Therefore, you have to acquire knowledge on many related subjects according to your capacity, and have mastery on one or two subjects. Since then, I tried my best to gain knowledge related to the basic needs of my operational villages. I worked as teacher, health worker, and trainer in natural farming and as an activist in land and forest rights.

I remember those days of working with her and Tyagi Ji. In my first term, I spent some time coordinating the youth training programme for Gandhian constructive works. In my second term (return to GRAVIS), I was looking after the activities for elderly persons. I learned from Tyagi Ji the valuable concept of rehabilitation of neglected elderly persons at their own homes, by providing the needed support through their family who are poor.

I was fortunate enough to have Smt. Shashi Behen Ji with us in Odisha during her last visit on August 15, 2019, to the Fani (cyclone) affected area, and her greater support to around 300 families with house repair aid, water filters, health hygiene kits, medicated mosquito nets, and solar lamps.

This visit was quite special to me. She said by looking at my health condition, "Ravi Bhai, not to worry further, now we have to share our knowledge and wisdom with our children, and they have to take it forward by building a network of brotherhood." She always talked about cooperation, networking, doing things together, and participation. Her words always inspired the concept of volunteerism, respect, serving the humanity, friendship, and peace. She contributed to humanity and society until her last breath.

I always believe Smt. Shashi Behen Ji is always around us, and there is much more to do, as inspired by her.

Ravi Kamal, India

Sh. Ravi Kamal is a social worker from Odisha, India and is a friend of GRAVIS and Shashi Ji.

Homage to mother Shashi Tyagi Ji

My deepest condolence to GRAVIS family members, friends, colleagues of Shashi Ji and the communities for whom she worked. Smt. Shashi Tyagi relentlessly worked for decades in the harsh desert region of Rajasthan.

Even though I have met her personally only once a few years ago in one of the FIAN meeting in Chennai, it was a memorable time. Later, I came to know much about her dedicated work in Rajasthan for the upliftment of the poor and downtrodden. It inspires me to rededicate myself to work with renewed commitment. I am sure the legacy left by Smt. Shashi Tyagi will be remembered and revered by the next generations. It is a great honor for me to know her passionate work for the upliftment of the poorest of the poor and pay homage to mother Smt. Shashi Tyagi.

*The Kindest Heart stopped Beating
The Hard working Hands are at Rest
God Granted Her Eternal Rest
God only Takes the Best*

*Her Life was full of Good Deeds
Her Thoughts were Always for Other's Needs
Today and tomorrow we will Remember Her Deeds
Always we will cherish her kind Deeds*

*Her Wisdom will lead us is greener Pathways
Her Dedication Will Inspires us Always
She taught us not to slip in to Disappointment
But prepared us for a lifelong journey of commitment*

Ravi Kumar, India

Sh. Ravi Kumar is a food rights activist and is associated with Food First Information and Action Network (FIAN).

- 112 -

A truly inspiring soul

My first and long-lasting memory of Shashi Ji was/is 'what a truly inspiring soul'.

I was fortunate to spend some time with her during a field visit to the Thar Desert. It is one of my most vivid memories during my time at GRAVIS. We spoke at length about many things during our journey and what struck me most was her passion and belief in what she did. She was a selfless individual and I clearly remember Shashi Ji's strength, determination and conviction in making an immense and meaningful difference to the desert community.

Thank-you Shashi Ji for imparting your incredible wisdom, knowledge and experiences to me. I know they have left an everlasting legacy and without which GRAVIS wouldn't be the remarkable organization that it is today.

Reena Chouhan and Meenesh Pattni, UK

Ms. Reena Chouhan and Mr. Meenesh Pattni are a UK based couple and have volunteered with GRAVIS in the past.

- 113 -

A Lucknow connection

I first met Shashi Ji in 2003 as part of a visit to GRAVIS with Wells for India (now called Water Harvest). Many visits have followed as a trustee, and latterly as a trustee for St. Clare and St. Francis Trust, but I would like to write here on a more personal level.

I am Anglo Indian—obviously I always have been, but it is only in the last 16 years of my life that I have been able to say this with confidence. And much of this is largely down to two very special women—one the co-founder of Wells for India, Professor Mary Grey; and the other the co-founder of GRAVIS, Shashi Ji.

I learnt from Shashi Ji that she was born in Lucknow, which was also where my mother was born and lived until 1944 when she married my father, an English army officer who had been in the Burma campaign. They both sailed to England in 1945 where I was born. But, I was never told I was Anglo Indian, although I always knew I was not quite the same as most English people.

On several subsequent visits, Shashi Ji helped me to understand my identity – she spoke about her life in Lucknow and how life would have

been for my mother. She helped me to understand the complex person my mother became and why. She helped me to learn to love her a little more.

I was so humbled by the time, the love and the care with which Shashi Ji helped me. She always found time to sit and make me feel cared for, even though her work was endless. The dedication with which she had pledged herself to work tirelessly for the people of the desert and especially for the empowerment of women and girls came from such a deep place within her that it appeared effortless, but that depth was formed through her commitment to her work and to Gandhi's philosophy which helped shape her life and character.

I was one of the first women in England to become a Christian priest—I have a little experience of what it means to be powerless both as a woman and to be not quite English. We may have shared different faiths, but we have shared very similar philosophies. More importantly we shared affection and acceptance of each other.

I am so fortunate to have met Shashi Ji—supporting the work of GRAVIS is a small way, I can say thank you to her for the gifts she has given to so many, many people in her lifetime – the gifts of equality and self-worth. In a world that is still so unequal and disrespectful to those different to ourselves—we too can pledge to keep passing on these precious gifts. In my faith we say: let light perpetual shine upon her; may she rest in peace and rise in glory.

Reverend Jean Boulton-Reynolds, UK

Reverend Jean Boulton-Reynolds is a Priest and a social worker and is associated with St. Clare and St. Francis Trust, Water Harvest and GRAVIS.

- 114 -

Ever lasting memories

"Never will we forget meeting you and your late husband, Sh. L.C. Tyagi Ji, for the first time in Jodhpur. This was back in the year 2000. Arriving from Jaipur by train, my late wife Surain and I were picked up at the train station and ushered to GRAVIS in Jodhpur. After a ceremonial reception, you served us a delicious vegetarian (of course!) meal up in your dining area! Such a spontaneous and shared start of a long-lasting friendship - from the first visit in 2000 until 2019! I myself, Surain and Ghislaine have been received by you no less than seven times. You have showed us much of GRAVIS' impressive accomplishments.

So many memories from the time spent with you the first visit to the Rampura village chatting in the evening in a GRAVIS field center, while sipping on *chai* partaking in a women's conference visiting an *Ashram* in Ahmedabad at a Gandhian meeting ...

You had such a special presence. When you entered a village (or school, hospital, flood-relief area ...), people would light up immediately and welcome you smilingly.

Thank you, Shashi Ji, for the inspiration you have given us. You will be sorely missed."

Robert and Ghislaine af Sandeberg, Sweden

Mr. Robert and Ms. Ghislaine are a couple from Stockholm, Sweden who have been friends with GRAVIS and Shashi Ji for over 20 years

- 115 -

Guide forever

My first meeting with Shashi Ji was in Uttrakhand around 1970 at the home of Late. Sh. Man Singh Ji. From then, till 14th November 2020, I remained connected with her. She played many roles in my life-of a teacher, of a mother (my mother died when I was a child).

Since late 1970's, I started working actively with Shashi Ji in Rajasthan. In early days, I saw how she faced all challenges with courage. I also remember an incident of 2019 in Odisha, when she visited flood affected areas and also met our old friend Ravi Kamal Ji. He is not in a good health. Shashi Ji felt his pain and donated to him her personal funds for his health. She had a very kind heart. Her memories will always guide me.

Roshan Lal Kukreti, India

Sh. Roshan Lal Kukreti is a senior social worker and has been associated with GRAVIS and Tyagi family for about 40 years.

“Way forward—Living her dream, and she is with us”

“I am very happy that you have been taking forward your father's work and plan to contribute to society further. I am happy that at such a young age, rather than being attracted to corporate sectors, you have chosen social service sector specially, to give wings to your father's dreams,” Maa Ji said on a fine evening of March, 2020. That was the last time when I spoke to her, about forty-five minutes all together. In every word of her, I found her speaking about cooperation, togetherness, faith, sympathy, and volunteerism.

If I look back, I cannot give an exact year or date of the start of our relationship, because I am that lucky person whose parents were trained by her during their young stage. I can say I knew her since birth; in fact she has seen me growing and specially taken utmost care by letting me study in one of the eminent educational institutions in Rajasthan. I was quite fortunate to have her guidance, love, kindness, and above all, a motherly figure who was always being very protective.

It is true that I lost my mother at a very early age when I was about four years old. But Maa Ji kept all those memories alive by proudly sharing the stories of my mother, about her journey as a social activist. She used to give me examples of my mother—how energetic she was, how vibrant was her personality. All that she meant me to know so that I could replicate my mother, rather than being sad about the loss, and it's a very rare way of nurturing.

Years passed. I took my way to move further with all that learning, with all blessings— God's master plan-no one can change. My mission and vision all took a shape, and I started visualizing the dream that my father saw which could be lived by me. The saddening part is, in between all those changes, his health condition suddenly broke me. It's “Maa Ji (Smt. Shashi Tyagi)” far away from Rajasthan that held me tight with her kind words and comforting gestures, and only one sentence, “Everything will be alright.” She said to hold tight your emotion, count those dreams yet to be fulfilled, and spend a quality time with my father.

She would always guide me and tell me that we cannot afford giving material support to all the needy; all that we can give is time to listen to their pain, sorrows, and the story behind their struggle. And we can counsel them, guide them, pave the way, and show them a right path so that they can put their efforts in the right direction. And, this support will stay longer and drive them farther.

She and Babu Ji (Shri. Laxmi Chand Tyagi Ji) laid the foundation of my life with such inspiring thoughts, and now it's my turn to take it forward. I continue to work with her thoughts for constructive work and aspire to live her dreams in every way possible no matter how far I can go.

She is there, and will be there with us always.

Ruchi Mitra, India

Ms. Ruchi Mitra leads SHED in Odisha, India and has known Shashi Ji since her childhood.

- 117 -

Foundations for democracy

They were a wonderful committed couple: Sh. Laxmi Chand and Smt. Shashi Tyagi. For sometime, they got the sweet company of another committed couple, Shri Prem Bhai and Dr. Ragini Prem at their *Ashram* in the jungles of Renukoot. Local people were *aadivasis* with their own culture. The atmosphere was not spoiled by modern civilisation!

From Banwasi Seva Ashram, Renukoot U.P., the Tyagi couple moved to another under - developed area, Maneklav and Gagadi where, working with the *aadivasis*, they conceived the plan to launch the Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti (GRAVIS). GRAVIS, Banwasi Seva Ashram and hundreds of centres were all inspired by Mahatma Gandhi. And, all such centres have a great place in the formation of our nation. Mahatma Gandhi gave us hundreds of precious gifts, Freedom, Self-respect, Work culture, Constructive Programmes etc.

On top of all, Gandhi Ji gave Mother India an army of dedicated, selfless workers. Many Gandhi *Ashrams*, *Vidyapeeths* and camps turned out workers; in addition, hundreds of British prisons also became Training Centres. Let us remember that after India became free, more than 100 countries, small and big all became free. Even today, these nations in Asia, Africa and South America remember how they saw India led by the Mahatma got freedom, without the gun and money and were inspired to achieve their own freedom. But, one tragedy followed; After achieving freedom, many countries fell for dictatorships, mostly military dictatorships. How did India escape such tragedy? Gandhi trained workers had spread into all villages of India and so, the atmosphere of freedom had spread into the whole country.

GRAVIS is a case in point. They have maintained the process of selfless service and through the process of creating workers continues. For

development of rural areas, India must have good voluntary organizations. After Sh. L. C. Tyagi left us, Smt. Shashi Tyagi led GRAVIS. Now, Dr. Prakash Tyagi has taken over. The spirit of GRAVIS must prevail and inspire.

Smt. Shashi Tyagi's personality was very hard working. Even after she fell sick and became very weak, Shashi Behan not only continued her work, but even went out to meet her friends in other countries and to attend the programmes. The special quality I found in Behan Ji was that while many philanthropic people are liberal in giving, Shashi Behan went in search of needy people and offered them help. May her spirit spread.

S. N. Subba Rao, India

Dr. S. N. Subba Rao is a noted Gandhian thinker with global recognition and is the Founder of National Youth Project (NYP).

- 118 -

A life of dedication and sacrifice

It is difficult to forget someone like Shashi Ji and her extraordinary life. My first meeting with her took place 35-36 years ago when she and Tyagi Ji started their rural development work in Manaklav village. The activities focused on environment, water security and agriculture. Since then, I continued meeting Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji frequently. Shashi Ji was always very active and led from the front.

I always wondered how she is so capable and so courageous. The reason was her background. She worked for community development from UP, gradually their work grew. Many of our work related meetings started happening at my Nehru Park residence in Jodhpur. I also visited many villages and projects with Shashi Ji. Later, they started working in Jelu - Gagadi village. Shashi Ji continued her role with confidence and commitment. She played an equal and confident role for GRAVIS with Laxmi Bhai. Shashi Ji was particularly popular among rural women because she was very simple and loving.

The Gagadi center had to face a brutal attack by the higher caste youth in 1990, as GRAVIS used to work for caste equality. This was a very traumatic event but Tyagi family embraced it with courage. They mobilized local communities and with the support of their friends, revitalized GRAVIS and made it even stronger. Both children of Shashi Ji were preparing for medical education and hence, they used to stay at my home for some time.

Dr. Prakash Tyagi, Shashi Ji's son, has inherited the qualities of his parents and he is currently leading GRAVIS very effectively.

Shashi Ji was always engaged in serving others. She had immense courage, thorough understanding and was a clean hearted and straight forward person. After Tyagi Ji's death, she continued GRAVIS' work despite of the loss. In her leadership, GRAVIS grew and reached many more people. Despite of being ill with cancer, she continued being active for the society.

Deeply rooted in Gandhian ideology, Shashi Ji achieved countless milestones. In 2017, she was honored with Jamnalal Bajaj Award which is a matter of great pride for all of us. I also remember that Shashi Ji never got tired of traveling in villages and always articulated her voice very actively in various meetings.

It is heartening to see that GRAVIS is flourishing under Dr. Prakash Tyagi's leadership. My best wishes.

S.M. Mohnot, India

Dr. S.M. Mohnot is an Emeritus Professor and the Founder of The School of Desert Sciences and a close friend of GRAVIS and Tyagis.

- 119 -

Miss you always, my dearest Shashi Aunty Ji

I just wanted to say simply how I will miss you very much. I am so fortunate to know Shashi Aunty; that's how I used to call her.

She was our family friend. With Laxmi Uncle, they both used to come to our house in Delhi, where with my father, the Late Prof. Arya Bhushan Bhardwaj and many other Gandhians used to come for the meetings. I used to help my mother and Shashi Aunty for the preparation of these meetings. I am talking about when I was in 10th grade, long back in the 90's. Prakash Bhaiya and Abha Didi sometimes came with them to visit us. After finishing my 10th standard, while waiting for the results, Shashi Aunty asked my father if I could go for an experience to Jodhpur and do some volunteer work for GRAVIS. I was soon given the permission to travel with her. The travel was by train from Delhi Station to Jodhpur in the Ahmedabad Mail. The voyage was in the night, and we got our train just in time. Shashi Aunty and myself arrived in Jodhpur around lunch, and Haji Bhai, the driver, came to pick us up.

Like my father, all the intellectual Gandhians are very reserved. I was shown my room where I would be sleeping and then had lunch with

everyone. Laxmi Uncle and Shashi Aunty asked me if I would like to visit a GRAVIS center. I said, “Why Not,” and the day after, I went from Jodhpur city to visit various activities that Shashi Aunty and Laxmi Uncle were doing with the rural people of the various villages.

For me at the age of 15 years, it was really a great experience. After the various visits, we arrived at lunch time in Jelu - Gagadi. Shashi Aunty asked me if I would like to stay in Jelu - Gagadi for some days and help the school children to teach them. I immediately said yes, and I stayed with Laxmi Uncle in these beautiful huts; they were so cool inside, although outside temperature was 45 plus degrees celsius. Last thing, I went to Pushkar and Ajmer with Laxmi Uncle for a religious experience as well. It was magical.

I met Shashi Aunty the last time at our house in Delhi in 2019. I was visiting India at the same time. She stayed with us for two days, and we really had beautiful time. She was a person who would become childish if she was talking to a child, and a wise woman talking to adults. I really love her, she is my second mother.

Amma, I will miss you very much.

Sadbhawana Bhardwaj, Italy

Ms. Sadbhawana Bhardwaj is naturopathy expert and lives and works in Italy.

- 120 -

A lifetime of dedication

I was introduced to Shashi Ji when I joined Asha for Education and became a steward for GRAVIS. I had my first opportunity to meet her in 2008 during my first site visit.

I really enjoyed all of the site visits I did with Shashi Ji. She was actively involved with the GRAVIS work and personally knew all the beneficiaries we met. Shashi Ji's deep knowledge and engagement with the local community always made it a meaningful visit.

I still remember how, as a founding member of GRAVIS, Shashi Ji was involved with this work for nearly three decades, and how involved Shashi Ji remained at the grass roots level. GRAVIS has done a variety of work in service of desert communities like health camps, *taankas*, advocacy, water security, education and so forth.

I was amazed at her deep knowledge of the nuances of the local cultures, her connection to everyone at a personal level, the warmth she showed to me, to our driver, to every person she met during the tour.

Binay Pathak, a long-time volunteer with Asha Seattle, said, "I remember when Shashi Ji came to Seattle in 2015 and gave an inspiring talk and shared some of the details of her journey. It takes leaders like her to bring social changes of this level."

In sharing her journey and her experiences during her talk in 2015, many of us were struck by her humility and how matter-of-factly she relayed some very challenging experiences as they began their long hard work in social justice. Her perseverance and fortitude, and her lifetime of dedication to the cause of social justice, exemplified by her life of service, will continue to inspire future generations.

We will miss Shashi Ji and we will remember and honor her by supporting and taking inspiration from her work.

Sandeep Nain, US

Mr. Sandeep Nain is a software engineer and a climber. He lives in Seattle, US and is associated with Asha for Education.

Humble tributes

Roots of trees are underneath earth but fruits are outside. The way roots contribute to fruits, Shashi Ji made same contribution to GRAVIS and to the society. For me, she was like a *messiah* and always gave me positive energy. I will always be indebted to her. Describing her personality in few words for someone like me is difficult. I pay humble tributes.

Sangeeta Chaturvedi, India

Smt. Sangeeta Chaturvedi is a teacher and has been associated with GRAVIS for long.

My Shashi Didi

Like everyone, I also called her Didi though she was like a mother. Though the exact time is not in my memory, but I still remember that I met her first time during my stay for a conference in AIIMS, Jodhpur. Didi called me to attend a meeting on silicosis and I attended there. I was also with Didi during annual meeting of Sarva Sewa Sangh in Muzzaffarpur and then in 2016 in *Shanti Sadbhawana Yatra* organized by Gandhi Vichar Yuwa Vahini. We met school children, college students, religious institutions, *Panchayats* and talked about Gandhi *Vichar*.

Didi was very determined towards Gandhian thoughts. She was very firm and committed on her values and ideas though very soft at heart. She had great respect for Gandhi, Vinoba and J.P. and followed their thoughts and ideologies in every part of her life. She used to talk about Gandhi Yuwa Vahini. She had many dreams for *vahini* like a mother has for her children. She was very fondly attached with all irrespective of gender and age. During *yatra*, we went to a school to meet children but older people and women also gathered there and they circled Didi and started talking endlessly with her. Some were sharing their experiences, some were telling stories of their children. One old man said that Didi had saved five years old children, I asked how. The man replied there was no school in my village and small kids are not able to walk long. Therefore, we send our children to schools when they are 10-12 years old and that too for 1st standard. Didi started primary school in this hamlet and this has saved 5 years of our children as they start studying earlier. There are many such countless incidences. Entire Gandhi *Vichar* family treat her like *Baa*. I

feel very fortunate that I worked under her guidance and motherly affection. And this gave me ample opportunities to learn from her.

Tearful tributes to my *Baa*

Sanjay Rai, India

Sh. Sanjay Rai is a social activist and Gandhian thinker and was close to Shashi Ji.

- 123 -

Legacy of inspiration

If I were to name the kindest and most benevolent gentlewoman I have known, I would name Ms. Shashi Tyagi unhesitatingly. I first met her at their home nearly 40 years ago when I was still a medical student. I was visiting the Tyagis with my parents to see their project in Jelu - Gagadi. Prakash and his sister were perhaps in primary school then. Both Ms. and Mr. Tyagi came across as very sincere and motivated people and I enjoyed the conversation very much, which was about their vision and development work in the village. After that first meeting, I have had numerous interactions with Shashi Ji and I marvelled at her transformational spirit, if I may call it that, with which she envisaged the project area where their group worked and within months bring about a sea of change in the lives of people. She was always willing to help, even in the smallest possible way she could, and always willing to listen if one had something to discuss. I also discovered that she approached problems optimistically and that attitude helped her instill confidence in her team to accept challenges and forge ahead. This is something I learned from her and it has held me in good stead over the years in my own journey to provide eye care services to the community. Shashi Ji's clarity of vision coupled with her infectious zeal and enthusiasm to develop rural communities around Jodhpur, was something to be seen to be believed and it has transformed the lives of thousands for the better. Her legacy will continue to inspire and guide all those whose lives she touched.

Sanjiv Desai, India

Dr. Sanjiv Desai is a senior ophthalmologist and leads Tarabai Desai Charitable Trust and Hospital.

One meeting led to a journey

I first met Shashi Ji in 2015 in a train. Despite being a stranger, she invited me to have meal with her and we started talking about family, GRAVIS and life. In one meeting, she became my inspiration. She had an impressive personality and was very polite, courteous and positive.

At a time of crisis in my family, she helped me and gave me an opportunity to work with GRAVIS. I am grateful for that opportunity and I continue working with GRAVIS. She always used to say that we should be good to even those who are not good to you. Her absence will always be felt.

Sanju Sisodia, India

Ms. Sanju Sisodia is a part of GRAVIS team for about 5 years.

A living legend of her time

I am sorry that we are late in sending a note about Shashi Ji. Even though we have been doing projects with GRAVIS since 1980s, we met with Shashi Ji only 2 or 3 times in Seattle. So we were discussing that weather what we wrote will meet the expectations for the book you are planning. After listening to so many people at her *Shradhanjali* in India who described in so much detail the experience they had working with her or getting help from her in their endeavors, we were not sure whether our short piece would make the grade.

Even though we have been doing projects with GRAVIS for more than 30 years, we met with Shashi Ji in person only a couple of times when she visited us in Seattle. In our conversations, she always left a deep impression of her sincerity, commitment, and effort she put in providing services to her community and helping other sister organizations. Every time just thinking of her, her unforgettable shining smiling face appeared. Clad in a simple saree and 'rich' heart that took care of thousands of people who looked up to her made us think how selfless and noble she was. Every time she spoke, it was all about and for people in her care. A living Legend in her own time! We'll miss her dearly.” -

Santosh and Pran Wahi, US

Ms. Santosh and Mr. Pran Wahi are based in Seattle and are associated with People for Progress in India (PPI).

Letter to you - Shashi

This might seem a strange time to be writing you a personal letter when we've been colleagues for 20 years but there are things I'd like to share with you - even though you're gone - so your spirit and your family can know how deeply you touched myself and many others with your life and work. I know your work was an intricate part of the collective efforts of your husband Tyagi, your son Prakash, your colleagues at GRAVIS, and the tens of thousands of villagers who are part of the GRAVIS programme, but I want to write this to you individually as a tribute to your determination, vision, and deep commitment to social and economic justice. Without you, many girls in the Thar Desert would not be educated, many women would not have overcome marginalization and injustice to become leaders in their communities, and the hundreds (thousands?) of village women's cooperatives would not have been created to forge self-reliance and community development.

I hope it's not presumptuous of me to say that we had a lot in common. We were born - you Indian, me British - in the same year that India won its independence from Britain after decades of struggle. We were both inspired by Gandhian philosophy - you as part of your history and culture and core values, me as an outsider who adopted non-violence as a way of life in my late teens. Through our different journeys within the same time frame, we both committed to working for the empowerment of rural communities with a focus on village women and girls taking charge of their own lives, with supporting rights and resources. When GRAVIS became a long-term partner of International Development Exchange, at a time when I was Executive Director, it became an obvious choice to ask you to become a Board member, as part of the effort to share decision-making and bring a partnership perspective to the table. You agreed, fully understanding the implications of this shift in governance and the resistance you would receive from some people who still viewed Indian people as poor, ignorant, brown. You regularly made the long journey to San Francisco from Jodhpur without complaint, bringing with you your on-the-ground experience, your willingness to speak up quietly but firmly, and your Board vote. Even if we'd had Zoom at that time, I suspect you'd still have made the journey to be at meetings in person, because that was the hallmark of your effectiveness, building personal relationships to change society.

When I travelled to Jodhpur for a partner visit, you and Tyagi Ji took me on a memorable journey to the communities that GRAVIS was working with and some of the projects we were supporting. You quickly understood

A life with a message

how happy I was in the desert and village environment, how glad I was to be seeing the innovation and changes that were happening in people's lives, and how healing it was for me to be in your company when I was experiencing a very difficult time at home. Sleeping under the stars, sipping chai on waking, and bumping across rough roads in the GRAVIS LandRover while in conversation with both of you filled my soul. Together, we forged a plan for highlighting the injustices and health hazards faced by mineworkers in the region, and advocating for their rights with international backing and solidarity. I'm happy that GRAVIS continues this work, just as it continues to operate the formidable community hospital serving 250,000 people that I visited as it was being completed and had hired its first staff.

You dedicated your life to serving others every day while holding a long-term vision for an equitable society. You never raged, criticized nor complained, though your work came at considerable personal cost to your health. You probably wouldn't have wanted it any other way, even though the rest of us might have, and through it all you kept your course. I still have a very strong visual memory of you – the shape of your face, the way you adjusted your sari over your shoulder, the cardigan you wore, how upright you sat – but it's the intangible impact of your essence on my being that I remember most. You represented a moral compass for me, you showed me that steady steps create deeper structural change, you taught me to put the last first, and that simplicity with complexity are strong partners.

In all my work with community organizations, GRAVIS is one of my favorite and I'm thankful and joyful to have got to know you. You leave an important, stable organization built on inclusion, democratic process, and decentralized self-reliance in a time of economic uncertainty, political divisiveness, environmental destruction and gross inequities. You combined the personal with the professional that, in writing this letter, I realize was the nature of our relationship. I'm grateful for our collaboration and shared interests.

Sarah Hobson, US

Ms. Sarah Hobson is a senior consultant, former Director of International Development Exchange (IDEX) and a friend of GRAVIS for over 25 years.

Shashi Ji - my role model

To me Shashi Ji represents perseverance, making the change for the better instead of just talking about it. I met Shashi Ji for the first time in 1998 in Finland, when she and a group of GRAVIS representatives visited Tampere University Student Union (TAMY) to tell students about GRAVIS' work. My first impression of Shashi Ji was that she was warm and friendly, and she spoke in a frank and straight manner. She was a leader who commanded respect.

I also realised my own role. I was an Environmental policy student in my early twenties. I could look at the world's inequality from a global perspective without really understanding it. Shashi Ji was able to express the role of women in the Indian desert region and the means of developing rural communities convincingly with concrete examples. They were much more helpful in the TAMY - GRAVIS cooperation and in addressing problems than my general examples referring to world politics.

The next time we met was in December, 2000 in Jodhpur on our reciprocal visit. As a group of eight students, we stayed mainly in the Kalron and Gagadi centers. Our programme was hosted by Prakash, Vasundhara and others at GRAVIS. In India we now saw Shashi Ji's real role in GRAVIS. She influenced things, attended various meetings, and visited villages. She challenged people, and gave examples that lives can be changed by one's own bold choices.

She was as approachable and sincere to us as she was with a small group in Finland, even though she worked continuously by travelling around Rajasthan and GRAVIS centers. She was also very motherly and made sure that we students visiting India for the first time had everything alright.

Shashi Ji is a role model for me. Today I'm a 46-year-old mother of two. In my life I have embraced the principles that I respect in Shashi Ji: the appreciation of everyone's life, women's role in strengthening the society, harnessing people's different strengths in the community; the courage to speak out to anyone of whatever social standing; respect for the environment and acknowledging it's fragility. I also keep in mind Shashi Ji's character, an open-ness to anyone, hospitality, a sense of humor, caring for loved ones, both her own family and her entire community.

Sari Nousiainen, Finland

Ms. Sari Nousiainen lives and works in Finland and had volunteered with GRAVIS in the past.

A woman of action and understanding : in memory of Shashi Tyagi

Principled, courageous, committed, and resourceful, but also caring and considerate. Humorous, open-minded and indefatigable. Uncompromising, especially what it came to wrongs, yet practical and capable of reconciliation. This is how I remember Shashi Tyagi, my Indian mother, I a younger friend, age wise good for a daughter, born and living in Finland. I feel our souls were fittingly kith and kin, which was perhaps in some respects boosted by the circumstances of our befriending, Shashi Ji's own children, Abha and Prakash, like my parents, being then long way off. Meeting Shashi Ji first time in 1993 when visiting GRAVIS, I had the opportunity to come back for several months in 1996 to do my social work internship (part of my studies) in GRAVIS , during which I lived mostly within the household of Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji. Later on, there were varying intervals in our contact keeping, but the sense of closeness and understanding remained, leaving me full of gratitude for having her, and him, as part of my life.

My upmost memories of Shashi Ji comprise of her lively presence: being on the road, whether attending or holding meetings, obtaining needed documents and information, checking the progress of ongoing projects, or doing the kind of PR work that running an organization requires. Like many others, I was privileged to enjoy her cooking, jokes, affection, even occasional well-intentioned scolding. Shashi Ji was tactfully considerate towards others, keeping an elderly friend with a good stock of quality honey, making knitwear with an Indian aesthetic twist to children of close ones, or taking care of the laundry of old and frail friends, however high the gandhian principle of everyone's personal engagement with physical work and cleanliness. At any rate, she was and is a role model to follow. As I believe these kind of memories abound, I would like to share how Shashi Ji narrated her beginning with Tyagi Ji and Gandhian work to me in our conversations during 1990s.

When Shashi Ji's and Tyagi Ji's families were seeking for suitable spouse candidates for them, Shashi Ji refused to meet Tyagi Ji before the marriage, despite his wishes for a chance to talk, for she was not interested to be any exhibition piece to appraise. After their wedding Tyagi Ji told Shashi Ji "each and every thing of his work" and asked Shashi Ji to read some Gandhian literature while she continued to stay in her father's house for further studies. Having lost her mother before she was three, Shashi Ji was a daddy's girl. Yet, despite her father and grandfather being freedom fighters who believed in egalitarian practices,

she only learned about social work in college, and even then did not take it seriously, skipping many lectures held by visiting Gandhians.

After a few months of consideration and finding Tyagi Ji's work convincing, Shashi Ji decided to join him in the tribal area where he was working. Tyagi Ji was hard working, and due to his nature, people liked him very much and were happy to work with him, giving lots of affection also to Shashi Ji. Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji read together Gandhian books and discussed them, and like this, and, "by observing I (Shashi Ji) found that this is the right way of life."

Gradually, Tyagi Ji and Shashi Ji began to think about founding an organization in another needy area, but when a great Gandhian leader, *Acharya* Kripalani wished them to join him and his *sanstha* in Rajasthan, they did. However, Kripalani Ji passed away unexpectedly soon after, and Tyagi Ji and Shashi Ji decided to follow their own dream, founding GRAVIS, then called Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti. GRAVIS was from the beginning meant to be a Gandhian organization, which works to give both voice and economic power to people and has then developed learning by working. In retrospect, she reckoned that adjusting to the Gandhian lifestyle was easy for her, Tyagi Ji and other people helping in everything. In the beginning, she missed ironed clothes and little less simple food.

In mid 1990s, Shashi Ji considered herself as not fully learned, but not blind either what it came to NGO work, greatest challenges stemming from political disturbances and misbehavior. While, for example, PR had been her hobby and responsibility from the beginning, she considered herself unsuitable to be in charge of purchasing or accounts, being no good in bargaining or understanding and keeping the accounts. What kept her going was satisfaction from the work, its challenges and coping with them. She did not mind lack of money or property, her happiness came from helping others, solving problems, and having good ideological discussions. As she encapsulated, even if problems are part of the work, there is never a feeling of stagnation, and with hard work, making more contacts and asking help, most things can be solved. As a resourceful woman of action, she left us a legacy not just to cherish, but joyfully follow.

Satu Ranta Tyrkko is a Finnish social work educator and researcher, a mother of two and an occasional activist. In her work at the University of Jyväskylä, she is specialised on ecosocial work; popular, activist and voluntary social work; Indian and postcolonial social work, and interfaces of social work and the arts. Being acquainted with GRAVIS during her studies has been definitive to her career.

Satu Ranta Tyrkko, Finland

Ms. Satu Ranta Tyrkko is a University lecturer and an old friend of Shashi Ji.

Shashi Behan – Karmashil

I still remember that about 42 years ago, Laxmi Chand Bhai and Shashi Behan came to Jodhpur from Uttar Pradesh. Both were well educated and it was not difficult for them to have any Government job in a nice place at that time. But the couple decided to live in the Desert. Initially, they started from Sucheta Kriplani Shiksha Niketan. That time, it was not less than miracle to see a woman working in social work. Shashi Ji worked for opium de-addiction and education of rural children. Both were very clear in their vision and soon they founded GRAVIS at Jelu - Gagadi village. They worked hard against caste system, feudalism and many social evils. In 1990, an attack broke out that damaged many assets and injured staff members but Shashi Behan and Tyagi Ji never stepped back from their social work and encouraged the team to continue the work. The diligence of Shashi Behan was unparalleled. She continued her work in all odds and exhibited exemplary firmness and courage in all conditions. Many women are working in Western Rajasthan in social work but the name of Shashi Behan comes first. Her untimely demise is a loss to entire society. Now, it is duty of future generations to carry forward her legacy of love and service.

Sawai Singh, India

Sh. Sawai Singh is a noted Gandhian thinker, social activist and speaker who has known Tyagis since 1980.

A legacy to continue

I am pleased to know that this book of Shashi Ji's memories is being compiled. She was associated with Gandhi Peace Foundation, Jodhpur over the last three decades. I am happy to contribute to this book. In her, I always saw a hard working person and someone who was committed to fulfilling the dreams of Mahatma Gandhi. There was no difference between her saying and doing, till the last moment of her life. I still remember how she frequently used to visit my father, Bhavuk Ji to get his guidance in 1980's.

She used to invite me to many GRAVIS events, to talk to the youth. She always used to tell me that I have the ability of inspiring youth. GRAVIS has done enormous amount of work which is recognized in India and worldwide. Her memories with us and with Gandhi Peace Foundation will always remain alive. We will all work with her memories to continue her legacy.

Sharad Jain, India

Sh. Sharad Jain is a Gandhian activist and leads the Gandhi Peace Foundation centre in Jodhpur.

The impact of one day

Hearing the stories of those who have known Shashi Ji for decades I have to control my jealousy—an emotion that is the antithesis of what Shashi stood for. Instead, I will celebrate my good fortune to have known her in the last years of her life and especially for one amazing, magical and, yes, life-changing day with her.

I am involved in the United States in an organization called Dining for Women that made a grant to GRAVIS to support reproductive health education, pharmacy services in rural villages, and community gardens. I got to know Prakash via email at the end of 2018 when we were doing some fund raising to support the grant. The next month when I was in Jodhpur I reached out to Prakash, worried about taking up his time, but wanting to learn more about GRAVIS's work. Not only did Prakash spend a great deal of time with me but he invited me to see the premier of the health education classes in a rural village. And best of all Shashi Ji gave me the gift of her precious time to spend the day to show the health education program and to visit one of GRAVIS's first projects.

Every moment of that day is as precious to me as a drop of water in the desert. I learned many things, about Gandhian principles, about how to teach about menstruation and reproductive health in an intensely conservative village, and about many ways that GRAVIS has made the desert bloom. But beyond the things we did that day, I experienced something that I have a hard time putting into words. In trying to describe it I told my dearest friends and family that it was the closest I would ever come to feeling like I was in the presence of a saint.

It was feeling the essence of someone whose total being was about the greater good and never herself. Someone totally comfortable with who she was, who understood all that GRAVIS had accomplished, but never felt the impulse to promote her own contributions. It was looking into the eyes of everyone who knew her and seeing great respect - and also seeing love. Over the course of the day she shared her story, and despite her modesty, I learned much about bravery and selflessness and deep dedication to mission. I was embarrassed when I was treated as a celebrity of sorts at a local Government school where the children had never met a Westerner before. Suddenly, I was in all the photos of the launch of the health education program. Shashi Ji should have been the one celebrated, but I feel confident that never would have occurred to her.

On the mantle of my living room there is a daily reminder of Shashi Ji, a colorful sculpture of a spice grinder made of paper made by women in the GRAVIS project. It is beauty for what it is and what it represents to the

A life with a message

village. It is beauty because it reminds me of Shashi Ji. I had the joy of meeting Shashi Ji again last winter when I returned to Jodhpur – of being in that presence, never imagining that it would be the last time. I'm still not fully understanding how it could be possible that she is not there guiding GRAVIS. Some losses just take longer to understand in your soul. I am Jewish and upon the death of someone dear we say, "May her memory be a blessing." I know Shashi's memory and her legacy are indeed a great blessing.

Shereen Arent, US

Ms. Shereen Arent is a lawyer from Washington DC area and is associated with several organisations and is a GRAVIS friend.

- 132 -

My memories of Shashi Tyagi:

I met Shashi Ji in early 1990's at a friend's house in Seattle and was immediately impressed with her dedication to help the poor in the villages of Rajasthan. Our first project with GRAVIS organization was about leather works training and marketing project in Rajasthan from 1989-94. Since then, we have had a long association with GRAVIS on a variety of projects; stone quarry worker rehabilitation, water resource management, skill training for rural women and children's health care. Our recent association has been in agricultural improvements, building *taankas* for rainwater collection and bio sand water filters.

During all this time, Shashi Ji has been in close touch with us and enriched our lives by her presence. In 2015, my wife and I visited her in Jodhpur. Even though she had just returned from along trip back from a village, she was keen to take us there to show the progress on a project. Her drive and enthusiasm was something we all admired. We'll certainly miss her divine presence.

Shimoga Srinath, US

Mr. Shimoga Srinath is a volunteer for People for Progress in India (PPI) and a long-time GRAVIS friend.

- 133 -

Spirit of service

Shashi Ji was known as Behan Ji by her colleagues. She was a strong pillar of GRAVIS and was awarded with Jamnalal Bajaj Award in 2017. I first met her in 2000. Her personality was like her name, like a moon that spreads light all over.

She was always there with all her colleagues in their joy and sorrow. In her leadership, GRAVIS did exemplary work on education, health and water. I salute her, her woman power and her spirit of service.

Shri Kant, India

Sh. Shri Kant is a part of GRAVIS team for about 20 years.

- 134 -

Long association

I have been associated with GRAVIS since 1985. With GRAVIS, I played different roles of teaching, project supervision and of vocational trainer. I learnt a lot from both Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji. I feel indebted to both Tyagi Ji and Shashi Ji for their contribution in social development. My sincere tribute to Shashi Ji's soul.

Simartha Ram Pathik, India

Sh. Simartha Ram Pathik is a past GRAVIS team member and the Founder of Samaj Evam Paryavaran Sansthan.

- 135 -

Shashi Ji's powerful words are a guidance

In the last week of April 2013 IDEX, now Thousand Currents, organized agro-ecology learning exchange programme in Jodhpur, Rajasthan. Thousand Currents, long term partner GRAVIS hosted the programme.

Therefore, in order to participate in the programme, I travelled from Nepal and visited GRAVIS Field Center at Jelu-Gagadi and two other villages of Rajasthan namely Bhamboo ki Dhani village and Govindpura village where GRAVIS was doing different works. We observed different programmes on health, women's empowerment, income generation,

water resource development and agriculture led by the communities that GRAVIS was serving.

There were so many similarities between GRAVIS work and the work done by my organization, Nari Chetana Kendra Nepal (WACN) in Nepal. I was so much impressed by GRAVIS work specially the water management work, construction of *taanka* and GRAVIS hospital. During the field visit, I found that the community was very happy with GRAVIS work and showing their gratitude specially to the Tyagi family. Until that time I knew only about my friend Prakash from Tyagi family. Therefore, I was very excited to meet Shashi Ji.

Finally, on the third day of the learning exchange my wish turned into reality as we were able to meet her. That was the first and the last meeting of mine with Shashi Ji. Even though I met her only once, that one meeting has left such a deep impression on my mind. She was very simple from outside and very strong woman leader from inside. She was probably the eldest person I met at the event, but she had the unique personality and glow which was attracting me towards her. Her lifelong commitment for her work and sacrifice was clearly seen in her personality.

All the work I saw during my three days visit to GRAVIS was an evidence of Shashi Ji's dedication and commitment to uplift the economically and socially disadvantaged people and region. For a person like me who was just stepping in social work at that time, her words were not just words, for me it was a guidance. I am grateful to Shashi Ji for her powerful words, and I personally feel that everyone who knows her, is deeply shocked and saddened as the face of vibrant community leader is no more. My condolences to the family of late Shashi Ji and indeed the GRAVIS community. I pray to the Almighty to let her soul rest in eternal peace.

Srijana Poudel, Nepal

Ms. Srijana Poudel is the President of Nari Chetana Kendra, Nepal (WACN)

Shashi Tyagi - my Aunt

Shashi Tyagi was my Mosi - (Aunty). I have many wonderful experiences of life with her and Uncle Ji - Laxmi Chand Tyagi. Her life was a blessing, her memories are a treasure. Before marriage, she used to take us to market often. Photograph shoot was a costly affair during that time. But she loved us so much that we have lots of photographs together of that time. She was very studious, bold and dynamic.

In 1968, she got married to Laxmi Chand Tyagi (Uncle Ji) who belonged to a very well to do family. But Uncle Ji was Gandhian and my Aunty had also opted Gandhian way of living for upliftment of mankind. In 1970, Abha was born at our house in Delhi. I along with my elder brother used to take food to the hospital for Aunty. Thereafter, Aunty took me with her to Banwasi Sewa Ashram, Mirzapur, UP. It was very difficult place, her house was of *khapral* (tile) roofed hut. Toilet was very far away. No electricity. Danger of wild animals was always there. They were working for deprived *aadivasi* (forest dwellers). Our hut was next door to Ragini Aunty (Prem Bhai and Dr. Ragini - Chief functionaries of *Ashram*). One day, our hut caught fire which was controlled with great efforts. I recollect there was a film on activities of *Ashram*. Aunty taught *aadivasi* children in school. She was very friendly with these children. Aunty's kind and friendly nature made Ragini Aunty, Prem Bhai, Ramanuj Uncle, Harnand Uncle, Zakaula, Guruji and Maink Dada (these are few name I remember now) very affectionate towards her. Prakash was born in *Ashram's* hospital. My mother came to take care of Aunty. She insisted her to come to Delhi with us but she gracefully refused. She had totally adopted the village lifestyle.

Recently during my visit to Jodhpur, she took my family to Gagadi, I was surprised to see that all deserted area had turned into green with GRAVIS efforts. My kids had mesmerising experience of sleeping under open sky and watching stars and of listening stories from Aunty. She took us to various development projects. She was connected with the community by heart.

We learned a lot from her. In Gandhi Nidhi and Gandhi Peace Foundation, she was very popular. When people came to know that she is my Aunty, many of them used to tell me their various heart touching experience with her. She was very much concerned about every relative in our family. She used to visit them and keep in touch by phone with everyone. I have spiritual bonding with her, we both discussed family matters, politics and social issues.

A life with a message

I am a naturopathy expert. She always referred me as Doctor *Sahib*, I used to tell her that I am not Doctor but she used to say that you are treating people without medicine so you are a real Doctor. I learned a lot from her apart from compassion, empathy, leadership, the most important thing that I learnt is honesty.

Aunty, we all will miss you, every single moment. Your enduring smile, laughter, caring concerns for everyone and all, keep us going strong and inspired. We cherish the memories and virtues you taught us through your actions. We all are proud that we are part of Shashi Tyagi and L. C. Tyagi's family.

Sunil Tyagi, India

Sh. Sunil Tyagi lives and works in Delhi and is a relative of Shashi Ji.

- 137 -

Memories of my dear friend - Shashi Ji

Shashi Ji and I met through the GRAVIS - IDEX connection (IDEX is the International Development Exchange, renamed as Thousand Currents). In 1998, as an IDEX volunteer, I sought a partner to visit during a planned trip to India, and that is how I first came to know Shashi. Although we met through Shashi's work with GRAVIS, our relationship developed as a personal friendship. Over the years I saw Shashi a number of times in Jodhpur but more often when she stayed with my husband and me in our home in San Francisco.

On that first trip to India, Shashi invited me to stay with her and her husband in Jodhpur. She took me out to the villages where GRAVIS worked, and I was immediately impressed with the way Shashi interacted with the people. They clearly held her in high regard, and I don't think I had ever been with anyone who had such a sense of purpose and a clear impact on people.

A few memories really stand out from that first trip. In one very small and dark home that we visited, a young mother was ill. There was a lot of discussion about how to handle the situation. I couldn't understand a word since it was not in English, but I could pick up the resistance in the family to Shashi's suggestions. Eventually they agreed to move the ill woman's bed outside so that she could get the benefit of fresh air and sunshine - a simple treatment plan. Maybe it helped, maybe it didn't, but there weren't many options at that moment, in that place, for that young

woman. My sense at the time was that Shashi had helped the family make a shift in ways beyond how they were addressing that particular issue. Another memory from that trip was sitting with Shashi one evening in a large circle of village members. Shashi wanted to make sure that the women in the group participated, so she insisted that everyone be heard, even if it was just to sing a song. That is exactly what one woman did, and it clearly took courage on her part to do it.

I also have some lovely memories of Shashi interacting with children. One time when Shashi was staying with me and my husband in San Francisco, she had a free morning, which was very unusual. We decided to visit the 4th grade class where my daughter taught. When Shashi told the children that she was from India, one little boy piped up that his parents were from India too. Shashi responded with her usual warmth and empathy, and I'm certain it was a day that child will remember with delight and pride.

My last time with Shashi was in 2018 when she came to the San Francisco Bay Area for activities commemorating the 150th Birth Anniversary of Gandhi and Kasturba. Shashi had many meetings with all kinds of important contacts. Friends flew in from all over the U.S. to see her. On the last Sunday she was here, Shashi made sure to be back at my house in time to join a birthday celebration in my family. I was really moved by her doing this. Shashi had an amazing capacity to balance a life of important and critical work all over the world with a deep connection to family and friends, and I am grateful to have been part of her circle.

Susan Kahn, US

Ms. Susan Kahn is a social worker from California and has been associated with several non – profits. A close friend of Shashi Ji.

Kindness and humility can be the most transformative tools

“A kind, gentle yet powerful force of light,” is how Thousand Currents' Director of Grassroots Partnerships Katherine Zavala describes her memories of Shashi Tyagi. Throughout her life, Shashi Ji exemplified the discipline of long-term commitment and the practice of deep listening to build trust, setting the ground for relationships and enabling opportunities for transformation. These values are still intact at Thousand Currents today, due in no small part to Shashi Ji's influential legacy.

A life with a message

Shashi Ji has been an integral part of the Thousand Currents ecosystem for more than 20 years, beginning with GRAVIS' partnership in 1999. She served on Thousand Currents' Board, participated and presented at multiple key events, and was a faculty member for the Thousand Currents Academy in 2015. Academy participants-including philanthropists, foundation staff, and social entrepreneurs-were inspired by her life story and took those learning's back to each of their respective organizations.

Because of her long relationship with Thousand Currents, we would often hear stories about her powerful leadership through her patient presence and deep listening in rural communities, her long-term commitment to community-driven activism, and how she visibilized women's essential roles in building community.

We heard about how she once stood before an angry male mob opposed to cross caste organizing, and asked them to think about their collective future and well being for all. Despite the difficulties women face in the Thar Desert, she persevered and led by example, showing the villagers that a woman could stand up and speak on her own behalf. Today, many locals cite her fortitude as the reason for change in their own communities.

“Shashi Ji is one of Thousand Currents' greatest teachers who has been integral to our development and transformation as an organization. I, we, will continue to be guided by her lifelong enactment of solidarity with the oppressed, leadership grounded upon humility, discipline and integrity, and her unwavering commitment to and belief in human transformation,” shares Solome Lemma, Thousand Currents' Executive Director.

Shashi Ji continues to be an inspiration to the people of the Thar desert and so many others who are inspired by her bravery. She remains a mentor and teacher for many current and former Thousand Currents staff and Board members, each of whom have been transformed by every interaction with her. As she transitions from this life, we remember her lifelong commitment to selfless service and solidarity, her humility, and her indelible spirit. We are grateful for her teachings and the wisdom she imparted to all of us, and will continue to be nourished by her legacy.

Shashi's association with Thousand Currents

Shashi Ji has been an integral part of the Thousand Currents ecosystem for more than 20 years, beginning with GRAVIS' partnership in 1999. She was a Board Member, Academy Faculty Member in 2015, and a grassroots leader of GRAVIS, a long-time Thousand Currents partner.

Thousand Currents Team, US

Thousand Currents is a California based non-profit organization and has been a partner and supporter of GRAVIS for nearly 30 years.

- 139 -

She wrote my life

What can I write about somebody who wrote me and my life. Shashi Ji was a unique human being, with whom many of us related like being a mother. Her heart was always with poor, destitute and diseased people and she helped them her whole life.

Her simplicity, humanity and courage were exemplary and she was known as Amma in Thar Desert. Her demise is a big loss for poor people. I am fortunate that I am following her path and have highest respect for her. She will always be there in my heart.

Tej Karan Ratnoo, India

Sh. Tej Karan Ratnoo has been a part of GRAVIS team for about 15 years.

- 140 -

Fond memories of Shashi Ji from a visit to GRAVIS from Seattle

My husband and I are volunteers with People for Progress in India (PPI) in Seattle, which has had a long association with GRAVIS. We first met Shashi Ji in 2006 during her visit to Seattle. We had just started to volunteer for PPI and were inspired by GRAVIS's work in water resources in the Thar Desert. Over the years, we learned more about GRAVIS's work through PPI supported projects. Our fondest memories of Shashi Ji are from February 2016 when we visited GRAVIS and Shashi Ji took us on a multi-day tour of GRAVIS field centers to witness their work in the Thar Desert.

On this visit, we were accompanied by members from two PPI-supported NGOs in Maharashtra, who were also interested in learning about GRAVIS's work. It was a remarkable learning opportunity for all of us, with Shashi Ji as our guide. We experienced first-hand GRAVIS's grassroots work in remote villages in the Thar Desert. We saw how rainwater capturing *taankas* (underground tanks) provided drinking water for families, *khadins* (strategically placed embankments in fields) helped improve soil moisture for farming, and *naadis* (ponds) provided water for entire villages. We also saw the manufacture, installation, and use bio-sand filters for clean drinking water, an initiative that PPI helped develop and support.

Shashi Ji took us to an elementary school for children of mineworkers, and several other schools. She was especially proud of girls who graduated eighth grade. While visiting a farm, we met a young woman studying for her B.A. in Jodhpur, who was back to help her family with *rabi* planting.

Over our two-day visit, we also attended several meetings of village developments committees (VDCs) and saw how decisions were made collaboratively by villagers, guided by GRAVIS field workers. The VDCs are a unique aspect of the way GRAVIS works in the community and we felt that it is one reason why GRAVIS's work is so effective and sustainable.

Throughout our visit, we were struck by Shashi Ji's deep links with the villagers, and the warmth and humility with which she connected with them. Her simple life-style, her capacity for hard work, and her tenacity were very inspiring. She encouraged young women to give up the veil that covers the face of married women in Rajasthan, while being mindful of the deep-rooted traditions in the villages. We also shared many light moments with Shashi Ji during our trip, as all of us stayed together at a field center. The last night of our stay, Shashi Ji invited a troupe of local *Langha* performers, who shared with us their wonderful traditional music and dance.

We are deeply saddened by Shashi Ji's passing but there is solace in knowing that GRAVIS is in good hands, and that the work started by Shashi Ji and L.C. Tyagi Ji not only continues but has expanded over the years. We send our very best wishes to Prakash and family and to the GRAVIS community.

Vandana Datye and Satish Thatte, US

Ms. Vandana Datye and Mr. Satish Thatte are associated with People for Progress in India, Seattle, WA, US and are GRAVIS friends.

Naman to Amma

She was a vibrant soul, one who literally lit up the entire room whenever she entered. She was full of joy and always eager to help out, no matter what the problem was. Whenever I had communications with Amma, they were very peaceful, solution giving and meaningful. Last conversation I had with her is still in my ears and became suddenly a memory, as it was hard to believe that she is not around physically any more after few days. I was going through hardest time of my life and she passed away during the same time.

It was a disaster to hear from family that she is no more with us. I have a positive feeling, that her soul is always around us and always protecting us. It's easy to live with this belief. I am blessed to know her for last 2 decades. I had a special connection of love, respect and concern with her. She was part of family. Amma was my sister's mother-in-law. Her passing away was the loss for the whole family. She was one kind generous person in my life I lost with shock. It's hard to describe her qualities in words.. But as soon as her thought comes in mind, one word for her is "A Giver". She was a giver, a giver of love, affection and materialistic things. She was her own kind of content soul on earth. I still have a winter cap with me, made by her hands. I felt tears in my eyes while thinking about her and that is the real earning of a "worth lived life." In her conversations, she shared about love of travel, and her experience and stories collected, explored from different parts of the world. She was an outstanding, dignified woman who had a passion for life. My lasting memories of her are simple: a hardworking, passionate figure of strength during tough times. It is a great privilege to write about Amma and to express the sadness I have over her loss.

Besides that, Amma, Thank you for everything you have given, your time and the warmth shared during your stay on earth. Naman and respect for you always, You will be missed dearly.

Vandana Singh, US

Ms. Vandana Singh lives and works in California and is a relative of Shashi Ji.

- 142 -

My gratitude

First, I pay floral tributes to Shashi Ji and Tyagi ji. I spent great moments of my life with them and whatever I am today; both Shashi Ji and Tyagi ji had a great contribution in that. I was introduced to them by my grandfather - Dr. Hatheela - who was a close friend to them. In 1996, I started working with GRAVIS and I am still continuing.

In GRAVIS, every worker is treated like a family member. Shashi Ji always took care of all families working with GRAVIS. She was always there for everyone in times of difficulty. Shashi Ji also was an impactful educator and believed in equality among castes.

It is very difficult for me to summarise my feelings in limited words about Shashi Ji. On 14th November 2020, on the day of Diwali, she left us. I and

A life with a message

my wife were deeply pained and did not light our home as we felt like losing our own mother.

I am grateful to Shashi Ji and Tyagi Ji for their contribution in my life and I pay my tributes to them.

Varun Sharma, India

Sh. Varun Sharma is working with GRAVIS as a Finance Officer since late 1990's.

- 143 -

Encouraging guide

I met Shashi Ji in 2009, when I started working with GRAVIS. She was simple with multi dimensional talent and was a supporter of poor people. She always encouraged me and used to tell me that I can do great work for women.

In 2014, my husband was hospitalized. I was very disturbed and wanted to leave GRAVIS. Shashi Ji enhanced my confidence and requested me to continue. Later on, I continued working with GRAVIS and learnt a lot from her. I will never forget her and it was always my great honor that I worked with her.

Veena Mathur, India

Smt. Veena Mathur is a part of GRAVIS team for over 10 years .

- 144 -

Shashi Ji – my Aunt and teacher

My life is full of memories of Shashi Ji (Chachi Ji). As I think of her, an image of love, confidence, clad in *khadi* clothes appears in my moist eyes. Since childhood, she was my teacher and neighbor.

As a teacher, she was very loving to every child regardless of who he or she was. She used to tell stories to children and was very playfull. I remember that when I was a child, I used to get angry at home and would go to a forest to live there forever. Chachi Ji would always find me, would tell me stories and would bring me back home. Her stories were very comforting.

Later on, Chachi Ji and Tyagi Ji moved to Rajasthan to work with rural poor. They always complimented each other and lived a life of hardship for those

in need. I remember Chachi Ji donating her kidney to save her husband. When my mother was ill, she came to Varansi and gave us strength.

Tyagi Ji was a soft speaking and serious person. Chachi Ji was jolly and loving and was very caring for those who she knew. She used to remember everyone who she met by name and always kept in touch with all people, which was her great ability. In 2017, she was awarded with Jamnalal Bajaj Award also. She had a confident and untiring personality, who used to make a family everywhere.

In the last couple of years, she had an “ulcerative colitis” but she continued communicating with everyone. I will always regret that in the last months of her life, I could not meet her because of COVID-19 lockdown. Some people leave this world leaving a vacuum which can never be filled. I pay my heartfelt tributes.

Vibha Prem, India

Dr. Vibha Prem is a gynaecologist and has been close to Shashi Ji since her childhood.

- 145 -

Forever changed

I was invited to India in 2020 by Jean Boulton-Reynolds and Denis Barrow, my husband's mother and stepfather. They regularly visited Rajasthan as part of their work with the St. Clare and St. Francis Trust, and on their last visit Shashi Ji had been telling them about a plan to host events at each of the GRAVIS Skills Centres for International Women's Day, where hundreds of women and their daughters would come together to document and celebrate their journey towards empowerment. Driving equality is something I have always been passionate about, and so I was thrilled to have the chance to be involved in the event.

I had never been to India before and was instantly taken by its vibrancy, but even more so by its wonderful people. I had heard so much about Shashi Ji from Jean and Denis, but nothing could have quite prepared me for meeting her face to face. As soon as we met, I was humbled by her openness and kindness. Despite the language barrier, she was extremely easy to talk to. On the journey to the Skills Centre, Shashi Ji told me all about the incredible work that happens there. Her story was phenomenal, and she spoke with a level of grace and passion that I had never experienced before, and probably never will again.

A life with a message

Before we began the day's festivities, I was taken on a tour of the Centre's site, meeting some of the teachers and seeing the classrooms where the girls learnt computer skills, sewing, how to prepare spices, and how to read and write. The walls were adorned with pictures of inspirational Indian women such as astronaut and engineer Kalpana Chawla, Olympic sprinter Dutee Chand, former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and many female heroes from the Skills Centre itself that spend their time working with the students, or tirelessly meeting with parents in the local villages to encourage them to allow their girls access to the education on offer.

One hundred and ninety-eight men and women attended that celebration on International Women's Day, and the energy was palpable, yet when Shashi Ji rose to speak it fell silent. I could sense the love and respect for her from everyone attending. She reminded us all why we were there, breaking occasionally for the women to clap and cheer. Then I and Jean each took a turn on the podium to talk about our careers, our life journeys, and to provide words of inspiration. Both Jean and I work in environments where women are significantly under-represented, and both of our stories echoed the same sentiment—that being kind and caring is not a sign of weakness but rather a sign of great power. This is something I have never seen represented more clearly than in Shashi Ji herself.

As we drove away and I watched the Skills Centre disappear into the distance, I was flooded with emotion. I was in absolute awe of Shashi Ji and her family for the years of hard work, pain, and love they had poured in to improving the lives of thousands of people across India.

I was changed forever by my experience, and a huge part of that was because of Shashi Ji. I still regularly wear the beautiful blue scarf she gifted to me just before I left, and even though I only met her briefly she will always remain a role model and an inspiration to me.

Vicki Reynolds, UK

Ms. Vicki Reynolds is a Digital Technology Expert and is a GRAVIS friend and supporter.

- 146 -

Fond memories

Shashi Ji was my Chachi Ji and I have countless memories and inspiration from her life. I must have been about 5 years old, when Chachi Ji brought me to Banwasi Seva Ashram. Here I grew up for a while and learnt important lessons of my life. I joined GRAVIS team as a young man in early 1980s'.

I saw the struggle of early days and learnt from the simplicity and moral values of both Chachi Ji and Chacha Ji. They enabled me to become what I am today. Because of Chachi Ji, I understood the value of honesty, sincerity and discipline. I received various training on health and social work. In Chachi Ji's leadership, GRAVIS did great work for poor and needy.

Chachi Ji was like a parent to me and her memories will always be there in my heart for the rest of my life.

Vinod Kumar, India

Sh. Vinod Kumar is a part of GRAVIS team for over 35 years

- 147 -

Source of inspiration

A mother has a very large heart in which she can accommodate not only the whole world but the whole universe. I was very fortunate that I received love of two mothers – my own mother and Shashi Ji. However I could not become Krishna like the history says. I continue to be mesmerized with the love and affection that I received from Shashi Ji.

I met her for the first time in a meeting with Dr. Subba Rao. Her words echo in my ears- "Vishal, take out all negativity from your mind and sail on hope'. I enjoyed her company immensely. When she knew that I am from Bagpath, she was very happy and said, she also has connectivity over there. Then, whenever she used to come to Delhi, she would call me and I would immediately go and visit her. Whenever she introduced me to a new person, she would do so in a way as if I am her son. She would always say that, I have the potential of doing a lot of good work. It is a co- incidence that the name of my two mothers was the same – Shashi.

Once, she suggested that I may travel with her to the United States. Unfortunately, that could not happen. She would always bring gifts for me from abroad. When I used to say how I can pay, she would laugh and say

A life with a message

you cannot pay to your mother. Once, we were in Jaipur for a programme of Rajasthan Chief Minister and there were arrangements to stay in a five star hotel. However, she asked me to come to her daughter's home to stay instead. I felt like a family member.

I can write my memories of Shashi Ji forever. To follow her path in life will be a true tribute.

Vishal Jain, India

Sh. Vishal Jain is a journalist and social activist from U.P., India and was close to Shashi Ji.

- 148 -

Great motivation

In 2012 I, my wife – Dr. Clare Glendening and her sister Madeliene Floresis had visited GRAVIS. Dr. Madeliene had been working on biodiversity in agriculture in many countries over long time. When I had told her about GRAVIS work and its contents, she wanted to visit the projects.

During this visit, I had an opportunity of meeting Shashi Ji and of having long conversation with her. She was soft and polite and had a deep understanding of issues. I have met very few people in India, who had the depth of understanding of social issues like Shashi Ji had. She always believed that child's education in a proper manner is very important and it helps in developing a strong society. With her, I visited several schools run by her. I was amazed to see the homely atmosphere in these schools and the care given to the children.

With the help of GRAVIS, many schools were opened in remote areas of the desert. Teachers were trained on holistic education and when the school became regular, they were handed over to the Government. I was particularly impressed with the discipline and hygiene that I saw in the children. I could see children wearing clean cloths, sitting in lines and following discipline and peace. I thought that these children were much better behaved than the children of urban schools where the facilities are much better. For those who are always looking at the Government for support, there is a lesson to learn from such rural communities who are willing to work on their own. Shashi Ji led all these social change programmes with great commitment and intelligence. She also motivated her children to work for social causes.

In a very difficult area, GRAVIS has been working on water security, agriculture, animal husbandry, economic development and health care. They are running a very successful hospital also and have created a model of water management and rural economic development.

Prakash Tyagi could have worked in any developed country of the world but he chose to continue working on the legacy of his parents in India. I salute such sacrifices and pay tribute to the parents who are such a motivation. My respectful tribute to Shashi Ji.

Vivek Samajik Yayavar, Australia

Mr. Vivek Samajik Yayavar is an engineer and journalist living and working in Australia. He is a close friend of GRAVIS.

- 149 -

Shashi Ji Tyagi - From long foot marches to giant leaps in the Thar Desert

By all accounts, Shashi Ji was an extraordinary woman and an inspiration to all who met, knew, or worked with her. As her son, Prakash, wrote, Shashi Ji had few possessions, and yet the richness of her character and example engendered deep love and appreciation from people near and far. I, like others, was influenced through working with her, and her immense example of Gandhian principles in action, her energy and generosity. How does one find the words to describe an Indian woman of her generation who exhibited such great vision, courage, determination, love of humanity, and accomplished so much? And how does one enumerate how much she influenced countless women, and men, of every generation?

I had the honor of meeting Shashi Ji and supporting the work of GRAVIS as a past program director at Thousand Currents. Even before meeting her, her reputation was legendary. The stories of Shashi Ji, and her husband L.C. Tyagi, have been passed down to each new set of staff where I worked. One of the most notable is about the courage and leadership she exhibited when faced by an angry mob of villagers who had burned down her dwelling for the cross-caste organizing she and her husband were engaging in. Her passionate words calmed the crowd down, and she was able to get a strong message of justice across. From small seeds of courage and connection, they were able to grow their work into a strong foundation based on local traditions and evolving values that now covers many communities and sectors across the Thar Desert.

Over the decades, Shashi Ji had an immense influence on Thousand Currents, an organization that promotes a transformational approach to partnership, based on solidarity between grantor and grantee, and which transcends traditional contractual practices. Shashi Ji became a board member of Thousand Currents in the late 1990s (then called IDEX) and had a strong influence on shaping the policies and strategies of the organization. Her work there leaves an internal legacy enshrined in the institutional fabric and memory, and the long-term relationship between the two organizations endures to this day.

I got to meet Shashi Ji in person for the first time during a visit to GRAVIS in 2013. GRAVIS was hosting the South Asian Agro-ecology Learning Exchange for Thousand Currents' partner groups in India and Nepal. I was a little nervous at first to meet such an inspiring leader. However, she put me at ease, was gentle and kind-and was all that I expected her to be. I got to see in person how much GRAVIS had built on her foundational work, and how far the organization had come. The programs for different groups of people and far-reaching achievements are too numerous to mention. And meeting with the women's groups that work with GRAVIS, I could see how much Shashi Ji's passion and care moved GRAVIS to have far-reaching achievements with women and girls in the areas of literacy, health, and livelihoods.

I had the pleasure of talking with Shashi Ji in detail about her work with women's empowerment and rights. In the early 1980s, she explained, the conditions of women were extremely poor on many fronts. And she had a very hard struggle for five to six years to make progress. It took great efforts to even to have women and men sit together, deal with the issues of purdah, and remove their veil for meetings. In those early days, the Tyagi's were accused of destroying families and damaging local culture through this work with women cross-caste. However, with persistent work and deep trust-building they were able to make enormous strides over the decades. Now women can vote and speak in front of meetings, and there is oftentimes 50% female leadership representation. There are numerous women's income-generating groups, and women are empowered to take greater ownership of the health and well-being of their families. Shashi Ji, I observed, was particularly encouraged by this advancement in women's empowerment and rights. Women are no longer in isolation and making great strides - all done, one can add, without destroying families or the local culture.

On the last day of the Agro-ecology Exchange in 2013, Shashi Ji surprised us with a lovely gesture. Each organization would plant a tree seedling in the Gagadi garden to commemorate the gathering, new friendships, and

the exchange of deep knowledge and wisdom. As I reflect on that day, I think of all the seeds that Shashi Ji has sown and that have grown and thrived over the decades across the Thar Desert.

We stand on the shoulders of giants, like Shashi Ji, who came before us and paved the way with great grit and determination. Shashi Ji had immense strength, foresight, and fortitude, as well as a deep well of humanity that we can all aspire to. For women, Shashi Ji paved the way in immeasurable ways. Yet, her work was never complete, as she always reminded her son, Prakash, as long as there was one more person in need. The memories of Shashi Ji and her legacy will live long—for they are truly immortal.

I send my deepest sympathies to Shashi Ji's children, grandchildren, GRAVIS staff, and Thar Desert communities for this immense loss.

Yeshica Weerasekera, Sri Lanka / US

Ms. Yeshica Weerasekera is a senior development consultant and has worked for more than 30 years for social justice in Asia and Africa.

- 150 -

Warm memories

It is with great sorrow to learn that Shashi Tyagi passed away in the end of 2020. I met Shashi in 2005 while I was HelpAge International's Tsunami Manager. That role brought me to India for work with HelpAge India in addressing the consequences of the 2004 Tsunami for States like Tamil Nadu and Kerala. In that context, we held also India-wide meetings for HelpAge and Shashi always brought up the role of women in India, from young girls to elderly women and the difficulties they had to face. I remember that she told us about the abortion practice of girl fetus and showed with figures how often that practice happened in Rajasthan State, but probably also in other Indian States. I was very impressed with Shashi's dedication to poor women's issues and felt inspired by her. So, when I had a Tsunami Programme meeting in Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu, and spoke to older people who would become owner of new fishery boats, I raised the issue why so few women were there and questioned their response that women don't fish, as older man of 80-90 years don't fish either. So I signed the project under condition that half of the boat owners would be women. Later that year, when the boats were ready for the

A life with a message

priest's blessing, I was very pleased to handover the owner certificates to groups of six people of which three were men and three were women. Those women were so happy that – through 1/6th certificate of boat ownership – they were secured of a pension for the rest of their life, as of every catch 50% is for the fishermen and 50% for the boat owners.

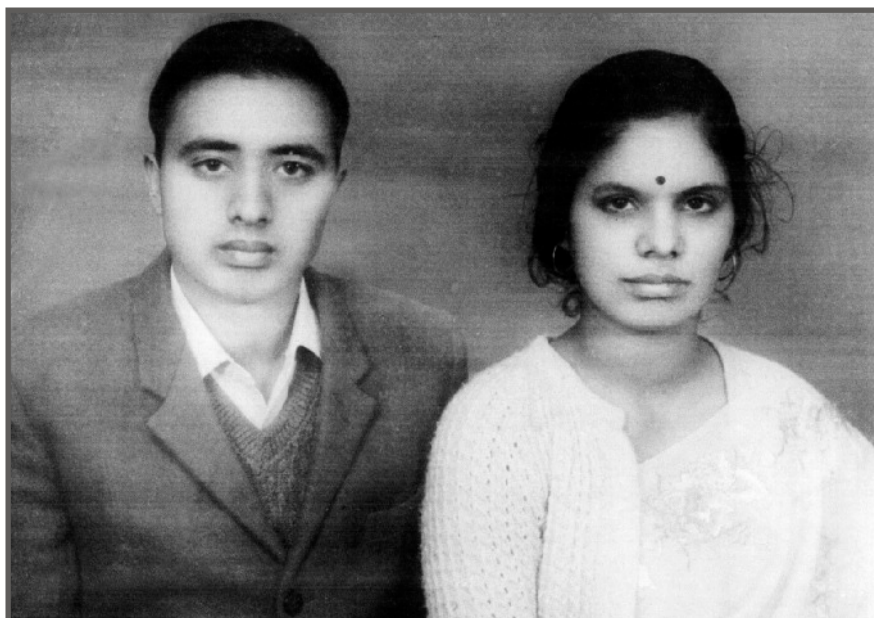
So, Shashi's legacy is widespread, but at the least also through me to poor women in Tamil Nadu and Kerala who became boat owners, for the first time in their life.

In December 2012 – when I was HelpAge International's interim Regional Director for South Asia - it was the last time that I met Shashi at a conference for older people in Jodhpur, Rajasthan. She was still very active on women's rights then, and I assume stayed like that for the rest of her life. I keep warm memories of Shashi Tyagi and wish her soul to rest in peace.

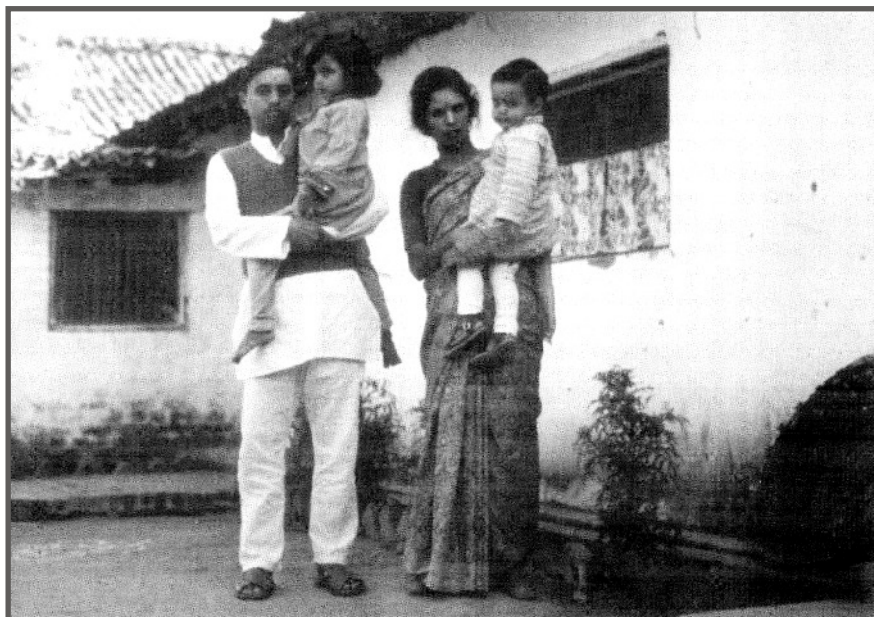
Yolanda Weldring, Netherlands

Ms. Yolanda Weldring is the Associate Director of Oxford HR Consultants and has been a GRAVIS friend for many years.

GALLERY

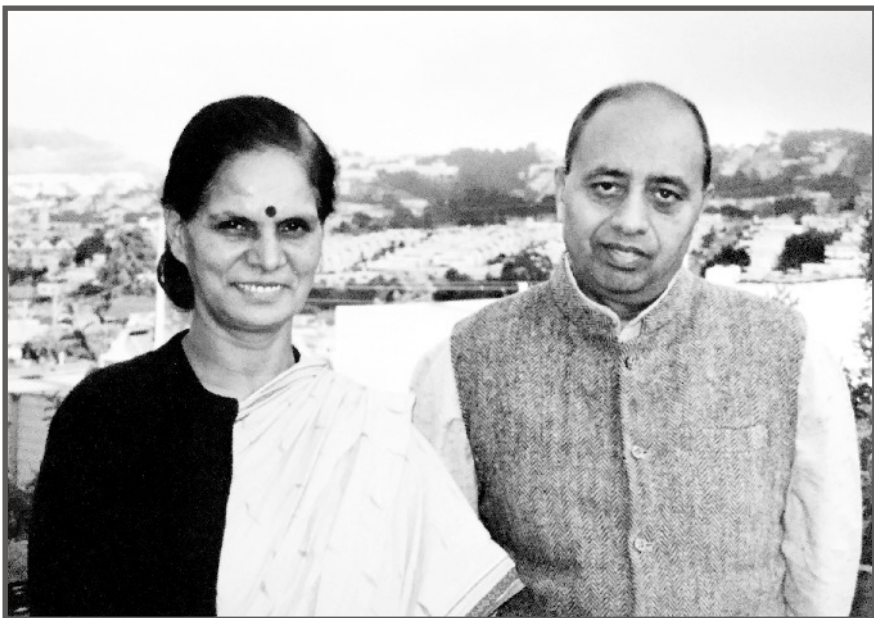


Shashi and Laxmi Chand Tyagi - younger days



Shashi Ji, Tyagi Ji and their children in 1970s

A life with a message



The Tyagi Couple



With children in a village



During a convention held at GRAVIS



A group of GRAVIS team members with Shashi Ji

A life with a message



From a meeting during old days of GRAVIS



Meeting community representatives



A group photo from an exchange meeting



Speaking in a Sarvodaya meeting



Addressing a village meeting



From a session at a UN meeting



Lighting the lamp before a meeting, with distinguished guests



Launching the renovation of a village pond, leading from the front



Receiving the Jamnalal Bajaj Award



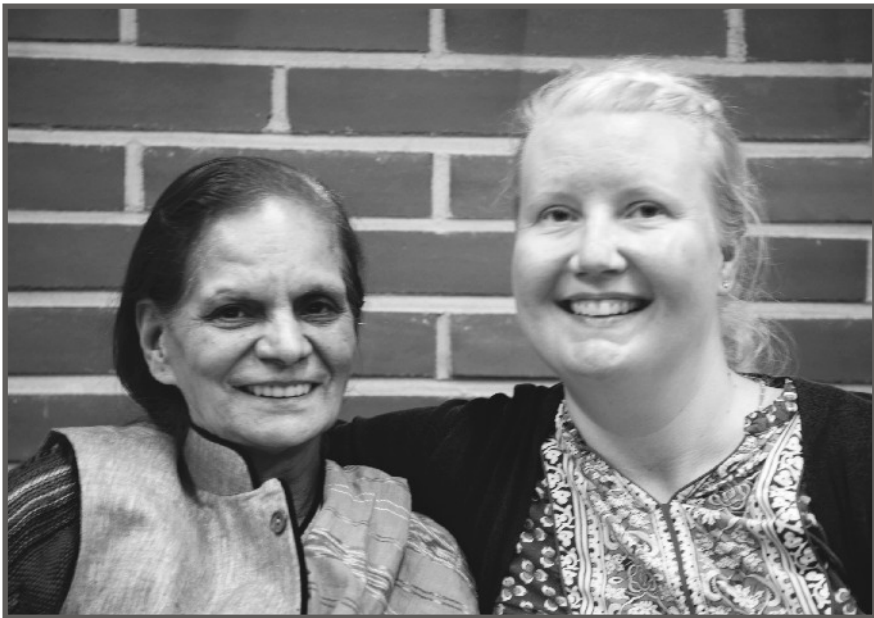
In consultation with the villagers



In London, with Tyagi Ji and friend - Peter Seddon



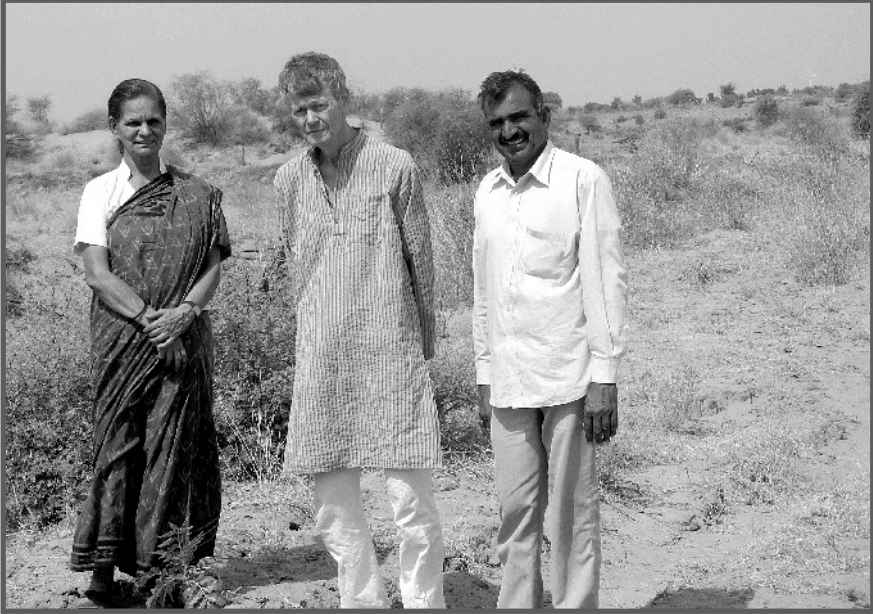
Meeting rural women



With Mari Karinen in Finland



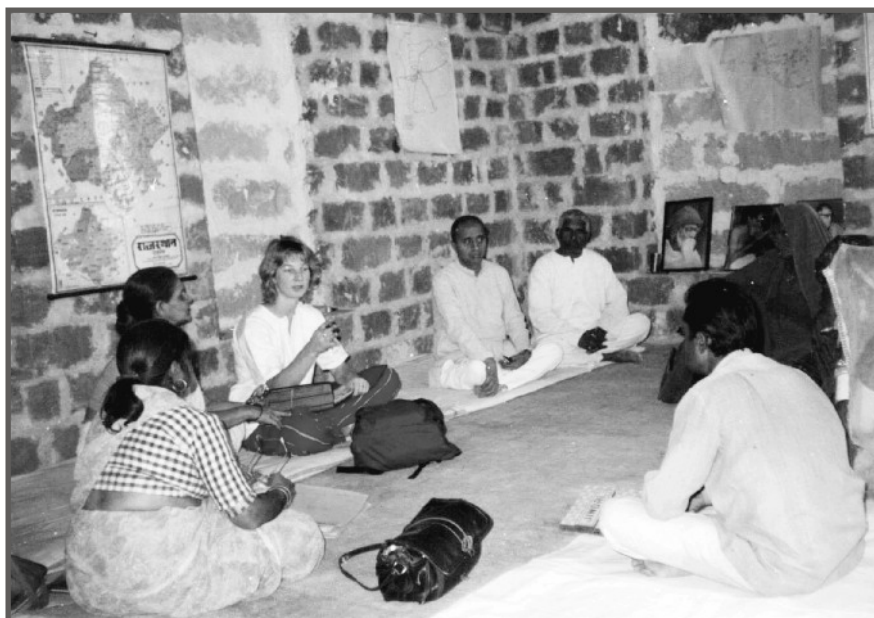
With Dr. Nicholas Grey and Dr. Vasundhara in England



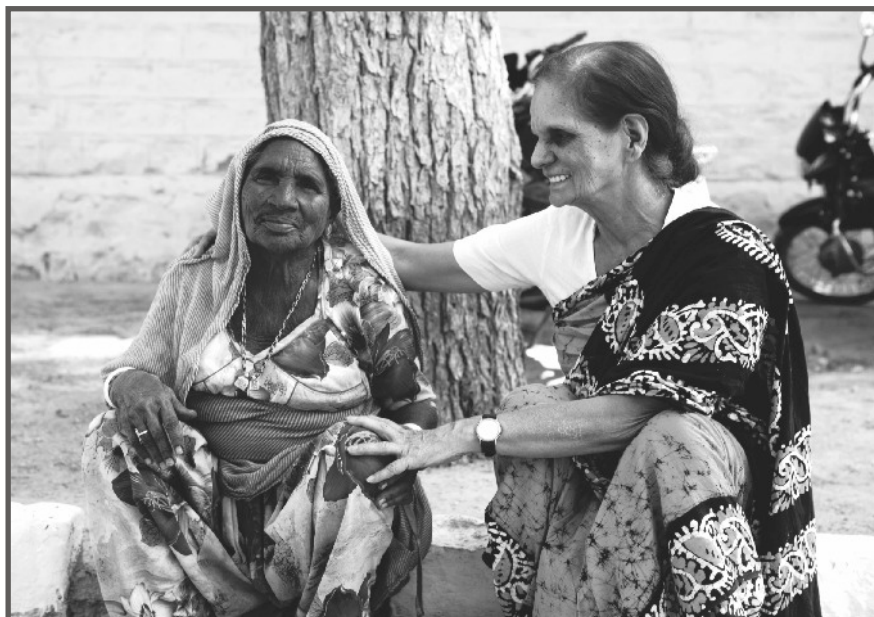
Visiting a rural farm in the Thar Desert



Speaking at the UN in New York



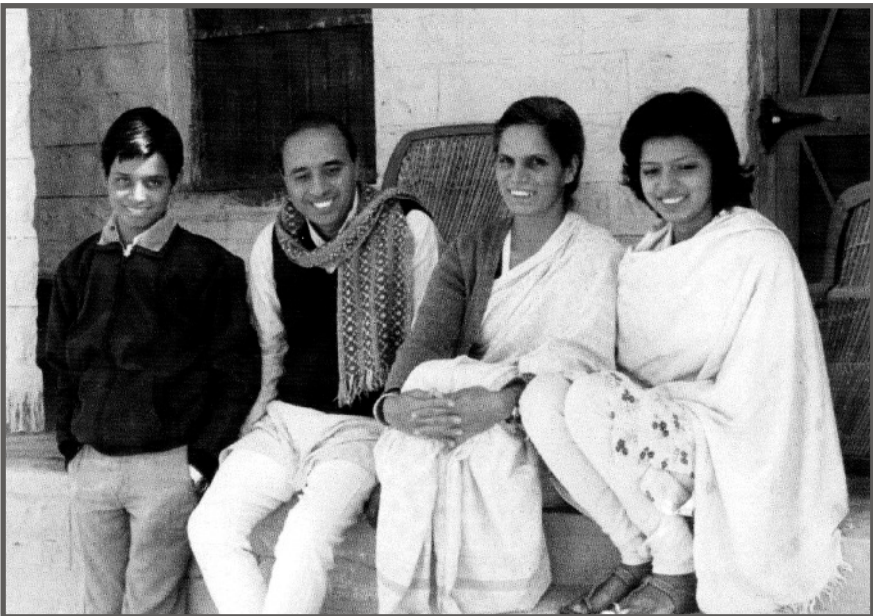
During days of constructing GRAVIS



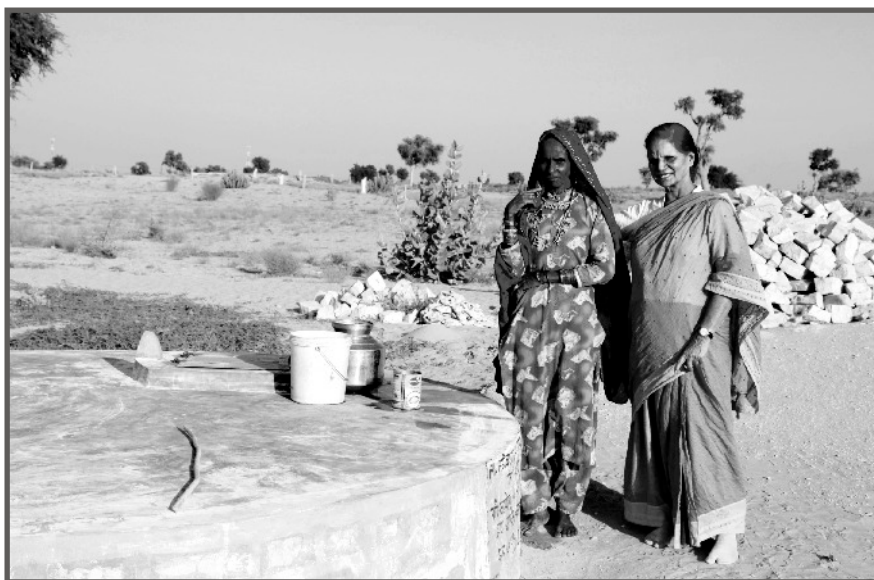
Deep bonds with local communities



With Renee Tillotson and friends in California



An old family picture



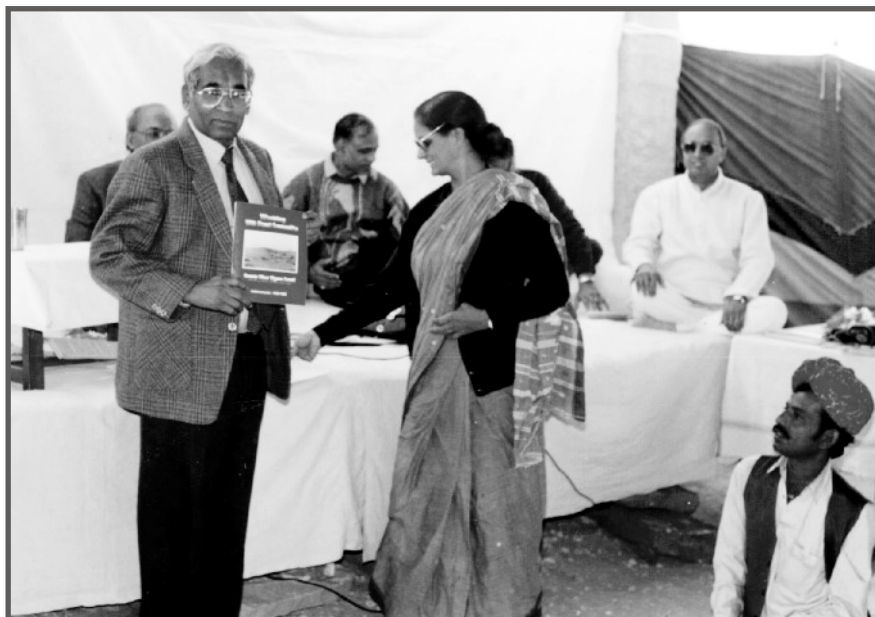
Shashi Ji with a taanka beneficiary



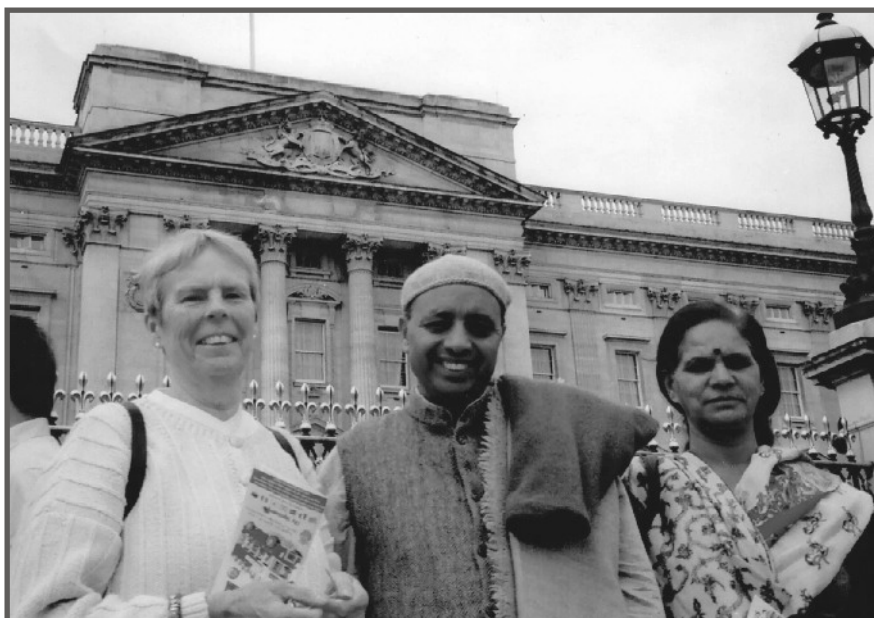
Speaking in an Award ceremony



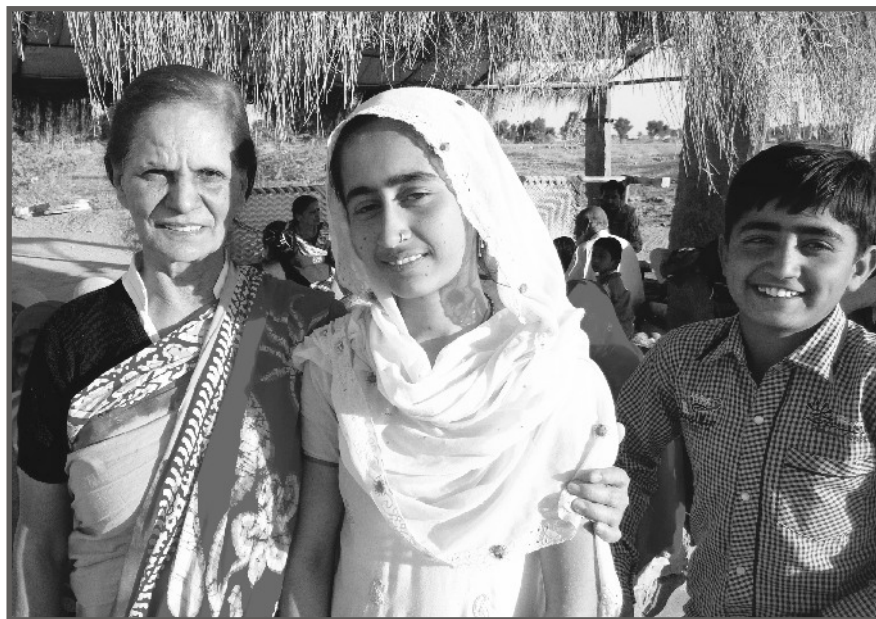
*With People for Progress in India (PPI)
visitors at GRAVIS Center*



With Sh M. L Mehta in 1990s



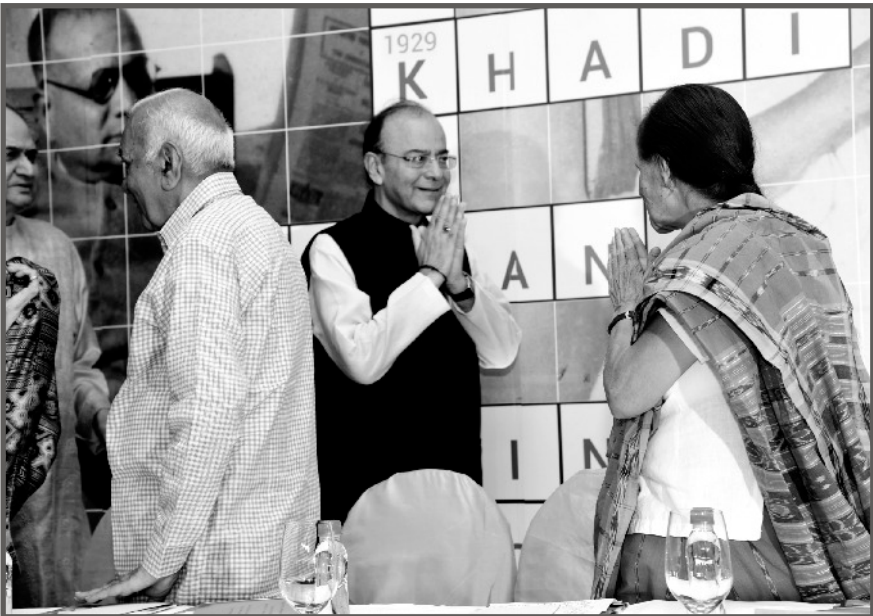
With long-time friend, Veronica



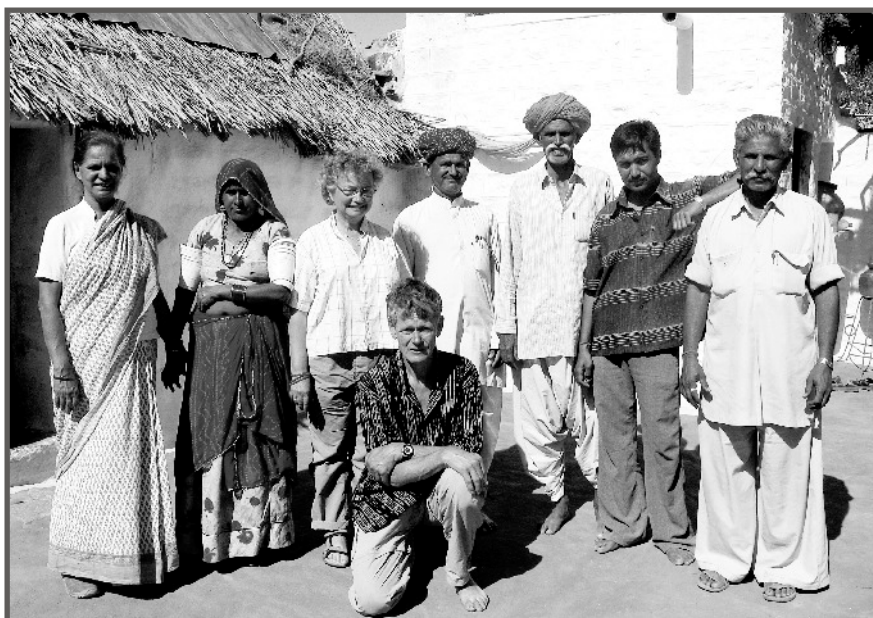
With young children in a village



With grand-daughters - Kashvi and Prisha



With Late Sh Arun Jaitley, the then Finance Minister of India



In a village with villagers, Robert and Ghislaine from Sweden



With visitors from Wells for India, UK - planting a tree in the memory of Edwad Echlin



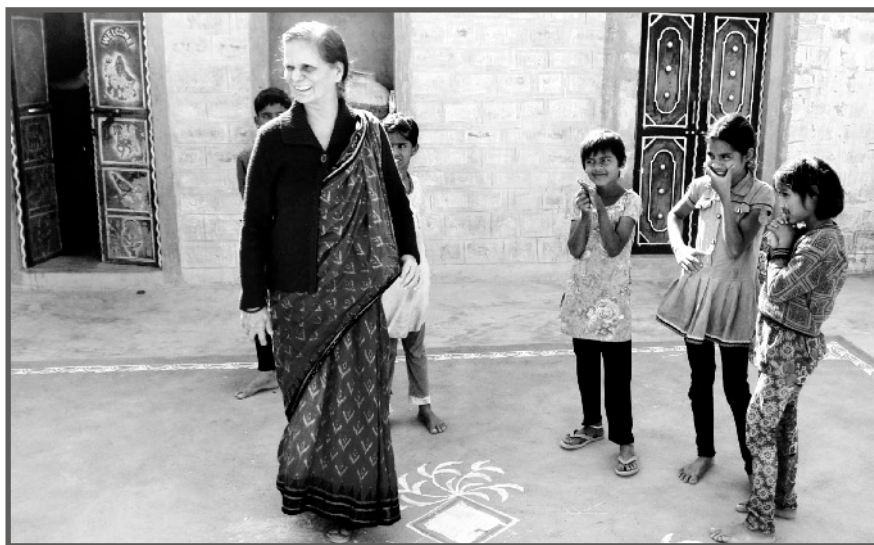
In a farm with a rural woman



Speaking to youth



Playful moments



Visiting a rural home



During a workshop at GRAVIS



In an Award function

A life with a message



With a bicycle recipient girl



Honouring an older woman



Supporting flood relief in Kerala



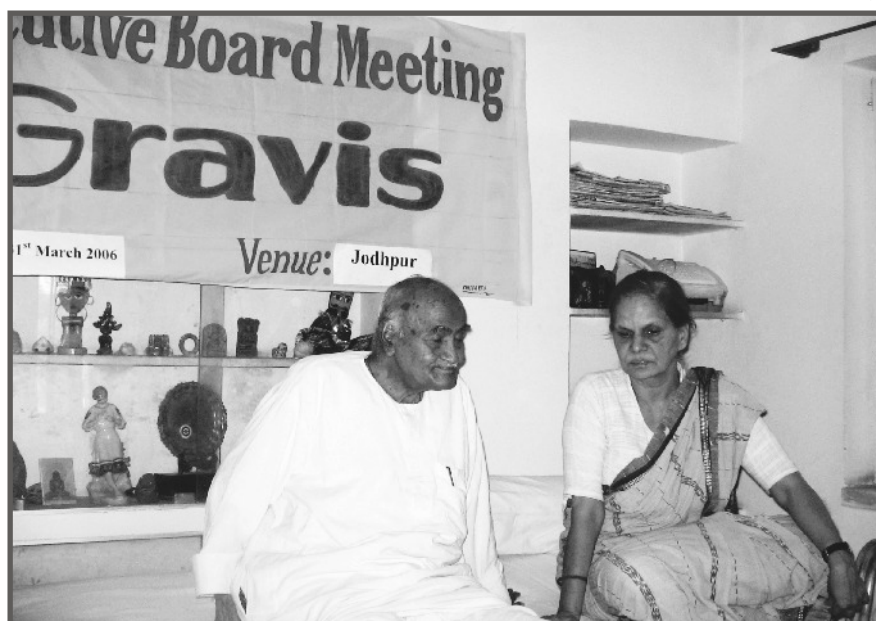
In water convention



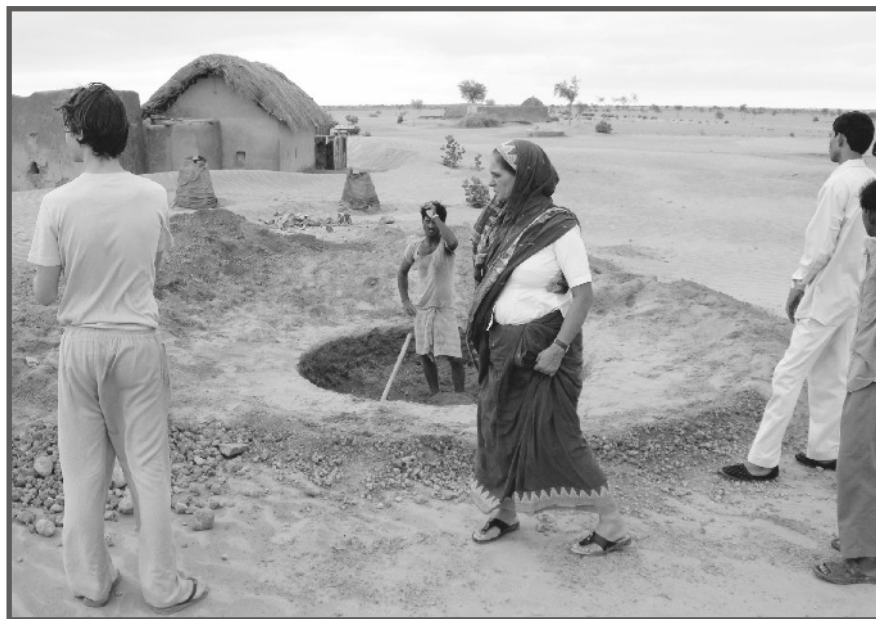
With school children



Speaking to women, along with Dr. Ragini Prem



With Bandhu Ji



Field work

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

S. No.	Name	Country
1.	Abha Sharma	India
2.	Abhay Kumar S Wayal	India
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4.	Akheraj Khatri	India
5.	Alison Maccoll	New Zealand
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7.	Ambrose Seddon	UK
8.	Angela Huggett and Jon Willis	UK
9.	Archna Kumar	India
10.	Arun Parihar	India
11.	Arun Tyagi	India
12.	Asha Bothra	India
13.	Ashok Choudhury	India
14.	Awadhesh Kumar	India
15.	Awadhesh Kumar Pandey	India
16.	Babu Lal Lakhani	India
17.	Beatrice Seddon	UK
18.	Begi Sukhani	India
19.	Ben Falk	US
20.	Ben Soltoff	US
21.	Bhai Khan	India
22.	Bhanwar Singh Chandana	India
23.	Bhura Ram Devasi	India

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24	Binoy Acharya	India
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35	Ekta Tyagi	India
36	Elizabeth Kurian	India
37	Fadhillah Hanum	Indonesia
38	Farah Khan	India
39	Fusraj Challani	India
40	Ganpat Lal Mehra	India
41	Gary Worthington	US
42	Ginny Shrivastava	India
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44	Godfred Paul	Myanmar
45	Goutam K. Gats	India
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47	Hayden Kantor	US
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50	Hemlata Yadav, Manisha, Tanvi	India
51	Hoslo Jiwa	Switzerland
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53	J. P. Gupta	India
54	Jagdish Meghwal	India
55	Jaipal Singh	India
56	Jane Kathure Biashara	Kenya
57	Jasdeep Garcha	US
58	Jassa Ram	India
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60	Jerry Folland	US
61	Jorge Santiago S.	Mexico
62	Jussi Nousiainen	Finland
63	Kalyan Singh	India
64	Kana Ram	India
65	Kishor Kumar Vyas	India
66	Krishna Joshi	India
67	Laura Paulus	Belgium
68	Leela Vyas	India
69	M.S. Boikhan	Pakistan
70	Mahendra Rajpurohit	India
71	Mahesh Pampalia	India
72	Mahipal Singh	India
73	Mahitosh Bagoria	India
74	Manju Lata Mishra	India
75	Mari Karinen	Finland

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76	Mary Tal	South Africa/Cameroon
77	Mathew Cherian	India
78	Max Wilson	UK
79	Michael Goldman	US
80	Minal Bajaj	India
81	Mira Shiva	India
82	Mridula Samvedi	India
83	Narendra Singh	India
84	Nicholas Grey and Professor Mary Grey	UK
85	Niru Hazarika	India
86	Om Prakash Sharma	India
87	Padmaja Sharma	India
88	Pawan Bhargav	India
89	Pham Thi Hoai Giang	Vietnam
90	Pratap N. Tyagi	UK
91	Prithvi Raj Sharma	US
92	R. S. Chaturvedi	India
93	R.P. Dhir	India
94	Radha Bhatt	India
95	Raheem Khan	India
96	Rahul Mishra	India
97	Rajendra Kumar and Chandrawati	India
98	Rajkamal Pareek	India
99	Raju Agarwal	Canada
100	Rakesh Kumar Kaushik	India
101	Ram Akbal singh	India

102	Ram Swarth Prasad	India
103	Rama Kant Rai	India
104	Ramavtar singh	India
105	Rambabu Bhatt	India
106	Ramesh Babu V	India
107	Ramesh Chand Sharma	India
108	Ramesh Parihar	India
109	Ranveer Singh	India
110	Ravi Kamal	India
111	Ravi Kumar	India
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113	Reverend Jean Boulton-Reynolds	UK
114	Robert and Ghislaine af Sandeberg	Sweden
115	Roshan Lal Kukreti	India
116	Ruchi Mitra	India
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118	S.M. Mohnot	India
119	Sadwbhawana Bhardwaj	Italy
120	Sandeep Nain	US
121	Sangeeta Chaturvedi	India
122	Sanjay Rai	India
123	Sanjiv Desai	India
124	Sanju Sisodia	India
125	Santosh and Pran Wahi	US
126	Sarah Hobson	US
127	Sari Nousiainen	Finland

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128	Satu Ranta-Tyrkkö	Finland
129	Sawai Singh	India
130	Sharad Jain	India
131	Shereen Arent	US
132	Shimoga Srinath	US
133	Shri Kant	India
134	Simartha Ram Pathik	India
135	Srijana Poudel	Nepal
136	Sunil Tyagi	India
137	Susan Kahn	US
138	Thousand Currents Team	US
139	Tej Karan Ratnoo	India
140	Vandana Datye and Satish Thatte	US
141	Vandana Singh	US
142	Varun Sharma	India
143	Veena Mathur	India
144	Vibha Prem	India
145	Vicki Reynolds	UK
146	Vinod Kumar	India
147	Vishal Jain	India
148	Vivek Samajik Yayavar	Australia
149	Yeshica Weerasekera	Sri Lanka / US
150	Yolanda Weldring	Netherlands

AFTERWORD

Readers may well feel that the huge number of heartfelt tributes to Shashi Ji is almost overwhelming. Yet, she clearly lived her life simply and modestly, with its paramount purpose always being that of service to others.

Fortunately, the organization she co-founded and led continues her important work, hopefully into the far future.

You may already be supporting GRAVIS in its efforts in aid of the villagers of the Thar Desert and other rural parts of India. If you have not yet been engaged in that support, or if you have let your involvement lapse, you may help carry on Shashi Ji's extraordinary legacy by going to the GRAVIS website at www.gravis.org.in, and by communicating your thoughts or wishes on email@gravis.org.in

Thank you for all that you do, in whatever way you choose, toward a more equitable and healthier world.

Shashi Tyagi, fondly known as Shashi Ji, was an eminent social thinker, a gender equality advocate, a development practitioner and the Founder of GRAVIS, a well known voluntary organization in India. Her creation GRAVIS works with over 1.5 million people in rural India. Shashi Ji dedicated her entire life to the causes of humanity and worked for peace, equality and harmony. The impact of her efforts can be seen in India and across the world through her work and in the reflections of her friends and colleagues. After battling Acute Leukaemia, she passed away on 14th November, 2020 leaving behind a legacy of love, empathy and service.

Gravis