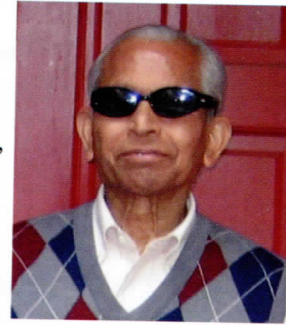




## Empowering Women, Improving Rajasthan

By Melissa Rice, IDRF Director of Operations

Rajsthani-Americans are empowering needy people in India through India Development and Relief Fund (IDRF), a tax-exempt nonprofit. IDRF's founder Dr. Vinod Prakash "...had the opportunity to receive quality education in India. I felt I owed a debt to Indian society and I wanted to make a difference in the lives of the less privileged." In 1988, he took early retirement from the World Bank in Washington, DC and established IDRF.



Dr. Vinod Prakash, IDRF  
President

IDRF puts power, not charity, in the hands of the impoverished in Rajasthan and across India. Its programs address education, healthcare, women's empowerment, ecofriendly development, combatting corruption, and disaster rehabilitation. With the help of NRI donors, IDRF has sent \$25.3 million to India since its founding.

Rajasthan has always been an important area for IDRF, with donors from and beneficiaries in Rajasthan. IDRF's board reflects India's diversity, and it includes the renowned social worker, Dr. G.R. Verma, who was one of the four honorees at the 2010 RANA convention in New York. Known as the *Crorepati Fakir*, Dr. Verma has worked closely with IDRF to educate countless impoverished girls in Rajasthan.



English lab in women's college

Thanks to Dr. Verma's exceptional philanthropy, a women's college in Jhunjhunu District, Maharishi Dayanand Balika Vigyan Mahavidyalaya, is equipped with the latest technology. Hundreds of girls from nearby villages study there, pursuing bachelor's degrees in chemistry, zoology, botany, physics, math and computer science.

Dr. Verma's own student years in rural Rajasthan were difficult. When friends helped fund his education, he vowed to establish himself in the US and help students in similar situations. On a return trip to India in the 1980s "...on a dreadfully hot

day, I saw a group of girls clutching their books and waiting for the bus to take them back to their village, wilting in the... 120 degree heat. I decided then to do something." Driven by Dr. Verma's magnanimity and passion, IDRF has supported Maharshi Dayanand for over a decade, and a host of schools, scholarships, and hostels for girls across the state.



Dr. Verma recently helped Maharishi Dayanand open English language and computer labs, to hone the skills essential to scientific employment. The college has also collaborated with the state government to bring computer literacy to local adults, especially women.



Meanwhile, in Sangaria, IDRF, Dr. Verma, and local NGO Swami Keshwanand Charitable Trust are helping girls reach the stars. Reena's father struggled to support his family as a street vendor in Hanumangarh but today his daughter works for the India Space Research Organization (ISRO). She is a leader in a field dominated by men.

Reena earned an IDRF-sponsored scholarship for six years, and graduated at the top of her class in avionics. She is one of 150 girls and 50 boys who received scholarships in 2013 for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade and college.



This is just a sample in IDRF's work in Rajasthan. Over the years, Dr. Verma has supported another women's college run by Gramin Mahila Sikshan Sansthan in Sikar, and helped them open a secondary school for girls, too.

IDRF has also improved the health of deprived people with the passionate support of other US-based Rajasthanis. In Jaipur, IDRF and Saraswati Jain Seva Samiti support a local hospital. This three-thousand bed facility is run by the government, but relies on Saraswati Samiti and IDRF to cover care for its poorest patients and even to invest in better infrastructure. Over 15 lakh people visit the hospital as outpatients each year.

Reflecting on the past twenty-six years with IDRF, Dr. Prakash said, "Many people want to give back to India, but they don't know how." With less than 5% overhead and a four-out-of-four star rating from Charity Navigator, IDRF has become a trusted partner for Rajasthani-Americans. Dr Vinod. said, "As much as I may have done for underprivileged people, I have earned even more back in *atmasanthushthi* (inner joy). I hope you will join in this joy!" For more information, please visit [www.idrf.org](http://www.idrf.org).