

[< Back](#) | [Home](#)

SASA dinner raises \$12,000 for India's neediest

By: Kyla Wilkes

Posted: 3/4/08

On the same day the Brown Corporation met to discuss plans for a slate of new buildings on campus, a small group of organizers were raising money for a much more humble purpose - toilets.

The South Asian Students Association raised more than \$12,000 for sanitation projects in Pune, India, on Feb. 23 during a benefit dinner, said SASA Community Outreach Coordinator Sumbul Siddiqui '10, who has been working since September to plan the event.

Sunil Bhatia, associate professor of human development at Connecticut College, approached SASA last April about organizing a fund-raiser similar to one held earlier by the Connecticut College Asian American Association, Siddiqui said. Bhatia, who is originally from Pune, has been involved with an NGO called Shelter Associates, which builds toilets in the slums around the area where he lived.

Siddiqui said SASA immediately wanted to take on the fund-raising project. "We've never ... done something like this before," she said. SASA was able to hold the dinner with the help of donations from several of the University's academic departments.

The event, held in Alumnae Hall, included a banquet style dinner and performances by Brown Badmaash, a South Asian dance team. An estimated 215 people attended, with about 60 people donating an average of \$200 - which is approximately the amount needed to build one toilet for an Indian family, Bhatia said.

Interspersed among the Badmaash performances were presentations by Bhatia, Siddiqui, and Sheila Dobbyn, a former Connecticut College student who worked as an intern last summer with Shelter Associates helping to implement the project.

According to its Web site, Shelter Associates is an NGO made up of architects, social workers and community workers that provides infrastructure planning with the urban poor in mind, specifically women.

Bhatia said he initially got involved with Shelter Associates when he saw the work they were doing around his hometown. The toilets built using funds from the banquet "go to mothers who have children and are on aid and manage a family, maybe a handicapped family," he said. "This money goes to the real needy in that sense. There are lots of women and children who die because they don't have access to good, clean water."

Siddiqui said the issue greatly moved her. "It's all about human rights. It's all about dignity," she said.

Siddiqui said the crowd was very diverse, with many different South Asian groups represented. She added she was proud that they all came together for the cause.

"I don't care where you're from and what language you speak - you're all people," she said.

The attendees were made up mainly of local residents because they comprised SASA's donor base, Siddiqui said. The event was publicized in the Rhode Island community through e-mails and word of mouth.

The ongoing goal, said Bhatia, is to raise a total of \$20,000 to build 100 toilets for the neediest families of Pune. With the \$12,000 raised by SASA and the money raised at Connecticut College, Bhatia said he is at about 80 percent of his goal, with around \$14,500.

The money will be sent to Shelter Associates as it is received, and the organization will immediately use the funds to start looking for families and building toilets, Bhatia said. He added that he plans to go to India in June for a two-month trip to see the results of his fundraising and to write his second book on globalization.

Although the crowd was made up largely of families from the community, a small group of students, including the students in Badmaash, attended.

Rhea Wharton '10 said she thought the event was very well done, adding that she thought all the speeches were powerful. "It's an issue that kind of speaks for itself," she said.

Rashid Hussain '10, who said he attended because he is interested in general development work, agreed with Wharton. "The presentations were very moving," he said. "It was very good to be exposed to the sanitation conditions" in India.

Both Bhatia and Siddiqui said they were very pleased with the night. Bhatia said he was especially proud of the all the work the Brown students put into it. "I cannot say enough about their devotion," he said, "The Badmaash performances were terrific. They brought the house down."

Siddiqui said she was happy the night went smoothly and that the organizers were able to raise so much money to ensure that more of India's poor have clean water and bathroom privacy.

"It's a simple thing," she said, "but it's so important."

© Copyright 2008 Brown Daily Herald