

Agents of change

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THE NEW Movers & Shakers

YOUNG. RESTLESS. AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE.
MEET A UNIQUE KIND OF MUMBAI ENTREPRENEUR

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ON A warm September day four years ago, Pooja Taparia watched actress Lillete Dubey's daughter Neha perform the role of a young girl sexually abused by her uncle.

In *30 Days in September*, Mala Khatri grows up traumatised and moves from relationship to relationship looking for sex and is unable to stick with any man.

Graphic designer Taparia (30) felt sick. She had no idea that incest was prevalent in Indian households. The play had been commissioned by RAHI (Recovering And Healing from Incest), a Delhi-based NGO that provides support to female victims of incest. When she left the Sophia Bhabha Hall in Breach Candy that night, Taparia vowed to do something.

The next day she was on the phone to NGOs seeing which ones worked with incest victims and discovered that barely any were. Her charity Arpan, she had started in her spare time a year earlier, immediately took up the issue as its main cause.

Despite being the daughter of a successful businessman, Taparia had never followed the typical path of a South Mumbaiite from an upper class family.

Since the time she was in school, Taparia had been busy collecting crayons and newspapers for the underprivileged. In her final year at Sophia Polytechnic, she volunteered at a school for the mentally challenged in Breach Candy.

"From a young age, I had found life unfulfilling if I was not doing voluntary work. I used to feel that something was missing from my life," she said.

At the age of 26, she started Arpan as a platform for vol-

unteers to help out in orphanages and old people's homes.

Following the play, she launched a major initiative to educate parents, children and teachers, counsellors and psychiatrists about how to recognise child sex abuse.

Now founder director of Arpan, she employs five staff and has 20 volunteers and does virtually no design work.

Arpan focuses on holding training programmes and awareness days for parents, victims, counsellors and teachers about child abuse and lobbying the government about the issue. "Today, more than 53 per cent of children are sexually abused in India. Fifty per cent offenders are known to the victims. As a result, millions of children and adult survivors are left traumatised," she said.

Taparia is one of 10 social entrepreneurs in Mumbai chosen to receive funding and training by newly formed foundation UnLtd India. UnLtd India, run by Briton Richard Alderson (33) and Indian Pooja Warier (27), was launched at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai last week. It aims to train, financially support and mentor early stage social entrepreneurs in India.

"We are looking for more people in Mumbai with interesting ideas and projects for social change to look at funding and training them for a year," said Warier, who previously worked for UnLtd in the UK. Their income comes from individual donors, often rich British Asians in Europe but they are looking for Indian donors.

According to Dr Meena Galliara, professor of social enterprise at NMIMS University, more and more money is coming into India to fund social entrepreneurship.

"Before liberalisation, there was a lot of dependency on funds from foreign donors and the government. But now that the markets have opened up, companies have started funding social issues," she told HT. "India is an emerging economy and it is social entrepreneurs who hold the keys to the problems here," she said.

Dr G.K. Jayaram, director of the Institute of Leadership and Institutional Development in Bangalore, said: "Development work is no longer about the salvation of the soul. It needs to be result-oriented. We need social entrepreneurs in India."

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