

SEVA TIMES



P₂ CORPORATE HONCHO NURTURES INNOVATIVE DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR MARGINAL FARMERS

P₃ CHILDREN OF MIGRANT LABORERS RECEIVING QUALITY COACHING IN UNA SLUMS



SEVA Snippets

Art of Living Programs for Chandigarh Police

The Art of Living has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Chandigarh police to conduct programs for their personnel. Chandigarh police recently rescued 280 children from drug abuse and plans are afoot to rescue a thousand more.

Drug Awareness Program at Jammu Central Jail

The Art of Living recently conducted a Drug Awareness Program at the Central Jail in Jammu Kot bhalwal. Inmates shared their experience with drugs and took a pledge to say no to drugs and also to keep the jails drug free. A yoga and meditation room was inaugurated in the jail premises.

Student of Sri Sri College of Ayurvedic Science Bags 2nd Place in National Youth Parliament

Ms. Anjanakshi of Sri Sri College of Ayurvedic Science & Research was recently honored by Hon. Prime Minister Narendra Modi for bagging 2nd place in the National Youth Parliament out of 57,933 participants.

Solar Light Distribution in Karbi Anglong

Supported by Sri Sri Rural Development Projects and North East Apex Honmillee Teronpi, IAS, volunteers of The Art of Living distributed solar lights to 92 tribal families in Umlapher, an extremely remote hilly area in West Karbi Anglong, on March 21, 2019. Umlapher has no proper roads or electricity. The tribals were joyful to have their homes lit up for the first time as night set in.

Roadmap for Restoring Joy in Punjab

 | Seva Times Network

- Gurudev addresses 20,000 farmers from across Punjab at Kisaana da Sammelan in Jalalabad
- Adopting natural farming, putting a halt to environmental pollution, and saving youth from drugs, will restore joy in Punjab, says Gurudev



Jalalabad, Punjab: On March 18, 2019, over 20,000 farmers from different districts of Punjab gathered at the Sports Stadium in Jalalabad for “Punjab de Kisaana da Sammelan” with Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. Comde. Harsha, Chairman, VVKI; Padmashri Puranchand Wadali; and Punjabi singer, Debi Makhsoospuri; were among the dignitaries present. The focus of the meet was to encourage farmers to adopt natural farming techniques in order to restore the fertility of the soil and restore the health of the people and also to save the youth of Punjab from the clutches of drugs.

Launching “Sona Moti,” a 2000 year old variety of wheat, Gurudev shared, “When I had come to this area about 15 years back, a farmer told me “Gurudev, I have been preserving this indigenous seed.” I encouraged him to continue this noble task. It is our duty to preserve indigenous seeds. SSIASST sent this seed to be researched in our laboratories. Tests revealed it has 12% folic acid. What is folic acid? BP, stroke, heart attack, are all linked to deficiency of folic acid. This

is naturally present in this wheat. The soil of Punjab should give the world this miraculous wheat by which health will be preserved and diseases can be prevented.”

Talking to the farmers about the advantages of natural farming, Gurudev said, “To get a good crop, we use different types of chemicals/fertilizers. This gives us a few good crops initially but then the soil becomes poisonous. A good crop may be reaped, but the grains are tasteless and without nutritional value. Chemical farming has robbed the soil of nutrients. I therefore request all our farmers, for a short period of time even if we have to get less profit, we should put up with it. Later on we can get four to five times the profit, we will reap a good crop, we have to save our soil from poisonous substances.” Addressing the health issues of the people in the region, Gurudev said that it is worrisome that

so many people from the villages are afflicted with cancer. Offering solutions to this he said, “One way is to adopt natural farming. Second, make every effort to keep our water pure. Thirdly, keep our environment clean. Do not burn plastic. Wherever we burn even one small polythene bag, it produces so much dioxin it can cause cancer in at least 1000 people. Take an oath not to burn polythene bags.”

He also encouraged farmers to make natural manure which is inexpensive and can save farmers from falling into the debt trap. Motivated by Gurudev, the farmers took a pledge to move in the direction of adopting natural farming techniques. Gurudev gave them the reassurance that The Art of Living would provide them with the necessary training to do that. To stay in good health, he encouraged them to practice yoga pranayama, meditation, and sumiran to keep the mind free of negative thoughts

and build immunity against diseases. Addressing the drug problem, Gurudev said, “Punjab is the land of courageous people. Punjab has come to the rescue of this nation many times. The youth of Punjab are full of passion and courage. Whenever enemies attacked the nation, rescue always came from Punjab... Unfortunately today the youth are caught in the trap of drugs. We have to teach our youth the art of living.” He guided all Art of Living teachers to conduct a Happiness Survey and counsel the youth about the hazards of drug addiction. Concluding his address, Gurudev invited all present to join in this battle against drugs saying, “All of you want to do something for this country. Society needs all of us right now. Together we should move towards a drug free Punjab... Jalalabad should become ‘Joybad’ a ‘Khushi ki Nagari.’ Work for self, society, and nation.”

The Wonder Wheat that Promises a Second Green Revolution

 | Seva Times Network

- This 2000 years old wheat is rich in folic acid, minerals, fat, and protein, and has a low glycemic index.

Bengaluru, Karnataka: Decades of use of chemical products in agriculture has depleted the once highly fertile soil of Punjab of all nutrients. To address this problem, The Art of Living embarked on a program to bring Punjab farmers back to natural farming. In the course of doing this, they discovered a variety of wheat that is at least 2000 years old. This wheat had been grown for centuries in India but in the recent past it had almost become extinct because of the rampant use of the hybrids and other varieties of wheat that are grown today. Nagpal, a farmer from Punjab, who had been preserving the seeds of this wheat, presented the seeds to Gurudev a few years back at Pingalwara ashram near Amritsar. When this wheat was grown by SSIASST, they found that this wheat had some very special properties. Round in shape, almost like a pearl, it looks very different from other varieties of wheat and is low in gluten and has a low glycemic index. When



Gurudev was shown the wheat, he suggested it be named “Sona Moti” and remarked, “This is the only wheat which has folic acid.” Dr. Prabhakar, Trustee, SSIASST, was taken aback for as a scientist and a plant breeder he knew that there is no wheat variety in the world that has folic acid. Scientists have been trying to put folic acid in wheat but never succeeded. When the samples were sent for nutritional analysis, something fascinating came about. This particular wheat had three times the level of folic acid found in any grain on the planet, had a mineral content that

was 241% higher than the other wheat varieties, and also had protein and fat content at least 40%+ higher. Farmers associated with The Art of Living were asked to grow this wheat and will be harvesting around 18 tons of this wheat in April. Dr. Prabhakar says, “Our farmers are roughly going to harvest about 18 tons of this wheat in April but the good part is that the entire production has already been sold to our Art of Living community in the NCR area... They have booked it at the price of Rs. 80/- per kilogram. Now, when you understand a farmer’s selling rate for wheat today, it is roughly around Rs. 30/-. Our farmers are not only going to make a huge profit on this, but the customers who are buying it know that this is a very special wheat, it has been grown chemical free, using Sri Sri Natural Farming techniques by our farmers. Therefore, the trust is there on both sides. The farmer knows he gets a good price, the customer that he gets a wonderful wheat to use. We happen to introduce this particular model which is very successful and I believe that Sona Moti is really going to create the second green revolution in Punjab.”

For further details, you may call or SMS +91 9205475717. If farmers wish to grow this particular wheat, they can undergo the Sri Sri Prakritik Krishi training which is a 3-day workshop. SSIASST will share with them all the techniques for growing this wheat as well as create market supply linkages for them.

Recharging Groundwater Supply – The Promise of Permaculture

 | Padma Koty

This editorial space is not to present yet another article on or about permaculture, but to briefly explain why permaculture can not just help conserve water, but actually recharge ground water in a proven pattern.

At a time when potable water is in short supply almost all over the world, seventy per cent of the world's drinkable water supply is used up by agriculture, as per some estimates. So why would nations and food-growing communities not switch swiftly to permaculture which has been proved to be a food-growing movement with no parallel? Permaculture requires a bare minimum of inputs that need to be bought. It is a system of using waste vegetable matter and other biomass, and just sprinkles of water, and combining smart design with proven land-use practices based on close observation of Nature. It is the answer that is staring a hungry Planet Earth in the face.

In permaculture, simple contour swales, ponds, micro-dams and other minimal, small-scale earthworks are constructed to use the natural flow of available water to conserve, store and regenerate water in the area under permaculture. It takes valuable pointers from ancient farming techniques and combines them with modern knowledge and understanding of earth sciences. It mimics nature's ecosystems to grow food in a way that harmonises with Nature's patterns.

What is at the heart of permaculture's contribution to regeneration of water? It is its philosophy of giving enough time to the water to soak into the land, enough time, that is, to keep the soil moist while replenishing the water table. In this, design is key. Permaculture experts explain that design is vital to capture soil moisture (through composting, mulching and other uses of biomass), and maximize availability of water while preventing evaporation. As explained above, strategic placement of small water bodies on the land helps collect and store available water. Using biomass makes available natural plant nutrients. Creating a catchment through these various systems and nature-friendly practices gives lasting benefits and ensures more or less reliable supply of water.

Reckless drilling of bore wells has led India to become water-stressed, i.e. there is no more ground water in many parts of the country. Nature offers a huge lesson, an example we must learn from: all over the world, across climate-variations, we see forests, grasslands, jungles, prairies that yield tons of biomass year on year without any irrigation whatsoever. Does it not tell us to rethink our emphasis on over-irrigation and over-watering?

Once the plants and trees grow, and even as they grow, minimal watering is sufficient. Plants need moisture, not water, to sustain," says a permaculture expert. Next time you water your tomatoes, know that they are desert plants!

Serious thought, concerted action, and a blueprint for India to take up permaculture in a planned and purposeful manner alone can ensure that our drinking water needs will not be severely threatened in the very near future.

NSDC Certification for Young Agriculturists

 | Dambarudhara Nayak

Odisha: The Art of Living in association with National Skill Development Corporation is helping individuals with prior experience or skills in farming and agriculture to be assessed and certified under Recognition of Prior Learning as part of the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana. Agriculture training workshops are being organized in 9 districts of Odisha. In this 3-day workshop, farmers are taught natural farming techniques that will safe guard the health of their soil. In addition, they also get to interact with officials from the District Agricultural Department regarding various schemes available for farmers. The participants of the workshop are also getting to learn the Art of Living's Sudarsan Kriya, which will ensure they stay in good physical and mental health. Art of Living specialists in natural farming techniques Bal Krishan Yadav, Bansheedhar Vishnoi, and Jagbandhu Raut are conducting these workshops. One of the advantages of this project is that it will check the migration of farmers into cities in search of jobs and attract them once more towards agriculture as a profitable occupation. After completing the training, a farmer remarked, "Chemical farming has reduced the fertility of our soil. To purchase chemical fertilizers for the entire 300 acres in our village, it costs Rs. 15 Lakhs. This is a loss of revenue for the village. However, for natural farming, all we need is 10 desi cows for the entire village. This will ensure that the money of the village stays in the village."

Participants share their experience:

"The training being imparted under the PMKVY scheme is truly inspirational."

- Nimai Pradhan, Jharsuguda.

"Along with natural farming techniques I also learned about Jeevamrut at the workshop. I will use this for growing crops in my field because this does not cause any harm to the environment. Additionally, our expenditure on chemical fertilizers will be reduced and we will also get more profits. I will definitely encourage others to undergo this training."

- Harchand Gadthia Taleem, Jharsuguda.

Learning from the EXPERTS



Moving the Margins

Sandeep Sabharwal has over 25 years of experience in working for the development of marginal farmers and farming practices in India. His endeavours range from cooperative institution building, to grassroots program conceptualization, development and management. He has served as a Manager for National Dairy Development Board in Gujarat; Senior Manager for Reliance Life Sciences; Program

Leader Disaster Response Centre of Reliance Foundation in Mumbai along with several other responsibilities. He has made significant contribution to The Art of Living's development initiatives for more than a decade.

Dr. Hampi Chakrabarti in conversation with Mr. Sandeep Sabharwal

■ What has been your core area of intervention as a development professional?

I started working for marginal farmers about 27 years ago. Since then, rainfed farming areas of India have been my primary work field. India has a huge potential in the rainfed farming districts. Incidentally, it might rain when it is not required and not rain when it is required. Therefore these are also the drought prone areas and also the areas where 100% of the forests need safeguarding. Thus, throughout my career, I have focused on seeking solutions to a few key concerns, like – helping farmers reduce the cost of cultivation, increase the productivity per hectare of land, thereby bringing more area under production, get better market linkages for the farmers so as to harness optimal crop prices sustainably and how to reduce the dependency on external input for farming by becoming self-sustained. Most importantly, I have looked forward to organize farmers in the manner of cooperatives or collectives for better functioning.

■ What are the key challenges for marginal farmers in current times?

First, communities are unorganized and that does a huge disservice to them. Whenever I talk to the villagers, I ask them that if each family in a village of 100 families together saves the Rs. 20 that they might be spending on addictions, how much they can save as a community. I bring to light instances when they came together as a community and volunteered to erect a grand place of worship or organize a local festival; then why can't they be organised for development work. I leave them with these questions and let them ponder upon it.

Second, there is leadership crisis at the grassroots. It is not that leaders are not there. It is needed for them to come in front and take charge. There are many youths with phenomenal leadership potential awaiting our attention across the country.

Third, the farmers don't often get professional assistance at their doorstep in terms of how to better utilize their water, their farms and natural resources. This is in spite of the best efforts of the government and other non-government bodies.

Fourth, the farmers often get exploited not having enough information regarding where to go and whom to approach. We can safeguard them once they are organised as a farmers-producers organisation.

Every farm poses a new set of challenges and needs to be given a tailor made solution.

■ Is the process uniform or unique across geographies?

The process needs to have certain elements of both uniformity and uniqueness. The first principles (which cannot be compromised) need to be the same. For e.g., if it calls for rainwater harvesting for water security; it is definitely required across all geographies. But in terms of the specifics to be practiced, if the geography allows you to have a river rejuvenation model, like desilting of a river where the silt can go to the farms and the river basin can hold more water, so be it. But if there is no river basin to be desilted, one can go for farm ponds, wells, trenches and so on. Depending on the topographical realities, rain water harvesting methods can change, but the principle remains same.

■ Now that The Art of Living has got mandates in many states to work for doubling the farmer's income, what methodology do you suggest should be applied?

The methodology should be targeted at reducing the cost of cultivation, which Sri Sri Institute of Agricultural Science and Technology does quite well. Next, is to increase productivity and thereby bring more land under production. A farmer may have 5 acres of land, but all his land need not be in the same place. 1 acre could be on a hilltop which he might never have tried for agriculture. Giving him hope that even that 1 acre can be brought under cultivation could be good additional income for the farmers. Apart from that we can teach farmers that seeds and fertilizers can be locally produced, reducing their dependence on external inputs. We also need to make available information and linkages for farmer to be able to bid at the competitive market to get incentive driven prices.

■ How does the cultural and spiritual context affect your work and its outcomes?

I am glad that people are thinking in this context now. In the corporate context, it does not matter much. But to me, it does matter. The moment I talk about de-addiction to farmers or any behaviour change, it is not going to happen by mere words. They will have to be helped which can only come through spiritual practices.

■ In this domain, what is your vision of the work for the future?

I definitely want to be actively involved in identifying and encouraging leadership and helping youth to realise their potential. Youth as social leaders need to be encouraged to sharpen their entrepreneurship skills in the villages, in areas like seed entrepreneurship, nursery raising etc. A farmer in Nalanda, Bihar, grew about 224 quintals of paddy on one Ha of land using 'SRI method' or the system of root intensification. It is manifold times more than what an average farmer in India produces. If we can adopt such practices and replicate even half of that outcome, India's hunger can be satiated. Such endeavours have to be encouraged.

■ What has been your biggest learning?

That I do not know a lot! Every village, every farm poses a new set of challenges and needs to be given a tailor made solution. There are so many youngsters in our country. If everyone can understand the basics of it correctly, it can happen.

Seva Highlights

Celebrating Parents' Worship Day with the Elderly in Chhindwara

Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh: Youth volunteers of The Art of Living in Chhindwara visited the Old Age Home in Priyadarshini Colony on February 14, 2019, to celebrate Parents' Worship Day or Matru Pitru Poojan Diwas with the elderly. The youngsters sought the blessings of the elders, cut a cake with them, and distributed fruits among them. Shweta Chadda, faculty, Art of Living, said that most all people worship their own parents but it is our good fortune that we get to celebrate this special day and seek the blessings of these elders who have been abandoned by their kith and kin.

Volunteers Felicitated for Their Services During Mahashivaratri

On March 16, 2019, the Sri Lingaraj Temple Trust Board of Bhuvaneshwar felicitated volunteers of The Art of Living for the commendable services rendered by them on the occasion of Mahashivratri. Every year, volunteers offer their selfless service by distributing drinking water and cleaning the temple premises on the occasion of Mahashivratri, Ashokashtami, and Sravan Somvar.

Village Bids Goodbye to Addictions on Holi

Holi was celebrated in a unique fashion in Anandawadi, a village in Beed district, Maharashtra. The entire village got together to burn tobacco and gutkha and took a pledge to keep the village free from addictions. This is the positive outcome of the efforts of Padmakar Kulkarni and Ghanashyam Dalawi who have been conducting Art of Living programs in the village for the last one year.

Art of Living Programs in Rural Punjab

The Art of Living's Vyakti Vikas Kendra has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Madhav Helping Hands Foundation, a division of Madhav Alloys, Punjab, to organize various Art of Living programs for development of soft skills in rural youth, providing value-based education in rural areas. The programs will be sponsored by Madhav Helping Hands Foundation.

Free Coaching for Migrant Children in Una Slum

 Swati Shukla

Appalled by the living conditions and lack of awareness with respect to health and hygiene in the inhabitants of a slum in Una district of Himachal Pradesh that is mostly occupied by migrant laborers, Yuvacharya Abhishek Saroch launched project "Apnatva" apparently back in 2015. Guided by him, his students Abhay and Mithali took on the responsibility of bringing transformation in this slum, especially in the children of the slum. They were supported by other volunteers of The Art of Living. Environment plays a major role in the physical and mental development of children. Due to the lackadaisical attitude of the slum dwellers and their careless attitude towards education, the children in the slum rarely attended school. They lacked discipline, were indifferent to the filth in which they lived, and had no sense



of hygiene or sanitation. Under the circumstances, the Apnatva project has brought about a tremendous change. Guided by Abhishek Saroch, the team of volunteers started conducting Nava Chetana and Bal Chetana Shivirs, and Satsangs. The children were given free coaching in Hindi, English, Math, Science, and Social Sciences.

In addition Yuvacharyas Abhay and Mithali started conducting classes in hygiene and health care for the children. Gradually, the children started paying more attention to their studies and their attendance in school became more regular and they performed better in their studies. They were also paying more attention to hygiene and

sanitation. Over the years the volunteers have developed a strong rapport with the people in the slum. This project has been ongoing for 4 consecutive years in the settlement and its impact has been tremendous. Volunteers arrive every evening at the slum to provide free coaching to the children. Weekly satsangs are now a regular part of life in the settlement. Inspired by the zeal and enthusiasm of the yuvacharyas, other people in the district are now coming forward to join hands with them. The children in the slums look upon these volunteers as their ideals. A local physician, Dr. Shantu Saha says, "I'm full of appreciation for such projects floated by The Art of Living. This organization is a source of inspiration.

Cloth Bags – an Eco-Friendly Alternative to Polybags



 Seva Times Network

Tapi, Gujarat: On May 13, 2015, The Art of Living family in TAPI district, Gujarat made a resolution to promote a plastic bag free Tapi district. They started out by making paper bags and have so far made and distributed over 2 lakh paper bags. The mission is led by AOL Anumala. In May 2018, they took another innovative step towards making Tapi plastic bag free. Inspired by Art of Living faculty, Belaben Prakash Golwala, they started promoting cloth bags as an alternative to polythene bags. The cloth bags are stitched with the help of villagers in the surrounding villages. So far, workshops have been conducted in Unchamala and Waghnera to teach the villagers how to make these bags. **Sourcing the raw material:** The cloth for the bags is provided by the volunteers themselves who buy cloth in bulk and also by collecting cloth from devotees who wish to donate cloth in good condition (like scarcely used bed sheets, table cloth, etc.)

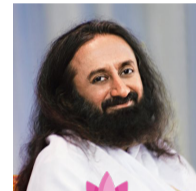
Building awareness: Awareness campaigns, including door-to-door campaigns, promotion through social media and email, and through Art of Living programs and Satsangs were conducted in Anumala, Vyara, and Surat, to make the people aware of the hazards of using plastic bags and encourage them to use eco-friendly cloth bags instead.

Distribution: Once the bags were ready, the team contacted vendors and residents, seeking their cooperation in replacing plastic bags with the environment-friendly cloth bags. Not only were the bags useful to conserve the environment, they also provided a source of income to the villagers. Fortunately, KAPS (Kakrapar Atomic Power Station) Management imposed a ban on use of polythene bags in Anumala Township which further aided their cause. Over 1600 bags, both large and small, have been made and distributed so far.

Over 150 Rural Women Felicitated on Women's Day in Solapur

Solapur, Maharashtra: The Art of Living family in Solapur organizes a special function on the occasion of International Women's Day every year. At the function organized this year, over 150 economically independent women from various walks of life, from cleaning staff of the municipal corporation to professors in colleges, hailing from the surrounding areas were felicitated. They were presented with saris and mementoes. Many among them were widows who had single handedly raised their children and provided them with a good education. There was also a group of women who manage a printing press on their own. Art of Living faculty Rohini Bhandari, Swati Chauhan, Dr. Pratibha Patil, Nagaveni Gugundi, and scores of other volunteers worked hard to make this program a success.

5 Skills You Must Develop to Succeed in Life & Business



Words of Wisdom
Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

Everyone wants to be successful in life but not many are aware of what success really is. Success is an attitude, not just a phenomenon. Tough situations arise in every business, every organization, and you need skills to handle them. These skills come from our inner space, which I call the Spiritual Space.

There are five ingredients for success:

1. Function as a Team:

Peace and prosperity are interlinked. Prosperity cannot flourish in a disturbed atmosphere. While working with others, you need to function as a team. Have a sense of respect for your team members, and do not indulge in blame games. As a team leader, you need to create an atmosphere of trust, cooperation, a sense of belonging, and celebration. Nothing can last if the focus is only on productivity and net result.

2. Manage your Mind:

The whole essence of the Bhagavad Gita is to act without being attached to the fruit of action. If you can manage your mind in a war-like scenario, then you can manage any situation. This skill in action is called yoga. It is this wisdom of yoga that transforms one's attitude from arrogance to self-confidence; from meekness to humility; from the burden of dependence to the realization of interdependence; from a limited ownership to oneness with the whole. When performing action, if the attention is only on the end result, then you can't perform. Just give yourself fully to the task with 100 percent sincerity and commitment.

3. Be Courageous Like a Lion:

There is a saying in Sanskrit that says, "Great wealth comes to one who has the courage of a lion and who puts in all his efforts." Passion and dispassion are complementary like the in-breath and out-breath. You breathe in but you cannot hold the breath too long; you have to breathe out. Similarly, you need to have passion to make things work but also the dispassion to let go. When you don't crave for abundance, it comes to you.

4. Develop your Intuition:

If all that is needed for prosperity is one's own effort, then why are so many people who put effort not prosperous? This unknown factor or luck is enhanced by spirituality. The whole material world is run by a world of vibrations which is subtler than all that we see. Spirituality enhances intelligence and intuition. Intuition comes to you when you balance your passion with dispassion; profit with service; aggressiveness to get things with compassion to give back to the society. Intuition is the right thought at the right time, and is an important component for success in business.

5. Meditate:

The greater responsibilities and ambitions you have, greater is the need for you to meditate. In ancient times, meditation was used as a way to find the Self, for enlightenment and to overcome misery and problems. Meditation is all the more essential in today's hectic lifestyle full of stress and tension. Meditation not only relieves you of stress and strain, it also enhances your abilities, strengthens your nervous system and mind and releases toxins from the body. We are made up of both matter and spirit. The body has some material needs and our spirit is nourished by spirituality. Meditation also helps us get in touch with our inner space – the source of joy, peace, and love.

The Slumdog Changemaker

| Dr. Hampi Chakrabarti

A quintessential Dharavi child, Reshma Parab had an upbringing that epitomised the life of an underdog in India's shining metropolis, Mumbai. Dharavi is reputed as Asia's largest slum. Inside this over burgeoning mass of humanity, young Reshma grew up like any other Dharavi kid - with more family members than their shanty could hold, playful with a sense of abandon, imitating the coarse mannerisms and language used by adults around them and witnessing crime as a normal way of life.

Nothing would have changed; Reshma would have lived without knowing the possibilities of life had The Art of Living not ventured into Dharavi in 2001. They had organised a meditation workshops for the adults. But the adults, most of them daily laborers, were not interested. Instead, it was the children who showed up out of curiosity! That is how Reshma took her first steps towards a different life.

Very soon, at a tender age Reshma completed the Youth Leadership Training Program (YLTP) and started working in earnest to uplift



RESHMA PARAB

“
I lived so
many lives
in those six
days.”

the people around her in the slum. She reminisces, “Some magic happened by the end of the program. My mind stabilised and gained focus. It brought a sea change in my perspective of life.” Reshma became an integral part of a very inspired team of dynamic volunteers. Soon enough they were able to bring to life a free school for the underprivileged slum children. After knocking doors at about 400 homes and trying to convince parents about the importance of their child's education, the team was able to procure admission for 50 students.

This path was never bereft

of its own set of challenges. Too many people shut doors on their face saying that they didn't want to miss their daily soap! Sometimes people confused Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar's photo for Jesus Christ and shooed them away fearing conversion. Many others turned them away thinking them to be from a political party or a sales person. Reshma withstood all this with an iron will and faith in the Guru. But, it was not yet over. When merely a school student, she contracted Tuberculosis. The slum conditions coupled with ignorance of precautionary measures made it worse. Fear of the end loomed large over her and her family, until when her Art of Living teachers stepped in. With regular practice of Sudarshan Kriya, before even her course of medicines was halfway through, she was completely cured. It only worked to strengthen her faith and determination. This time even her parents could not be untouched by the faith in the Guru.

With a renewed vigour Reshma resumed her work. Every day brought intense learning her way. One such instance was conducting the Prison Smart program in a women's remand home in Mankhurd, Mumbai.

She recalls, “So many of these girls were well educated. Young and inexperienced as they were, they either got duped by their boyfriends or ended up doing illegal work for the want of money.” Being a woman herself, this was a heart wrenching experience for Reshma. The first day of the program, they could hardly sit due to restlessness and trauma. Reshma had to find ways to endear herself to them and then things began to fall in place. An ocean of love emerged as they calmed down with the processes taught. By the end of the program, it was not just the girls who underwent a sea transformation, Reshma too emerged a new woman. She says, “I lived so many lives in those six days.”

In the course of events she also stumbled upon hardened criminals from Mumbai's infamous underworld, who were, incidentally, very keen on learning yoga and meditation. Knowing that spirituality can reform a person, Reshma never turned away from them. She knew she was meant to take the Guru's wisdom to the ones who needed it most. Over the years now Reshma has touched more than 15,000 people across the slums in Mumbai and also across several villages in Marathwada of Maharashtra.

This flight from odds to even is only about to attain new heights.

Tigress of the Tribal Land

| Dr. Hampi Chakrabarti

Imagine yourself, pacing on foot through a narrow trail in a sun shaded forest. You are hurrying in the twilight to reach the safety of a home before night befalls and all of a sudden you hear a thundering roar within earshot. Instinct tells you it could be a tiger. You look at your only companion, hoping she wouldn't have heard it, hoping it was just fear playing with your mind. But no; she too had heard it, as loud and clear as you did.

This narration might sound fictitious, but not to Gajmati.

Gajmati Singh had never anticipated the outstanding life that she now lives. Born in a village in Jharkhand, Gajmati's life had nothing exceptional about it, until one day, in the year 1999, when her eldest sister pushed her into a selection test conducted by The Art of Living. Unwilling to disobey, Gajmati just went ahead as instructed. It turned out that they were looking for dynamic local youth to groom them into rural leaders through the Youth Leadership Training



GAJMATI SINGH

“
I was clearly told
that if I trespass,
gardan seedhe cheh
inch chota
(I will be beheaded)

Program. Only three people qualified from their village, Gajmati being one of them. The training program revealed a new self to her; of a fearless and hardworking young girl, passionate to bring transformation.

Armed with this new knowledge, Gajmati began travelling across Jharkhand to conduct the Nav Chetna Shibir, Bal Chetna Shibir and satsangs. These were effective tools for community sensitization; much needed in a state that had a significant rural and tribal population, who were under-privileged, below poverty line, under-educated, and above all reeling under the terror of Naxalism.

The need to end Naxalism had not escaped Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. One day he instructed that certain top-ranking Naxalites be brought to Rishikesh to participate in The Art

of Living program with him. Young Gajmati was assigned this task. She laughs as she recalls, “imagine, you had to convince these violent men to go to Rishikesh for a meditation program!”. She, nevertheless, set to get the job done, looking for soft corners to make an appeal to them. The intensive work that she had already done in the villages came handy. Most Naxalites had friends or families in the villages who had participated in these programs and reaped its benefits. Gajmati tried to send across a word through them. However, for several days she couldn't even get an appointment. After much persistence, one fine day, she was blind folded and taken to them. The Naxalites already knew of the organization's work and knew it was for their development, yet they were sceptical. They feared of being given away to the media or the authorities. To ensure none of that happened, they put a condition to Gajmati. For the fifteen days that they would be gone, she would have to stay captive in their den.

Not a second of fear did visit the brave girl. She immediately agreed. Her strength lay in her faith in the Guru and in the merit of the purpose. Her conviction shook the men and they withdrew the condition. The program happened smoothly and they became supporters in Gajmati's future work.

Gajmati was just beginning to taste the life she was about to lead. In the coming days, Gajmati, along with her friend Reetum, was

assigned to conduct the programs in fourteen villages across Parasnath in Jharkhand. The challenge was, these villages didn't have roads. Villagers would have time only in the evening after the daily chores were done. Thus, all programs were scheduled for the evening. But the circumstances did not allow two young girls to stay back in the village for the night. Thus, walking for several kilometres through the forest to reach these villages and then running back to a safe home became an everyday exercise. And this is where, on an unassuming day, they met with a tiger. Gajmati says with a gasp, “Next day we mentioned none of this to the coordinator for fear of the work being stopped. That place was in urgent need of transformation, and we needed to make it happen.”

By the end of their four years there, the scene had transformed much. People came together to construct a road for themselves. And not just Parasnath, Gajmati, with her team, has been a sweeping force of transformation throughout the tribal land. Her current mission is Burmu, another Naxalism afflicted area in Ranchi district. She says, “Today you will not be able to identify Burmu with the Burmu I had come to; where I was clearly told that if I trespass, *gardan seedhe cheh inch chota* (I will be beheaded).”

All of this only made her stronger. Her aim Gajmati says, “There shouldn't be a single day in my life when I don't meet someone new and spread Gurudev's wisdom.”



PROJECT BHARAT

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