Chandigarh/Hissar: The grounds of Chandigarh University reverberated with the chants of “Na Karuna Na Karun Dangal” (Will Not Do Drugs) and “Will Not Let Anyone Do It) on a drizzly Monday morning. Over two days, 60,000 students turned up to be part of the launch of Drug Free India, one of The Art of Living’s many initiatives towards de-addiction. The campaign was launched at Chandigarh University on 18th February and the second leg of the campaign launch was held at Guru Jambheshwar University, Hisar, Haryana.

“We need to strengthen the youth of this country and whatever weakens this strength, like drugs, needs to be blocked,” said Gurudev while addressing the students, “People get into drugs because they are looking for happiness, fun and love. Just come join us. We’ll give you a high that will never go down. Inner high can give love and happiness.”

Speaking in Hisar, Gurudev pointed out that time had come for youngsters to place pride with NOT doing drugs, rather than being proud of having them. Hon. Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauded the years of efforts of The Art of Living in countering the menace of drugs. “I sincerely appreciate the efforts of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. Among the dignitaries who attended the event alongside Gurudev on February 18, 2019, in Chandigarh were Bollywood icon and recovered drug addict Sanjay Dutt, rapper-songwriter Badshah, comes- dian Kapil Sharma, popule Punjabi Folk singer Gurudas Maan and Hon. Gover- nor of Punjab, V P Singh Badnore. In Hisar, Hon.Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar and famous actor Varun Sharma shared the stage with Gurudev. Talking about his own battle with drug addiction, Sanjay Dutt said, “I was bleeding from my mouth, my nose. I hadn’t eaten in two days. I got scared looking at myself in the mirror. I told my father, I need help.” Dutt shared that he decided never to touch drugs again in his life when a drug peddler contacted him on his return from rehab.

Taking the awareness campaign forward, Gurudev also announced Walk-a-thons across Indian cities and villages on 9th March, raising awareness and mobilizing communities in the fight against drugs.

Over a crore students from 12,000 colleges signed up for the campaign against drugs through live webcast from across the country on both the days. Part of the initiative also includes formation of SWAT (Social Wellness and Awareness Training) clubs that have been opened across college campuses that will mobilize and raise awareness against drugs and organize preventive interventions.

The Drug Free India movement against drugs has already taken social media by storm with more than 90 eminent personalities from the field of films, sports, politics and business having poured their support for the cam-

Project Bharat Gains Impetus with Gurudev’s Visit

Maharashtra: During his recent tour of Maharashtra, Gurudev held a series of meetings between 7th and 11 February in Watar, Khambag, and Pune, with the newly appointed Pratinidhis. Thousands of youth from 7 lakh villages across the region were in attendance. The youth were bursting with enthusiasm and a determination to do something for their nation attended these meetings. Their exuberant energy had been given a new, constructive direction by Gurudev Sri Ravi Shankar.

During the course of these meetings, it became clear that Gurudev’s vision was to engage the rural youth of India to cultivate a happy and powerful nation whose greatest strength was and always has been her spiritu- ality. Gurudev referred to Project Bharat as a golden opportunity to reclaim humanity and prosperity. With five representatives from each of the nearly 7 lakh vil-
lages in India being associated with an organization like The Art of Living, they would have the support they needed to develop their villages and make India Swacchh (Clean), Swath, Surakshit (safe and secure), and Samridh (prosperous).

Gurudev urged the youth to fight the problem of un-
employment by learning new skills. The Art of Living had set up several skill centers across India and more would be set up to provide training to youth and help them get employment. The organization could also extend help to make them successful entrepreneurs.

The youngsters were encouraged to learn and teach yoga. Gurudev emphasized “Yog aur Udyog” – Yoga for health and Udyog for economic stability. He also encouraged them to organize Sanatsangs in their villages to bring people together and create waves of happiness and positivity across the nation. The Pratinidhis were now vested with the responsibility of bringing out the inner joy of their people and making their villages vibrant and violence free.

In order to save our soil and our water, Gurudev mo-
tivated the youth to learn and promote natural farming tech-
niques. Those Pratinidhis who had already obtained train-
ing in natural farming could provide training to others.

As Gurudev says, government- ment’s will come and governments will go, it is up to the common people to take on the responsibility of bring-
ing growth and prosperity in their regions. Change of this scale is possible only with the participation of the common man.

During his visit to 60,000 Pratinidhis from 1500 villages on January 27, 2019, Gurudev concluded his talk by saying, “I have complete faith that you will successfully complete this project before long. What-
ever needs to be done, we will do it together. The Art of Living will be completing 40 years in 2021; before what

Crore+ Students Pledge Against Drugs

PM Narendra Modi Lauds The Art of Living’s Initiatives to Fight the Menace of Drugs in India

The Art of Living’s River Revjuvenation in Limca Book of Records

The Art of Living has made its way into the ‘Limca Book of Records’ in India, for its exceptional efforts to resolve the country’s severe freshwater crisis through a massive river revival drive across four states. The project has benefited nearly 500,000 people in over 5000 villages and has been implemented across Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. The gigantic task is carried out through community participation programs, contribution of Art of Living volunteers and over 5000 locals.

Launch of Gandhi Global Solar Yatra

On January 22, 2019, Gurudev launched the Gandhi Global Solar Yatra at The Art of Living International Center, Bengaluru. A collaborative venture of The Art of Living and IIT Bombay, it aims to create 1 million “Student Solar Ambassadors” in 200 countries including 135 Art of Living Ashrams across the globe.

Sahaj Samadhi Meditation as Treatment for Depression and Anxiety

According to a study recently published in the British Journal of Psychiatry, 20 minutes of Sahaj Samadhi meditation per day was able to act as an effective treatment for late-life depression. Research- ers had 83 seniors practise Sahaj Samadhi for 20 minutes a day for three months to see if it could ease their symptoms of anxiety or dep- ression. Dr. Akshya Vasudev, who headed the study, says that the chances of getting into remission are 3 times higher with meditation com- pared to the usual treatment plan.
February 2019 saw a new beginning with Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar leading the Drug Free India campaign on a national scale.

Drugs are a menace gnawing at the roots of our society. It not just destroys the body and the mind of an individual, but it snuffs out the ability to be positive and productive in life. Families have been destroyed and communities have been rendered ineffective. Drugs contribute directly and indirectly to violence and heinous crimes in society and also affect the economy of the country negatively. It is appalling to know that we lose 10 youngsters every day in this country due to substance abuse. For a strength of its significant young population, by converting them to a skilled workforce, a menace like drug addiction needs to be tackled with an iron hand and with urgency.

The Art of Living has more than three decades of experience in fighting the menace of drug and other addictions with potent tools like Yoga, Meditation, Sudharshan Kriya and Ayurveda. It is time now to scale up the efforts, to reach every nook and corner of India. In view of this, the Art of Living, under the stewardship of Gurudev has initiated the Drug Free India campaign.

On 18th February 25,000+ students from Chandigarh University pledged for a Drug Free India with Gurudev and many celebrities. Gurudev gave the clarion call of India’s biggest fight against drugs.

In 1999 Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar had a pioneering vision of empowering youth in rural communities to take stewardship of their own lives and livelihoods while taking leadership for developing the rest of their community. This was through a radical program called the Youth Leadership Training Program (YLTP) that could also help stem rural-to-urban migration.

How to implement this vision? How to ensure sustainability of programs and projects once they were initiated? Who – and where – were the dynamic, self-motivated individuals who would keep on-track the developmental activities that were undertaken? Who would ensure the flock was kept together? Enter the Yuvacharyas. Another radical idea was initiated from the youth graduating the YLTP program, look for a few with pre-decided, must-have traits. Select those who show dynamism and leadership skills, and give them the title of “Yuvacharyas.” These take the lead for implementing programs and projects and interact and liaise with other agencies, including governmental ones, while ensuring that all activities remain on track.

The YLTP Program itself is an intensely experimental course designed to put the participants through a scorching, increasingly-challenging agenda designed to make them drop self-set limitations and concepts, and transform into self-motivated individuals ready to take up any challenge. Participants have experienced deep and lasting transformation in their personalities, abilities and priorities.

A large component of the transformation is a deep sense of commitment to building the community and the nation. No exaggeration here. This is one graduating group that is ready to move mountains, even land-slide affected ones! In a nutshell YLTP is about transforming lives, empowering rural communities and helping build livelihood without altering demographics. It is one of this era’s great maintain-your-roots movements. A model worth replicating across the globe to enable rural communities to preserve their precious heritage and culture, while adapting to the demands of technology and modernization.

In times of rapid socio-economic change, we have witnessed rural youth getting uprooted from their communities and migrating to urban areas. Unwilling to take up their forefathers’ traditional occupations such as agriculture, they have been facing the harsh realities of migration such as falling prey to crime rings, loss of self-esteem, isolation and so on.

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What is your vision of the work for the next five years? I am inspired by Gurudev’s vision of developing model villages across rural India into reality. Mr Chaturvedi has been an Art of Living teacher since 2006.

Mr. Rakesh Chaturvedi has spent the larger part of his life serving in the Co-operative Department, Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Department, Civil Secretariat, State Institute of Rural Development, Finance Development Corporation, CAPART and BRGF. In 2016 he retired from his official capacity as Additional Director and State Nodal Officer rural sanitation (Vishesh Sachiv Grade), Department of Panchayati Raj U.P. Since then he has employed his experience to render Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar’s vision of a developed rural India into reality. Mr Chaturvedi has been an Art of Living teacher since 2006.

LEADING THE ROAD TO RURAL INDIA

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Dr. Hampi Chakrabarti in conversation with Mr. Rakesh Chaturvedi

■ What is unique about The Art of Living’s approach in Rural Development?
■ What advice would you like to offer to a beginner in the field of social development work?
■ How to implement this vision? How to ensure sustainability of programs and projects once they were initiated? Who – and where – were the dynamic, self-motivated individuals who would keep on-track the developmental activities that were undertaken? Who would ensure the flock was kept together? Enter the Yuvacharyas. Another radical idea was initiated from the youth graduating the YLTP program, look for a few with pre-decided, must-have traits. Select those who show dynamism and leadership skills, and give them the title of “Yuvacharyas.” These take the lead for implementing programs and projects and interact and liaise with other agencies, including governmental ones, while ensuring that all activities remain on track.

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Do I really want development for the rural people? One must ask this question to oneself before venturing to work in the villages.
Kukui Village: A Tale of Transformation

Kukui is a quaint little village with a population of 404 that falls under Tundahali Panchayat of Ormanjhi Block, Ranchi. Until a few years back, this picturesque village situated less than 50 km from the capital, was the proverbial ‘last mile’. Swampy mud tracks sufficing for roads, low literacy rates, low income, and a lower than the average sex ratio were some of the problems that plagued this village.

Today, in 2018, Kukui village has a very different story to tell. In 2017, The Art of Living entered into a partnership with the Government of Jharkhand to create 60 Biocon Panchayats across 15 blocks in seven districts of Jharkhand to facilitate sustainable rural development. Tundahali Panchayat was one of the project areas. Although The Art of Living had begun work in the region a few years earlier, this tie-up with the government gave a renewed impetus to the development work in Kukui. Sonoram Maitio, Village Pradhan (head) since 2007, says, “Earlier it was so difficult to even make all villagers sit in one place. Now with The Art of Living’s community mobilization and sensitization programs, everybody has come together to work for development.” He also feels that with the training that has been imparted to panchayat members and functionaries, day-to-day governance has become much smoother, with fewer bottlenecks. The elected representatives and mukhiyas (village heads) have started regular public meetings at the Panchayat Bhavan. The Gram Sabhas (village meetings) have become vibrant with increased participation from the community, particularly women.

The village now hosts a skill development center supported by The Art of Living. The prime beneficiaries of this center have been the women in the Self Help Group (SHG). They have been imparted training in sanitation, paper bag making, stitching, and leadership skills. Sewing machines installed at the center enable these women to run a micro-enterprise entrepreneurship initiative.

In the most recent development, The Art of Living has embarked on a participatory natural resources management project which will benefit Kukui along with 50 more villages in Ormanjhi and Burmu block of Ranchi. As Sonoram foresees, this will be a vital step for food and nutrition security and sustainable livelihoods for the villagers.

India Geospatial Excellence Award for The Art of Living

The Art of Living has installed a cost-effective water filtering unit at Kothomiya village on the world’s largest river island, Majuli, in Assam. This filtering unit invented by Prof. Robin Dutta from Tezpur University will provide arsenic and iron free water for households at a very low cost of Rs. 0.05 per liter.

Check Dam Constructed on Dahisar River

The Art of Living has just completed construction of a check dam on Dahisar river in Mumbai. With a storage capacity of 44 million litres, it will recharge the ground-water table and also revive the bio-diversity of the area.

Volunteers Serve “Kadha” to Prevent Swine Flu

Molela, Rajasthan: As the Swine Flu epidemic spread in Rajasthan claiming more lives (100 + as on February 9), Art of Living volunteers distributed “kadha,” an Ayurvedic concoction that is effective in curbing swine flu, to over 6000 residents of Molela and surrounding areas.

24 Hours Ambulance Service Launched in Molela

Rajasmand, Rajasthan: Villagers in Molela now have an ambulance that will be at their service 24 x 7, thanks to the volunteers of The Art of Living who have made this possible. Earlier they had to rely on private vehicles or public transport to rush patients to a hospital on time in times of emergency. The ambulance, fitted with all modern amenities, was launched into service on January 6, 2019.

Be a Good Listener

Listening not just to words, but also to feelings and expressions. Observe infants. They listen to expressions and gestures. Even without understanding words, they are able to influence individuals, groups, and masses. Whether in one-to-one communication, or in addressing a huge audience, something intangible moves people more than the words. We try to rationalize by attributing intangible moves to the audience. We need that beautiful combination of sensitivity and sensibleness. Communication is the art of being sensitive and sensible at the same time. Some people are too sensitive, thereby losing their sensibleness. Their speech lacks clarity and is inarticulate. And there are people who make perfect sense, but they are insensitive. They say the correct things, but they are not aware of the emotional response of the audience. We need that beautiful combination of sensitivity and sensibleness.

Real Communication is beyond Words

All of us have experienced at one time or the other, an amazing phenomenon. Whether in one-to-one communication, or in addressing a huge audience, something intangible moves people more than the words. We try to rationalize by attributing this to charm, charisma, presence, body language, etc. If you are firmly established in the zone of silence, if your mind is calm, you will find yourself suddenly able to influence individuals, groups, and masses.

Be a good listener

Listening improves relationships, but also to feelings and expressions. Observe infants. They listen to expressions and gestures. Even without understanding words, they communicate with you. Somewhere in the journey of life, we have lost this ability. Let’s make an attempt to regain it.

This world is varied, beyond our imagination. We need to establish communication with one and all is a skill worth possessing.
Although a tomboy since childhood, Moli Sarkar grew up with the innocence and naivete of a girl born in a small village in West Bengal. An ardent music lover, she had confessed the name of Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar to the master Pu. Ravi Shankar, and that is how she entered her first Art of Living workshop! All she had enquired from the volunteer inviting her to the workshop was, “Will there be music?” The volunteer had answered in the affirmative telling the usual satirical and Moli was sure this was a music workshop. Least had Moli expected that this unsuspecting misstep would change her life forever. She had been a yoga enthusiast all through, but it was only at the workshop that she realised what a game changer in life yoga and meditation could be. Clarity dawned upon her and she knew that she had found her purpose in life. She resolved to walk that path and today, Moli is looked upon by several young people as a fearless and dynamic leader, dedicated to serve the cause of development in rural West Bengal. Since 2009, when she first met Gurudev, Moli has dedicated her life to teaching people the art of stress-free living. Through workshops including the Happiness program, YLTP, Nav Chetna Shibir and Bal Chetna Shibir, she has so far reached out to more than 60,000 people across Howrah, Medinipur, Hooghly, Midnapur and Bhargram districts of West Bengal. Between 2011 and 2014, for four years, she tirelessly conducted workshops in three consecutive sessions throughout the day. Several of her students have further qualified to become The Art of Living teachers. In 2012, she, along with other volunteers organised a padyatra, in the ancient Indian way, within Bagnan. This padyatra addressed over 40,000 people on issues like health, leading a happy life and spiritual wisdom. All this was no cakewalk. Moli has had to battle extreme prejudice and political pressure against her work. She recalls with a laugh, “Once, I was conducting a workshop and suddenly saw goons barge in and threaten me to stop The Art of Living activities immediately! Before I could understand anything, they disrupted the workshop and bade the participants to escape. Apparently, a girl who had once participated in a workshop in my constituency had eloped. Some misconceptions took the opportunity and convinced her hapless parents that it was because of The Art of Living activities that she had eloped! The community unable to find her, decided to vent their wrath on The Art of Living. Now, what am I supposed to do if a girl decides to elope! By the next morning the rumour mills had succeeded to spur venom against The Art of Living and I found myself at its receiving end! It was only quick thinking with a calm mind and faith in her Guru that helped Moli tackle the situation. She immediately reached out for help to the other influential members of the society who had been benefitted by the workshops. They finally managed to bring the situation under control. Seeing her dedication to the work and devotion to the Guru, she had often been branded as a ‘mad woman’. More than often, her capability and motives have been doubted. In spite of all odds, even today she goes door to door to meet people and conduct the workshops. When asked how does she continue unfazed, she says, “I feel so lucky, how will people walk this path!” She has been successful in bringing together communities of businessmen as well as the underprivileged sections of society in Bagnan, West Bengal, to work for their development, both personal and of the region. She says what helps her win over people are love and the authenticiy of her work. Moli wants to help people go beyond their small mind which gets bogged down by ego and little desires. Only then will human values blossom.

Inspirited and guided by Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Moli has risen to become a force of indefatigable service to humanity, a leader and a team builder working for her people and her motherland. She meets life head on with her gaitety laughter and childlike humour. When asked why she spells her name (for correct representation in this article), Moli nullifies chances of any further adventures from a homographic confusion. She says, “There is Modi sarkar, I am Moli Sarkar”.

Although he had taken the step, Rohan however cautions that social developmental work is sometimes like a bottomless pit. No matter how much you do, it is not sufficient to solve the formidable challenges of the world. Here one ought to have a realistic target and approach; whatever small impact it creates is good enough. Not having this perspective sometimes tends to bog one down. This is where Rohan falls back on Gurudev’s teaching that passion, compassion and dispassion should walk hand in hand. “Therefore see, everybody in The Art of Living is always smiling,” he chuckles. Quite overwhelmed with the blessing and growth that have come his way, Rohan is now working on building more partnerships with bilateral and international agencies, generate low cost scalable models, and strengthen the central team to be able to deliver Gurudev’s vision of bringing a smile on every face. His family could not have been more proud of him.