

Seva Times



P₂ UNVEILING THE SCIENCE BEHIND NATURAL FARMING

P₃ DSN GRADUATES SPRUCE UP SLUM AREA IN FARIDABAD



SEVA Snippets

Ambedkar Jeevan Patham Launched in Andhra Pradesh

On the eve of the 128th birth anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar, Art of Living launched Integrated Skill Development Program under "Ambedkar Jeevan Patham" for 4000 economically backward scheduled caste students. This is being done in partnership with the Social Welfare Department of Andhra Pradesh. Pola Bhaskar, IAS, Director Social Welfare, AP, will be mentoring the program which is to be conducted in all 13 districts of Andhra Pradesh.

Intuitive Sight for the Blind

96 blind children of Kamla Mehta Blind School, Mumbai, did the Pragma Yoga Program. The program was conducted by Art of Living faculty Shreya Chugh and Pallavi Dutt. After practicing the intuition process for 40 days, many of the children could identify colors, shapes, pictures, and also read without Braille. The Principal noted a marked difference in their studies, health, and soft skills.

Youth earning 1-2 Lakhs Per Month after Completing Art of Living's Solar Skills Training

Mayur Chaudhari and Tushar Mahajan, Co-founders and proprietors, Sri Sri Solar Solutions, completed the Solar Skills training at the Art of Living's Sri Sri Kaushal Vikas Kendra, Bangalore, in August 2017. Their average income prior to the training was around Rs. 15,000 per month. Now their average profit per month is around one to two lakh rupees. One of their biggest projects till date has been a 6 KW On-Grid Solar System, for which the turnover was Rs. 4,55,000/-.

Desi Beej Mahotsav Highlights Desi Seeds

Padma Koty

Bengaluru: An astonishing variety of indigenous seeds was on display at The Art of Living International Centre, Bengaluru, when it hosted the very lively Desi Beej Mahotsav, for over 2000 dedicated farmers from 8 states of India. They interacted with experts, award-winning conservationists, and with each other, over two days, March 30-31, 2019.

Conducted by the Sri Sri Institute of Agricultural Sciences (SSIAS), the event centre-staged a nearly-forgotten aspect of Indian agriculture – the Desi, i.e. indigenous, seed varieties. The aim was to encourage farmers to learn how to grow Desi seeds as a viable business. A royalty model in collaboration with some universities and the Heirloom Seed Breeders Association of France, has been planned to help in this.

As part of the Mahotsav, the path-breaking "Sustainable Seeds Innovation Roundtable 1.0" discussed the setting up of an Art of Living Digital Platform. This will benefit farmers wanting to practice chemical-free farming as it helps them to commercially produce and procure Desi seeds in a reliable, sustainable and profitable manner. They can make innovations in neglected Desi seeds and, importantly, get recognition for their efforts. A second Conference 2.0 is planned in July 2019, in collaboration with Leeds University of UK and Technical University of Munich, Germany. In a noteworthy project, Art of Living is supporting farmers in Punjab in growing an



Why are Desi seeds so important for health and food security?

Before the Green Revolution, Indian farmers had a vast diversity of indigenous seeds that they had been cultivating for thousands of years. These have now become near-extinct due to aggressive marketing of hybrid varieties. Desi seeds are well suited to local agro-climatic conditions, and are resistant to disease, pests and drought conditions. They have higher nutritional values, and better fragrance and taste, whereas hybrid seeds focus on higher yield to the detriment of nutritional qualities.

indigenous wheat variety, christened "Sona Moti" by Gurudev, using natural farming techniques and organic manure. The first harvest of 18 tons of wheat has been pre-booked by the Art of Living itself, assuring these growers that their organically-grown produce has a sizeable health-conscious market. It has been said, "What we eat is a political decision and unless we take these actions with awareness about indigenous seeds, we won't be able to challenge the corpo-

rate control over our lives." Unless policy-makers, farmers, agricultural experts, conservationists, experts in indigenous seeds, and health-conscious consumers act in concert, the rising problem of seed monopoly by foreign companies over the Indian agro-input sector cannot be addressed. The Art of Living's Beej Mahotsav has set a highly praiseworthy precedent by bringing all these stakeholders under a single platform.

Art of Living First Aid Awareness App: Saving Lives in the Nick of Time

Dr. Hampi Chakrabarti

The Art of Living is taking giant strides in emergency health care. Joining efforts with G1, an integrated health platform, The Art of Living added Delhi NCR as the third city after Bhubaneswar and Hyderabad for a pilot run of this project. The project is aimed at creating awareness about first aid measures during medical emergencies. Volunteers are being trained to become efficient first responder with the aim to reduce the emergency response time from 15-20 mins to less than 5 mins.

In recent instances, Sitara Patel's toddler suffered hot water burns on her right arm after a household accident in Sonbhadra UP. Neighbours and family members on the scene, with the intention to soothe the burn, imposed the idea of applying tooth powder or talcum powder or oils directly on the burn. But the mother being a trained first responder, knew better. She kept the burnt area under running water for 15 minutes and immediately reached for a doctor. Her child is doing much better now.

Pulkit Mathur, a trained responder from Noida, was driving with his father when they witnessed a bike accident. An immediate shift in his mode of action from that moment onwards. He says, "All action points we learned during the Emergency Response Training were coming to me and I felt empowered to help that person." The biker received immediate and effective help. G1,



with support of The Art of Living, aims to train 1,00,000 first responders by the end of this year. A mobile application, 'Art of Living First Aid Awareness App' was launched to aid in and speed up the learning process.

Strengthening the Grass-Roots

Seva Times Network

Art of Living to train 29,000 members of panchayat and gram sabhas in yoga, meditation, and life skills

Assam: Convinced that spirituality and good governance go hand in hand, the State Institute of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj of Assam has given a mandate to the Art of Living to train all the elected representatives in yoga, meditation, and life skills. The panchayat and members of gram sabhas are the most important in a democracy. It is necessary that they have the required skills to establish stronger governance at the grass root level, which forms the foundation for the country's constitutional bodies.

Around 29,000 members will undergo training in a period of four months. 12 centers have been established in which continuous training will be conducted by 24 teachers. This exercise not only aims to bring about personal enhancement for each participant but will also translate into better awareness of self and society. With better awareness and accountability from the elected members the Government schemes and policies will be implemented with dedication which will translate into benefits reaching to the last person even in remotest places. The peoples participation in governance will also help in solving local issues more effectively and foster a sense of oneness and open up new opportunities for all.

Happy Birthday Gurudev!

Thohaja Gururak

On May 13, 1956, in a small town in Tamil Nadu, Pappasam, a new hope for a peaceful one world family was born in the form of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. 'Pappasam' literally translates to "Destruction of Sins" and the child born on that fateful day took on the responsibility of bringing peace and joy not just to his family, or his town, or even his country, but to the whole world! This month, as we celebrate Gurudev's 63rd birthday, we are joined by 450 million people from 156 countries whose lives have in some way been touched by him.

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar is not only one of the greatest spiritual leaders of our times but also one of the greatest social reformers. All violence simply drops in his very presence and young or old, male or female, rich or poor, ignorant or intellectual, one cannot help but fall in love with him! His aura of love and compassion encompasses all who come his way irrespective of their religious, cultural, social, or financial backgrounds. As a spiritual master, he ensures that you grow to your full potential as an individual and as a social reformer he empowers you and gently motivates you to bring a positive change in society.

It is definitely not an idle spiritualism that his devotees practice; devotion and love for their Master is translated into 'Seva' - an offering of selfless service to the Divine, rendered with no personal expectations. Today The Art of Living boasts of one of the world's largest network of volunteers. The organization has rejuvenated 41 rivers across four states in India, has planted 81 million trees across the world, transformed the lives of over 8,00,000 inmates in prisons across 65 countries through Prison SMART programs, provided free education to over 70,000 children, trained thousands of farmers in organic farming, launched of the biggest anti drug abuse campaigns of all times, and so the list goes on.

In 2018 Gurudev launched one of Art of Living's most ambitious projects - Gram Pratinidhi. The project aims to appoint at least five representatives from each of the 6.5 lakh villages in India who are young, energetic, and full of enthusiasm to take their country forward. This will create a spiritual wave in India like never before in history. India with an estimated population of 1.37 billion is a land of diverse religious, social, and cultural beliefs. Spirituality is the silken thread that will string all the diverse pearls of India into one beautiful garland. This is no ordinary task but then Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar is no ordinary person!

As we celebrate Gurudev's birthday, come let us all join hands to make Project Gram Pratinidhi a resounding success. There is no greater gift than this that we can offer!

Sri Sri Says Spiritual Values a Must to Save the Environment

Padma Koty

The recently organized Desi Beej Mahotsav at The Art of Living International Center was but the latest in a series of initiatives taken over the decades by the Art of Living under the vision and leadership of Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. Hundreds of varieties of indigenous seeds go extinct every single year. Gurudev's latest initiative is bound to positively impact the farmers' business and save native varieties from vanishing forever.

Gurudev's simple but sure approach of positively questioning ingrained environmental practices and then moving on to taking concerted action to bring sustained and far-reaching benefits through the Art of Living Projects is a great contribution to India, and to the planet.

He has said that the challenge of the present century is to maintain harmony in the environment while giving space to technology and science to grow. **This can happen only when we have spiritual values.** How can this be achieved? He explains how with his characteristic depth and brilliance:

- The purpose of technology is to harness nature, to bring information and comfort to human beings. When spiritual and human values are ignored, technology brings pollution and destruction, instead of comfort.
- Laws alone cannot ensure environmental sustainability. We need to make care for environment a part of our value system.
- Mechanisms need be created for participation of civil society, especially the youth, for revival of water bodies, planting saplings and a life style geared towards zero waste.
- The greed for quick and large profits severely disrupts the ecological balance, and not only pollutes the physical environment, but also stimulates negative emotions on a subtle level. We need to attend to the human psyche, which is the root cause of pollution.
- It is not technology and science that pose a hazard, but the waste material generated by technological and scientific processes.
- Have reverence for the planet, revere trees and rivers as sacred, treat people as sacred, and see God in Nature. This will foster sensitivity
- A happy state of mind is crucial towards a pollution-free environment.

Gurudev's underlying ideology towards all aspects of Planet Earth has always been holistic, inclusive, compassionate and really well-thought through. His ideology ensures that all ramifications of any eco-environmental challenge facing us are brought into play while deciding the course of sustainable action in addressing those particular - and allied - challenges. How to bring in sustainability, how to safeguard the profitability of livelihoods, how to save native knowledge and know-how, how to save lives (farmer suicides) - all these have always been at the base of Gurudev's thinking on what action is needed to bring in the required change in existing systems, practices and processes. Gurudev does not believe in mere "activism", but in action. Pioneering, path-breaking action. The proof is in the Projects!

Learning from the EXPERTS



Keeper of the Future

Dr. Prabhakar Rao has a PhD. in Agriculture. He has over 20 years of specialization in landscape architecture. He has been part of several iconic projects all over the world, including the Palm Island, Waterfronts in Kazan, and several sustainable architectural projects in the Far East, Africa and the Americas. He presently consults for projects like Sardar Vallabhai Bhai Patel statue in Gujarat, the Green project for the new capital city Amaravati, Waterfront township in Bhutan, etc. He has been involved with the Art of Living Foundation since 1996. He set up and headed the Middle East division of the International Association for Human Values in Dubai, as the COO, till 2011. Currently entrusted as a Trustee with the Sri Sri Institute of Agricultural Sciences & Technology Trust, Dr Rao has been a seed keeper of indigenous native varieties for more than 25 years. He has now successfully stabilized around 140 rare indigenous vegetable varieties.

Dr. Hampi Chakrabarti in conversation with Dr. Prabhakar Rao

■ Tell us something about Gurudev's vision for agriculture in India.

The Sri Sri Institute of Agricultural Sciences & Technology Trust was set up by Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar seeing the severe need among the farmers for an alternative to chemical agriculture. With this mission He looked into our ancient scriptures like the Vriksha Ayurveda, Charak Samhita, about 18 chapters in the Rig Veda and others. They documented a system of agriculture in India that had successfully survived for at least 5000 years. It is known as Vedic agriculture and several other names as Kadu Krishi, Rishi Krishi, Homa Krishi. Gurudev brought all of them together as Sri Sri Natural Farming. He took the essence from our scriptures and presented in a form that anybody could adopt.

■ What is unique about Sri Sri Natural Farming?

It is a technique of agriculture where you let nature do its work, what it has already been doing successfully for millions of years, and not interfere with it by adding harmful chemicals. Sri Sri Natural Farming is unique in many ways.

Manure: It is based on the desi cow. If you look into mythology, it is derived from the mythical Kamdhenu that was gifted by God to mankind, saying that this cow will give all the wealth that is needed in life. What is a lesser known fact is that this wealth was not milk, but the cow dung. A desi cow's dung has microbes that act as key catalyst for plant growth; they assist in releasing the nutrients in the soil which are in a bound form i.e., they are not freely soluble. In a beautiful symbiotic relationship, it gives sugar in return for their survival. We make Jeev Amrita, Prana Jeev Amrita, Beej Amrita and Panthagavya from the dung. These can be prepared by the farmer in the farm itself, at no extra cost, since all ingredients are available in the farm itself. Moreover, the moment you bring this sattu into the soil through the microbes, the earthworms come and do all the work of tilling and loosening the soil and bringing air into it.

Disease & Pest Control: Gurudev believes that everything is a creation of Shiva. We cannot go and kill a pest just because it is sitting on our plants! What we can do is make our plants a little less attractive and appetizing to the pests, by putting something bitter on it so that they go and sit somewhere else. To control pest and diseases, we teach farmers to make astras, like neem astra, brahma astra and agni astra, which again can be made at zero cost, from ingredients available in the field itself.

Marketing: Our trained farmers come together and form the Sri Sri Kisan Manch, wherein we provide them direct linkages to the market and consumer, through Sri Sri Tattva. In this way Sri Sri Natural Farming provides the farmers a 360 degree support from training, hand holding to marketing.

■ What are the core challenges that SSIASST is trying to address presently?

The retail prices are at an all-time low in terms of inflation. The farmers are reaching a stage where farming is not even worth the cost of harvesting. The farmers sometimes are driven to the point where they just leave the crop on the field or dump it on the road. This is why people are unwilling to take up farming. Gurudev understands the gravity of this situation and thus is addressing it at a very fundamental level. He wants to give the farmers a profitable, viable and sustainable alternative, which is Sri Sri Natural Farming.

■ How is this connected with spirituality?

Gurudev says, "what you eat is who you are." Is the food we and our children eating today, conducive for having a healthy body and centred mind? The kind of food that we are eating today is full of chemical residue and other toxins. A body loaded with toxins moves our nature away from sattva and does not enable the mind to be centred and develop itself spiritually. A rajasic mind will have its own challenges while processing information. Eating toxin free food itself will be a great starting point for transformation to happen.

■ What have been the noteworthy achievements of these initiatives?

The very fact that we have 22 lakh farmers who are working with us and adopting this technology, I believe this itself is a huge achievement. We have over a 1000 trainers in India who travel all over the country and conduct training programs.

■ Has there been any intervention for stopping farmer suicides in India?

Very much, specially in the Vidarbha area. We are first of all taking care of the farmers' mind through our Happiness Program and then slowly introducing them to alternative forms of agriculture. Today there all happy farmers and attribute their success to Gurudev. Our work continues.

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A desi cow's dung has microbes that act as key catalyst for plant growth”

SEVA Highlights

Free Food for Patients and Their Caretakers at Sunder Nagar Hospital

Sunder Nagar, Himachal Pradesh: The Art of Living Women's Club in Sunder Nagar has launched a project to distribute free breakfast to patients and their caretakers between 7:30 a.m. and 8:15 a.m. every morning at the Civil Hospital. Narendra Sawa, Chief of the Club, stated that the objective behind this project was to help the caretakers who set aside their responsibilities to stay with the patients in the hospital to take care of them. A tea dispensing machine has also been installed at the hospital. Ritu Kharbanda, Director of the club, says that shortly they plan to introduce free dinner as well. The members of the club have also helped to redecorate the Children's Ward in the hospital, making it nice and bright with pictures of cartoon characters like Mickey Mouse, Tom and Jerry, and Chotta Bhim.

Nine Couples Tie the Knot at Mass Wedding in Gujarat

Panchmahal, Gujarat: On the occasion of Hanuman Jayanti on April 19, 2019, Yuvacharyas led by Art of Living faculty, Parth Joshi, had organized a mass wedding in Rameshara Village, Panchmahal District, Gujarat. Nine girls from the surrounding villages were married at the ceremony. Parents of the brides were joyous that they could get their daughters married without being burdened by heavy financial expenditure which they could ill afford. Nearly 3000-3500 guests who attended the wedding were treated to a sumptuous feast. Elders of the village who attended the ceremony remarked that they were attending a ceremony of such grandeur for the first time after independence. Each of the brides received household goods such as beds, bedding, almirahs, fans, mixer-grinders, and kitchen utensils, worth Rs. 35000-40000 as a gift. All these gifts were arranged by the villagers, Yuvacharyas, and Avadh Dham Mandir.

25 Gram Panchayats of Haryana Confer Title of 'Choudhari' to Gurudev

Hissar, Haryana: During his recent tour of Haryana, Gurudev was conferred with an honorary Doctorate degree by Guru Jambheshwar University of Science and Technology. He was also decorated with the title of honor, 'Choudhari' by 25 Gram Panchayats of Haryana at a special ceremony organized by The Art of Living family in Hansi. According to Sandeep Goyal, this title is conferred on a person who upholds justice and righteousness and works for the upliftment of the downtrodden without discriminating between caste, creed, rich, poor, etc. This move was lauded by the Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar.

Working for a Cleaner, Healthier, & Happier Sant Nagar

Seva Times Network

Faridabad, Haryana: Recently, a batch of students who completed The Art of Living's "Dynamism for Self and Nation" (DSN) course, conducted by Sukhi Bhaiyya, were assigned the task of making Sant Nagar, a densely populated slum near Faridabad Railway Station, cleaner and healthier. DSN is a rigorous and transformational course that empowers participants to break through personal inhibitions and barriers and access inner stability and power, helping the participants to blossom to their fullest extent and live the life they desire.

The project was named "Utthan" and the team members did a wonderful job in cleaning up the area and making the residents of the slum happier and healthier by teaching them yoga and meditative techniques. To bring about any lasting change, first the individuals have to be empowered and then the community has to be brought together to work in harmony towards common goals - which in this case was to get the slum cleaned up. The team members carefully planned yoga, meditation, and satsang sessions with the community. Every morning, at 7:00 a.m. the young and the old living in the slum gathered together near the open ground in front of Hanuman Mandir for an hour long session of yoga and meditation. Sundays were markedly special as the sessions ended with a special satsang.

Hygiene promotion activities were conducted in the school. Children were taught the importance of washing hands before eating and after using the toilet. The children were also encouraged to assist their parents, especially their mother, in



Volunteers teaching children the importance of hygiene through fun and games

the household work. The team members also educated men and women of the area about the importance of personal hygiene. Discussions were held with the local community head who explained the pertinent issues that needed to be addressed.

To handle issues that could not be handled by them alone, the team members took the help of government officials and NGOs. The team used many innovative social media tools to address the sanitation issue in the community. The Swachh app was effectively used to lodge a complaint about the clogged up drain and dirty streets and the municipal authorities immediately took action. The community was educated about using the Swachh app and the people were motivated to use the app to ensure hygiene in their community. The team members used other social media tools

like Central Public Pollution Control Board app (CPCB) - a public forum application to raise the issue of the community to the government authority.

Sant Nagar is funded under the Smart City program. New sewer lines are being laid in the colony, water pipes, storm water drains and internal roads will be developed in the coming months. What was needed was to create awareness in the community regarding sanitation and hygiene, which the Utthan team did very efficiently. This is just a small sample of what an empowered group of individuals can achieve. All of us dream of building a better society but as individual we achieve very little. The Art of Living provides the necessary platform for individuals to come together and work towards bringing about sustainable transformation in society.

Learning New Ropes in Summer Camp



Bengaluru Karnataka: 200 rural children from the North-East of India and Karnataka are sharpening effective professional skills this summer at The Art of Living free school in Bangalore. Under the project "Shishka & Kreedha" in partnership with Tata Communications, children studying in classes 5-9 are learning to work on presentations, Excel Sheets, and other computer skills. Both girls and boys are being coached in football, volleyball, and other sports to gain sporting as well as life skills.



Project Bharat Gains Momentum

Buldhana, Maharashtra: Pratinidhis from 65 villages in Buldhana district, Khambgaon Taluka, Maharashtra, got together and created a big momentum as they went about organizing 40 Nav Chetana Shivirs that saw an average participation of 130 people in each village. Taking it a step further, Seva Yoddha, Hitesh Bihara, with the help of volunteers and Pratinidhis succeeded in organizing Happiness Programs in a cluster of 40 villages and around 320 participants experienced Sudarshan Kriya.

When Life Is a Challenge, That's When All The Skills are Needed From Within You



Words of Wisdom
- Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

Being calm and peaceful when everything is calm, everything is peaceful, has no meaning. Being peaceful when everything is peaceful is dull and boring. You should create some trouble. You should have some fun. You should have some mischief. When everything is absolutely fine and peaceful and quiet, being peaceful has no meaning, but when everything is falling apart, then being quiet and peaceful - that peace has value. A bottle of water has more worth in a desert than when you are surrounded by water. When you are sitting by a spring, then a bottle of water is of no value to you. One handful from the spring is good enough to quench your thirst. When there is chaos, there is confusion; when there are problems all around you, then calmness is needed the most; wisdom is most valuable then. When life is a challenge, that's when all the skills are needed from within you. When people blame you, when they don't understand you, that's when you need the inner strength to smile. When things don't go the way you want them to, that's when you need the endurance, the strength and courage to remain unperturbed. What brings that courage in you is exactly what Krishna said: samatvam yoga ucyate (2.48). That equanimity is the test of your yoga.

There is an incident about Mahatma Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi's life companion, Kasturba Gandhi, was on her deathbed. Doctors had given up hope. They said, "Just a few hours or minutes - that's it, for her to live." At that time, Mahatma Gandhi came out of his kutir and told Pandit Sudhakar Chaturvedi, "Read that verse from Bhagwad Gita for me." When he recited the Gita, Gandhi said, "Today is your Babu's test. Today is my examination. I will know whether I will be able to handle the loss of Kasturba." As he was saying this, tears rolled down his eyes. "Whether I am equanimous or not, today is the testing day." Yoga brings that balance, so that an event doesn't shatter you.

Just observe how your mind goes, how it flares up, for nothing! How it creates a mess all around. One moment it's high, another moment it's down. Bipolar is an extreme condition, but those who are not doing yoga, they are all, in some manner, in a bipolar state. Yoga is the answer for these psychological troubles. Samatvam yoga ucyate (2.48). Yoga is the equanimity that wells up in you, that comes up in you, stabilizes your consciousness.

Excerpts from Gurudev's commentary on Bhagavad Gita

Embodiment of Selfless Service



Dr. Sujata

“
I have always set my own targets & achieved them.”

Seva Times Network

Tapan Rehabilitation Society, a nonprofit organization in Nilokheri, Karnal, that caters to special needs of differently abled children and young adults, is the brain child of Dr. Sujata. Dr. Sujata holds a doctoral degree in psychology and a post graduate degree in guidance and counseling and is among The Art of Living faculty.

The second of three daughters, Sujata comes from a highly educated family. Her father, a doctorate in Upanishads and History, is a Class I Officer in the Education Department. Her mother is a highly intellectual homemaker. Her family has always been very supportive of her and encouraged her to pursue her dreams. After

completing her studies, Sujata wanted to become a counselor. A little shy and introverted, Sujata says she was never a career woman. Focusing on the needs of specially abled children and young adults was never on her cards. She started her career as a project officer in UNICEF for 3 years. For a short while she worked with Metro Group of Hospitals when she came across patients with anxiety, trauma, phobias, and other emotional distresses. Perhaps she would have remained content as a counselor had it not been for a group of differently abled children that approached her for guidance. The seed for Tapan Rehabilitation Society was laid. Sujata very philosophic-

ally says. "We don't choose our occupations but it is vice versa. It chooses us."

Sujata started Tapan Rehabilitation Society in 1994. Initially it served about 25 children providing services such as speech therapy and vocational training. In 1995, a team of doctors, educationists, social workers, and businessmen joined Sujata in her mission and today the institution has reached the heights of international repute. It now also has a Viklang Shishu Prashikshan Kendra, a residential institution for children and young adults ranging in age from 3 to 30 years old. There are now 200 students including those with learning disabilities, speech and hearing impairments, mental challenges, autism, and cerebral palsy. The center is educating these children and teaching them daily living skills that will help them to integrate into the day-to-day life of their communities. It also now offers D.Ed. in Special Education for those who are interested to equip themselves as teachers for the specially abled. Additionally, Tapan has now also taken on the responsibility of empowering women and is teaching them skills such as stitching, embroidery, candle making, and computers.

While working with mentally and physically challenged children is rewarding, it is not an easy task, especially for sensitive people like Sujata. Handling psychiatric cases would have a deep effect on her and leave her feeling disturbed. In 2001, she did her first Art of Living program. When asked

what impact the program had on her, she smilingly said, "Before doing this course I used to smile very rarely but now the smile is rarely missing from my face." She found a better vision of life and relationships and she was ready to take on all the challenges that her occupation offered. In 2002 she became the first Art of Living teacher in Karnal and started conducting programs for children in the Rehab center, for destitute women in Nari Niketans, for police personnel at the Police Training Center, and for inmates in prisons. She has helped thousands to find joy in life, including the children at the rehab center. A self-motivated woman who believes in setting her own targets and achieving them, Sujata has become a role model for the woman of today. She has been conferred the "Woman of the Year" Award twice by the District Legal Services Authority, Government of Haryana. She has also been nominated by the Government of Haryana as the brand ambassador from Karnal for the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao campaign. Giving her 100% to the task at hand and at the same time remaining detached has helped Sujata to remain motivated towards her work. Her philosophy and lifelong project are best expressed in the motto penned by her for Tapan Rehabilitation Society, "Every individual is unique and can contribute to society in a meaningful way if given right input at the right time."

Making Way for a Better World

HERO STORIES



Pankaj Yadav

“
This entire journey is learning”

Dr. Hampi Chakrabarti

Although born in a family where education was worshipped, studying was not a favourite thing for young Pankaj. Nevertheless, growing up in Uttar Pradesh, the heartland of public service aspirations, he was required by his family to toe the traditions. Thus, after completing his graduation, he tried his hands at business. When that didn't work out he grudgingly took up the next best job option. But his heart failed to be interested.

Unknown to his conscious self, Pankaj Yadav had grown up admiring the efforts that his family elders made towards the development of their village and people. He proudly says, "people from more than fifty villages would come to my

eldest grandfather with their problems. Later on, my father carried forward that tradition." Observing the seeds of the same passion in him, one day his father guided him to study for Master in Social Work.

That was it. After years of restlessness, for the first time, Pankaj found a home for his heart. But the exuberance couldn't last long. In his first job he soon realised that all his time was spent dabbling in papers and he hardly ever got to directly participate with the communities. Dejected, he went back home - where the miracle of life was about to knock at his door.

Directionless, as he passed his days, a friend

largest volunteer-based NGOs and was a frontrunner in social development initiatives. Unsure of what lied ahead, but devoid of many options, Pankaj took a leap of faith and traversed the distance between Mau and Bangalore to find himself suggested him to visit The Art of Living International Centre. It hosted one of the world's at the Project Management Unit of the organisation. Pankaj knew the moment he stepped into the office that life had finally brought him to the place where he was meant to be. The 'Stand Up and Take Action' campaign was just wrapping up and the 'Mission Green Earth' was taking shape. There was no looking back for this wide-eyed lad.

More than a decade later, Pankaj has made significant contribution to managing social development projects in The Art of Living. Some projects under his belt are 'Mission Green Earth Stand Up Take Action', prevention of child marriages in Bihar in partnership with religious functionaries, behavioural change through spiritual action for preventing diarrhoea and gastro enteric infections in Assam and later in Uttar Pradesh also. He has worked extensively for sanitation projects through activities like toilet construction and behavioural change workshops. Today he specialises in Integrated Village Development initiatives.

Pankaj points out that every project brought along a set of unique challenges. When he was working in Bihar towards eradication of child marriage, each day they were required to fight against a deeply entrenched institution and powerful local individuals who swore by it. They couldn't even take recourse to law or police action as that would

be detrimental to their objective of behavioural change with a spiritual approach. Each day they had to walk the thin slippery line of not hurting sentiments and the same time waging a war against those very sentiments. In another instance it so happened that he was travelling on a bus to Barabanki in UP with a group of young volunteers for a project, and the bus met with an accident. Several passengers were severely injured, which also included few of his volunteers. As the matter came to light, the authorities and few local media houses for no rhyme or reason pointed fingers at him for putting those young people's life in danger! That moment he knew that he will have to rise as a responsible leader and not bow down to the false accusations. Of course, as he says, "I knew Gurudev was there with me." With this faith he decided to take on whatever came up. When questioned on what has been his biggest learning, Pankaj says, "This entire journey is a learning." Both challenges and surprises wait for you at every turn of the path, mostly to reveal the possibilities that you are capable of touching upon. His team completed the construction of more than 700 toilets within 90 days! He himself was pleasantly surprised. The biggest magic however unfolded, Pankaj says with a smile, "When everything fell in place so smoothly for me, a boy from the Hindi heartland, to be able to marry a Kannadiga girl." Vimala, his wife, a senior project manager with the organisation, smiles along.



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