

A Talk by Mr. Bunker Roy

On Saturday 1st July I attended a talk and a presentation by Mr. Bunker Roy. Mr. Roy is the Founder of Barefoot College, Tilonia, Rajasthan. As the presentation started I realized that Mr. Roy is a person with powerful conviction and vision of what he wants to do for the society. The college Barefoot is in a way how he expresses the joy and celebration of life where the resources and choices are minimalistic. The secret of the success behind this unique college is to acknowledge, respect and believe the knowledge and the wisdom that poor and illiterate people of India have. I say illiterate because it is very important for us to understand and differentiate between the illiterate and the uneducated. No human being in this world can be called uneducated as reading and writing are an important but a small part of Education. We keep receiving education from our life at every moment and this does not come from books and journals.

Mr. Bunker has been able to channelize this wisdom to build this great institution. People of the village have come together to harness the solar energy and practically work anything on it. The college campus has its own radio station, solar cookers, ATM, marketing units, dentistry, night schools, nursery and anything one could imagine. Imagine all this working on two major sources of power i.e.. Solar power and the Women power.

The college has identified a huge resource and potential in the poor and illiterate women in various communities all over the world. The college is an example of a student centric curriculum where the Teacher is a learner and a learner is a teacher. It demands one to be able to learn, unlearn and relearn from the life of people in rural India.

The college works on demystifying technology in the villages. And who is better than the women of our rural India to be empowered through this idea. The college runs training programs for poor and illiterate women who are mothers and grandmothers to become Solar Engineers. The tribal women learn to engineer and fabricate Solar Energy plants. The training empowers these women to then go and work in their community and solar electrify their villages

with the help of the local people. So far the empowered women of the college have solar electrified 15 thousand houses.

We learnt that the Barefoot model has reached 82 countries across the world and there are 30 barefoot colleges in 13 states of India. The college also runs 20 night schools all over India and proudly all lit up by self generated Solar Lamps. Many African countries are working with Barefoot College to empower the Grandmothers to become Solar Mamas. The Grandmothers come to India and work here for 6 months to go back and electrify their villages and find better water supply systems.

The presentation helped me understand the power that lies within people which is probably waiting just for an opportunity. When I visualize this thought in my context I cannot even imagine the potential that lies in our children and their parents.

What really impressed me was that the Barefoot colleges and schools conduct an election every three years to choose a Prime Minister and Ministers of Cabinet. The Ministry works in collaboration with the students to monitor the quality of education imparted by the teachers. The fact is that all ministers chosen are children from the college. It is truly a government for the people by the people and of the people. The ministry meets once in a month to discuss anything right from the attitude and behavior of the teachers to other grievances.

The presentation also drew our attention towards the fact that our young children do not get to face live and understand the reality of rural India. A program called The Jagriti Yatra happens every year to bring one closer to the Rural India. Find out about it yourself and see how it can bring a change in you.

The idea behind the creation of this great college work on very simple thoughts like - "Have the patience & humility to listen to people" and "Do not call anyone uneducated just because they cannot read and right as they may still have a lot to contribute".

Thank you for reading the report with so much patience. I am grateful to you.

Warm Regards

Deeksha Thomas