

One India One People, a well known foundation which is committed to make our country Great, Strong and United, recently felicitated three extraordinary Indians for their astounding achievements in various fields. In this issue, we will feature Arvind Gupta, the "Toy - Man" and will continue to feature the other two awardees, Shree Kavalam Panikkar and Shree Ranagasamy Elango in the subsequent issues. Below is the excerpt of his interview with Ms. Shweta Parakh, where he shares his past and present with all of us. Elemento page will feature his short Biography.

Question: You are known for your passion for creating toys out of nothing. What do you think of the children of this generation?



Arvind Gupta: The whole message is that today we live in a society which is producing so much of Junk. You know, collect your Fruity packets, don't throw away old refills collect tooth paste tubes, old cans... you can do so much of great science with them! We have this very stereotypical notion that the science can be done only with

pipette and burettes and fancy glasses etc. Children are so traumatized by these equipments that they stop learning all together. We have a slogan that the best thing a child can do with the toys is to break it. Why do children break a toy? Because they are so curious and want to know what's inside it. This is what propels them. And the good toy design must welcome children to pull it apart to see what is inside it and then put it back again. And I think there are enormous possibilities and potential in our children, given a chance of open learning, of discovering things themselves. But Children just don't want to leave the school. See there is a slogan which says "Children walk to school and shouldn't run away from school". It should be just the opposite. If schools were activity based and promote innovative learning, then children would run for school and walk away from them.

Question: You have won many awards before this one. How do you see this award that you got today from One India One People Foundation?

Arind Gupta: I think in today's time it's a very very important award, because this is not an award specifically for science. Our national fabric is being torn apart by all kinds of forces; this could be communal forces, forces from outside our country etc. The movement started by One India People is a much larger movement. It refurbishes the faith of our people right in their own

culture and their own soil. This gives them the inspiration that they can do it and we can hold our heads high. It means a lot to me.

Question: What would you comment for the underprivileged children who live in adverse circumstances and still are seen making small toys out of the garbage that they collect, earning their bread and butter from them, though they might not even know the science behind their own creation?

Arvind Gupta: I think that India is one of the few countries which still have the tradition of making the things with the hands. And this tradition is fast waning because of the on-march of mass produce of factory toys. It will be good learning and good science if we revive this tradition. There is a book called "The joy of making Indian Toys" by my friend Sudarshan Khanna which documents hundreds of these toys. The nice thing about these toys is that they are made from absolutely low cost materials; there is some recycling element in them. In a very little time you can make something very dynamic, something which spins, something which hops or makes sound. And this captures the imagination of the children. This is the time to revive this kind of practice. And as you said, this is a very good way of earning a living and also a very good way of propagating a value system of education.

Question: What is the secret behind the energy that you spread out in your workshops where children are mesmerized with your magical toy making skills?

Arvind Gupta: I derive a lot of energy from the children themselves. Good science is always challenging the teacher. And we want children to do the thing in their own way. Because this is the only one way! And children are great experimenters. Each child is a true scientist. If you give them one idea, they will always carry it forward; they modify it and take it to greater heights. This is a great hope with children. I have learnt a lot from them. I don't know how much good I have done to children, but you know children have done a great deal of good to me.

Question: Who has been your mentor?

Arvind Gupta: I have learnt from many people but one was Anil Sadgopal. He was a molecular biologist. The early seventies were very crucial times world over. There was a political ferment with the Vietnam movement, Civil Rights Movement, Jai Prakash Narayan's Andolan, Naxal Movement etc. And when these societies are churned, a lot of social energies are released. Anil Sadgopal came from US in the early seventies and he was just thirty when he quit his job and went to his village. And because he came from academics, he said that the way the science is being taught in the schools is horrendous. So, we are going to try to make the science interesting and creative by using

all the available material in the village. This excited me. I spent a year over there as a youngster, just 22 years of age. I said this is what I want to do.

Question: So, you mean to say that when children make these toys and play with them, parents should not have any problem.

Arving Gupta: I personally feel that it is not fun if it is not learning!

Interviewed by:
Shweta Parakh