

Brief background and work of Varun Vidyarthi

Varun Vidyarthi has a formal background in Electrical Engineering from I.I.T. Kharagpur and Business Management from I.I.M. Calcutta. He started his career as an engineer with the corporate sector at TATA Motors, Pune. The Indian spiritual tradition of finding a purpose in life, led him to abandon that career track to live and work among poor villagers in Uttar Pradesh, North India. In the early eighties, his analysis of linkages between social structure and resource management issues in rural India led him to work as Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, U.K., Research Fellow at the East West Center, Honolulu, U.S.A. and later as Consultant to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the U.N. The call of the grassroots, however led him back from academics to being a practitioner of participatory methods in rural Uttar Pradesh. He is currently director of Manavodaya. He is also member of the Working group on Panchayati Raj, Gender and Micro finance. Planning Commission, Government of India as well as member UP Electricity Regulatory Commission.

Varun and Amla (Ph.D. in Chemistry from I.I.T. Roorkee, married to Varun) started the institution Manavodaya (meaning Human Awakening) in 1985, through which they have been working full time in

- o Developing practical methods of self help and empowerment among the rural poor. After working continuously at the village level in a backward region, the institute has successfully demonstrated that people living in the most adverse conditions can be enabled to improve their living conditions significantly through their own efforts. This has been widely acclaimed and the institute is now recognised as a center of excellence in people-based, self help approaches in development. It continues to attract practitioners, academics and bureaucrats from India as well as different parts of the world for training in methods of participatory development. Varun has

lectured extensively in different institutions and universities across the world on practical methods of enabling people's participation.

- o Training professionals in values based approach to life and work. Several thousand professionals serving in the government, banks and other institutions have been trained at the institute during the last twenty years. The special identity of the institution lies in promoting values through a process of “ Collective reflection “, a method evolved at the institute during the numerous programmes held for a variety of participants like illiterate villagers, bank managers, government officers, public sector executives, students and professors from the developed countries.

Manavodaya has an Ashram like infrastructure in Lucknow which has excellent conferencing, lodging and boarding facilities. All programmes of the institute are residential, having durations varying from three days to three weeks.

The efforts of Varun and Amla are now being spread by a growing network of Manavodaya Alumni in different parts of the country and abroad. Varun has produced several reports and publications about his work. A good analytical account of the work can be read in a recent book entitled “ Development from Within “ co-authored by Varun with Prof. Patricia Wilson of the University of Texas, USA.

Contact details

Varun Vidyarthi

Manavodaya

Institute of Participatory Development

I.I.M. Road, Post Diguria, Lucknow 226020

Phones : 0091 522 6568530, 0 9839310461

E mail : manavodayaindia@gmail.com

Website : www.manavodaya.org