



Music in the soul can be heard by the universe

老子



MUSIC EDITION



We thought about this a lot. Open media, stories focusing on processes, media that creates impact, a sustainable business model. What is Saadho? At the end of it, we always end up with stories of the heart, stories of love. So, that's what it is going to be!

Saadho is a print magazine which writes about people for whom their work has become their means to connect with the divine, initiatives which have taken birth from this beautiful life force within all of us. And Saadho can only be true if the people making Saadho become that in the process. This is why we're doing Saadho.

After the concept edition and the Jan 17' edition, we got good clarity and hence, this time around, we've kept a theme for the magazine and as the cover page depicts, it is music!

Over centuries music has been a great connector of hearts, lives and beyond. In this edition, we try to bring you this essence via stories of initiatives, people and more. There are a few other stories as well which also represent music and harmony in their own sense. Apart from this, we've also experimented with forms and have tried to add a lot of personalization to make this edition a symphony of love!

Mirdad

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# PARVATHY BAUL A SINGING DANCING SWIRLING BAUL MYSTIC

*“Aami kichui jaani na, Aami kichui jaani na”* (I don't know anything, I don't know anything), said a Baul gurujee from Kolkata with an entire world of wisdom flowing from his eyes to a small audience in Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh. A couple of years before, I had been introduced to the tradition of the Bauls during a performance by the mesmerising Parvathy Baul at Jagori NGO.

A *sadhak* for more than three decades, Parvathy has had a beautiful journey of devotion, and personifies the musical Baul tradition. A mystic yogic tradition dating back to more than 15 centuries, it draws from Sufism, Buddhism, Vaishnavism and Tantra. Believed to have origins in the modern day Bengal, the Baul tradition has inspired the likes of Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekanand and many more. “Baul tradition is not only about music; it is a holistic way of living. A tradition, living in which makes one more compassionate, more just, more loving,” says Parvathy, for whom the journey began during a train journey when she came across a blind Baul. The person fascinated Parvathy, as he seemed to be so lost in the joy of singing that he appeared to belong to another world.

Parvathy's musical journey began when she was six when she was trained in Kathak dance and Hindustani vocals, but her real connect happened a decade later when she came across the Bauls. “I was drawn into the Baul tradition.

It is a yogic tradition for people on the *bhakti marg* and the moment I heard a Baul singing, I was teleported into some other blissful state,” says Parvathy.

As author Laurent Aubert writes, Parvathy first learnt from Bhipad Taran Das Baul and then Phulmala Dashi, a strong female Baul who asked her to join her while she did *Madhukori* (sacred begging) on the trains, so she could teach her some songs.

This was a very difficult step. Many Bauls usually led a very marginal life, not caring for anything but their *sadhana*. This is beautiful to one degree but not necessary. The word ‘Baul’ originates from three terms: *betul*, which means ‘mad’ or ‘out of rhythm’; *vayu*, which means ‘air’ or ‘the inner flow of energy which gives life and harmony to all sentient beings’; and *âuliyâ*, a term of Arabic origin, which means ‘holy man’. And the essence of the tradition (like any other yogic tradition) lies in attaining harmony with nature and all; becoming one.

For anyone on the spiritual path, a master is very important, and this search led Parvathy to Sanatan Das Baul, an octogenarian who sang poems about Radha. His ashram was in Khayerbani. Learning from him, she was initiated into the Baul tradition but as a Brahmin girl, Parvathy could not help but wonder if the path she followed was consistent with her real vocation. Along the way, she also ventured into theatre, and this when she met Ravi Copalan Nair, her life partner, who is a specialist in theatre. Along the path, she faced many difficulties but her belief was strong.

“There are doubts. The *bhakti marg* is about complete devotion but still one has points when a question arises: how far have I reached? When will I reach the destination? This happened with me too but then I came across a Baul song,” she says when asked about the journey and went on to share it:

*My compassion boat  
is filled with gold of nothingness  
I have no space for any other  
Oh Kamli, you have rowed your boat for many lives  
you row your boat towards the sky  
now let's begin  
and see where this journey takes you.  
You have let gone the tie of ego  
you have put up the sail of expansion  
now go on the path by the guidance of a True Yogi.  
take your boat to the right to the left  
it's filled with waves of sorrow and happiness.  
Kamli, you have known every wave  
you have found the company of true Ananda in your longing for the beloved.*

*Interpretation: you wanted to reach a destination, but in the path itself; in the longing itself you have found your destination; he is here, there and everywhere.*

Photo by Ila Reddy





Singing and dancing her way through years, Parvathy has mesmerised many via performances across the globe, and is currently focussing her energy on setting up the gurukul at Ekathara Kalari.

As they put it, Ekathara Kalari is a space for sadhakas from the traditional knowledge streams of art, spirituality, theatre, puppetry, music and healing. It merges the concepts of the 'Akhara', a space for Baul practitioners from the Bengali tradition, and the 'Kalari', the traditional Kerala theatre practice space. At the gurukul, Parvathy Baul and other teachers take in a very small group of dedicated students. "Baul practice is a slow and long-term process that requires strict inner discipline. It is transmitted from teacher to student in a shared environment," says Parvathy.

Baul is an immensely beautiful tradition, and Parvathy has played a pivotal role in bringing its magic to the people who'd otherwise have not been able to have a taste of it. Being in the presence of Parvathy or any other Baul guru is an experience to be savoured and a step that gives one the glimpse of the unity.







## A MEETING WITH KHAPA BAUL

A little less than 200 kilometres from Kolkata lies the spiritual town of Shantiniketan. Its red hued roads and serenity inspired Rabindranath Tagore to open his ViswaBharati here. Apart from ViswaBharati and being a muse for Tagore, Shantiniketan is famous for producing yet another Nobel Laureate- the economist Amartya Sen. While the names of these two heavyweights dominate every other street name and store sign of the little town, it is perhaps the orange clad, Ektara wielding Baul which has emerged as the most enduring symbol of Shantiniketan.

“My grandfather used to be a cook for Rabindranath Tagore,” says KhapaBaul (pronounced khyaa-pa) proudly. Born into a family of Bauls, Khapais the latest in a long line of the custodians of this ancient and sacred tradition. Often times they have had to resort to other means to earn a living, like his grandfather

cooking for the Nobel laureate. But the Baul way of life has always been at the centre of their existence. Born JagannathHazra, KhapaBaul is fondly called Jaga-da by the locals of Shantiniketan, *da* being the Bengali suffix for older brother.

Khapa himself has had to sell his art many a times in order to survive. In an increasingly tourist ridden Shantiniketan he is frequently summoned to be the evening’s entertainment at resorts and hotels. Among alcohol soaked guests looking to dance the evening away, he sings songs of the red earth of Birbhum, the mystic spirit of the soul and of love for the supreme divine. Speaking to me on a morning after one such night of revelry, he is matter of fact about it. “They were content to be swept away by the currents of the rhythm,” he says of the guests of the previous evening. “To be moved by Baul music you need to dive into the river. Go deep and dive in the depths of your soul to uncover the gems this music has to offer. But it’s okay. I am happy as long as I get to sing and dance and practice my art, even if I am the replacement for the DJ sometimes.”

Khapa isn’t bitter about it. He is grateful for whatever allows him to continue this life of pursuit. “To be a Baul is to be a seeker. It is a life spent searching for answers about this earthly life, exploring our body and the spirit housed within it. Most importantly it is about having fun.”

“Yes fun,” he laughs when seeing my confused expression. “To be a Baul is not to be a stoic sufferer. It is such a privilege to be alive, a blessing to be able to experience the world the way we humans do. You have a duty to make your time here as full of joy as possible. For us Bauls we do that through our music. We plumb

the depths of the human condition and mine its joys and sorrows through poetry, song and dance.”

With his free flowing locks, patchwork orange kurta and the guitar case which contains his Ektara slung across his shoulders, Khapa at first glance appears more rock star than wandering minstrel. To complete the anachronistic picture he whizzes across town on his bike, travelling from one singing engagement to another. With his warm and chatty demeanour he strikes up *adda* groups and makes friends wherever he goes. It would be hard to argue he isn’t having fun.

“I am not advocating mindless pleasure,” he clarifies. “For us to experience true joy we have to lead lives of extreme rigour. Each of us have a divine soul within us. To discover its truth we have to constantly seek, probe and question. Our work is our Dharma. We have to be disciplined in pursuit of our craft. The more we immerse ourselves in what brings us joy, the better we grasp the elusive divinity of our souls. The closer we come to truth, peace and vision. To be on this path we must cherish and celebrate all our senses. Be free and wild. Make love, sing, dance and pray. But be mindful of our Karma.”

It is this sentiment that he imbues through his music. As long as he is engrossed in playing the music that is his legacy he transcends to a higher plane. For Khapa, to be a Baul is not to simply play a tune but to live a life that is in service of the soul. To answer to a higher calling with every action of yours. To get closer to the mystery that enshrines our being. And what happens when he has found the answers he is looking for? “Then I’ll no longer be here,” he smiles.



# The Kumbh Within

My customary walk by the banks of the Thames in London became an everyday ritual whilst wanting to avail the privilege of living close to its south bank near Waterloo in 2009. Very often, on these chilly strolls in the cold winters of London, the thoughts meandered and made their way to Indian landscapes. I found myself gazing at forms and colours and often being reminded of similar visuals with starkly different connotations in the Indian cultural realm. In hindsight, these thoughts were precursors to a journey that was to be embarked upon in the summer of 2009 which took me to the ancient land of Varanasi by the banks of the Ganga. This odyssey was to lead to the land that houses the confluence of the Ganga, the Yamuna and the Saraswati (Allahabad), the land that houses the source of the Godavari (Nashik-Trimbakeshwar) and sees it turn southwards; and the land through which the perennial Kshipra flows (Ujjain)

From a dissertation comparing the cultural landscapes of the Thames in London with the Ganga in Varanasi to the commission of documenting the Kumbh Mela of Allahabad (2013), Nashik-Trimbakeshwar (2015) and Ujjain (2016); the journey goes on.

Would I in my own senses have chosen to go to the Kumbh? Surely not then! In 2013. It had to be an invitation before the need to go uninvited dawned; much later. Crowds, chaos, stampedes, fake Gurus were synonymous to the Kumbh in my mind. It was a serendipitous work commission; in hindsight. The beginnings of this trajectory can be traced to this assignment, it still continues and is now an integral part of what forms our mind sets (through the many influences it has brought with it) at Anugraha. The commission of making a book on the Kumbh made me realize that for this to manifest it had to be us and not just me. Anugraha, our design studio was born in December of 2012.

Here, we share a few illuminating conversations amongst the many that left an impact and shifted things within.

*Vivekanand Brahmachariji of the Agni Akhada, a young saint on being asked about his experience of going for the holy snan had an immediate response which stayed with me: little said with an analogy that was so random and yet so relevant 'Melody khao, khud jaan jao'.*

*Mahadevanandji, a 22 year old: thanapati Naga at the Juna Akhada while being interviewed by one of the team members narrated a conversation between Swami Ramkrishna and his disciple who referred to*







*Swamiji and said that he was great tyagi (one who sacrifices). On hearing this, Swami Ramkrishna replied saying that he was actually a bhogi (one who indulges) and that his disciple was a tyagi. Adding to this, Swamiji said unto him, 'I have experienced God. I am always with God. I have left this materialistic world. You have chosen to live in the materialistic world. You have your bhog (indulgence) here and you have sacrificed God. So in actual fact, you are a tyagi, and I am a bhogi. My bhog (indulgence) is God.*

*I was an orphan, my parents gave me to an ashram as a part of their sadhana, I was looking for 'something'. For Daya Prasad Mishra, (a 98-year-old sadhu of the Panchayati Akhada, wrapped in marigold and an assured sense of calm seated outside a tea stall looking on at a passing procession) it wasn't so much about becoming a sadhu as being one — 'Sadhu is in the mind. You are also a sadhu, every human being is one. Hold on to the truth and the good; that is being a sadhu and that is sadhana.'*

*'We are all part of a circle. On the circumference of the circle are lakhs of people. God is at the centre of the circle. Now, if we have to journey from the circumference to the centre, how many radii will be there? Infinite. So each seeker has her own path, is it not? One chooses this way, another chooses a different way. Infinite people, infinite paths to God. Choose your own path.' Nikhilatmanandji at the Sri Ramkrishna Math Kumbh Camp in Allahabad expounded this analogy originally proposed by Swami Vivekananda as if to validate all that was being said and heard.*

The experience has been narrated by Deshna on behalf of the entire Studio Anugraha which has embarked on this journey.





# स्वर साधना में मग्न

“We can never do anything different. Everything has been done before; all we can do is research and unearth the gems again. Otherwise, how is it possible to believe that what I am singing hasn't been sung by Taansen or Baiju Bawra centuries ago? Impossible,” laments Sanjeev Chauhan, or Guruji for his *shagird* (students). He goes on to say that music is the only medium that can take a person into meditation without any effort. Once a person starts a journey with music, the outer sounds automatically drop and there is no space for external disturbances to enter. We're sitting in the Garden of Fragrance in Chandigarh, amidst the greenery and musical notes of the birds, trying to explore the deeper layers of sound, or as they have been called in ancient cultures, *naada*.

One of the key elements Guruji highlights is the recognition of *naada*. There is the big or coarse *naada*, small *naada*, *sukshma* (subtle) *naada*, and the ultimate zero. In between, there are many others as well, but the recognition of the coarse from the subtle is important. “There are two main categories of sound- *aahat naada* and *anaahat naada*. *Aahat naada* are the sounds that are created- like two stones striking against each other, or a saw cutting through wood, or a bird chirping. And *anaahat naada* are sounds of the ultimate, the ones that we cannot define in this state,” explains Guruji. For music, he goes on to say that it is important to wean out the sounds that are useful for music from all the *aahat naada*. There is a certain sort of consistency in these sounds. Why do we like the chirping of one particular bird over another? This is the consistency in *svar* that is being spoken of.

## The beginning

Sanjeev has been a *saadhak* of sound for a long time; one can say ever since he was born. “They tell me that I didn't speak as a baby for the first two years. People around were concerned but one day, they found me humming an old Hindi song,” he exclaims. But being born in a family of engineers and professors, Guruji was pushed to pursue the same. While in the eighth grade, someone told him about Pandit Bhagchand of Mewati Gharana who used to teach music in the same area where they live- Hisar, Haryana. The teacher didn't pay much heed for the first 10 days when Sanjeev approached him, but he was persistent. “One day, he asked me to come the next morning at 4 am. I woke up, jumped the 10ft wall outside our house and was at his doorstep,” he recollects.

*“I have never compromised. I have done what I liked and that which is true to my innermost being. The joy is in living the subtle aspects (sukshma rup) of sound.”*





There were distractions after this incident as well. A deep connect with music was established, but the world has its way with deviations. It keeps throwing obstacles (or, in some context, signposts) on our path to check our resolve. Sanjeev's teacher's health was failing, and so after four years of studying with him, Sanjeev was pointed to a Deshbandhu Sharmaji of the Gwalior Gharana in Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh.

Simultaneously, he pursued his Bachelor's in Arts, spending the weekend in Dharamshala, and be in college during the week. Both the destinations were six hours apart by bus. "I studied with my teacher for 14 years, which makes the entire music saadhna of 18 years but for close to 12-13 years, I was looking at my career to be elsewhere. I also pursued an MA in Literature, and then got an MBA degree from the University of Hisar, and took up a job. All this while, music was a central thread, but I just did it for the joy it gave me," Sanjeev tells us.

All along, his father harboured a desire to get Sanjeev into IAS, and the preparations were on. But, in 1999, his father suddenly passed away. This was the turning point. All the studies, his job, it was all his father's dreams. But after his passing away, Sanjeev seriously started thinking about what he really wanted in life.

## The transformation

The next year was one of transformation, when the journey from Sanjeev to Guruji began. He spent a lot of time in isolation, listening to the tanpura, and crying. "I used to spend days together just listening to the sound of a tanpura, either in a room or in the hills of Himachal Pradesh," says Guruji. These were the days of realisation. Music and *swar saadhna* is all he wanted; this was the only path to be walked on. There was nothing left.

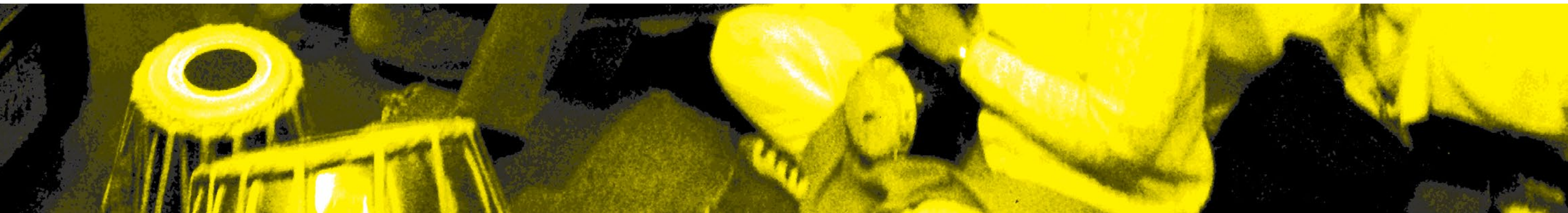
And once this realisation sunk in, a beautiful outer manifestation began. He started out by making a music CD as a tribute to his father called 'Ram Charnam' which went on to do reasonably well. This got him recognition and some connections in the recording field. "You still need to fill your stomach. My life's purpose was in sight but one needs to work in the world. This CD turned out to be a blessing which opened up new doors to allow me to work and experiment with music," says Guruji.



## On the new road

Along with a friend, Deepak, he started Creative Arts Studio, where they produced music albums. Soon after, Sanjeev tried his hand at music direction and excelled. To keep his practice strong and alive, Sanjeev used to *riyaaz* at the studio, when someone asked if he taught as well. "Well, come over to my place, I would gladly share what I understand," he had replied, and that was how the teaching began. Guruji now has students in Chandigarh, Hisar and other places in north-west India. He went on to make CDs of Kabir bhajans and other greats, which did well. And this has brought him success over the last 15 years.

But, all along, the journey has been about the exploration. "I have never compromised. I have done what I liked and that which is true to my innermost being. The joy is in living the subtle aspects (*suksham rup*) of sound," he says. His cohort of music lovers has kept on increasing and Guruji's dive within is going deeper and deeper...





## CHAAP TILAK

Written by Hazrat Amir Khusrau, a sufi poet and musician from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, who was a disciple of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi. Regarded as the father of Qawwali, Hazrat Amir Khusrau is believed to have introduced the ghazal style of song in India. Chhaap Tilak Sab Chheeni is a beautiful song about the devotion love and oneness which lives on strong even after 800 years...

छाप तिलक सब छीनी रे मोसे नैना मिलाइके  
प्रेम भटी का मदवा पिलाइके मतवारी कर लीन्ही रे मोसे नैना मिलाइके

*You've taken away my looks, my identity, by just a glance.  
You've said the unknown, by just a glance.  
By making me drink the wine from the love of devotion  
You've intoxicated me by just a glance;  
My fair, delicate wrists with green bangles in them,  
Have been taken off by you with just a glance.  
I give my life to you, Oh my cloth-dyer,  
You've dyed me in yourself, by just a glance.  
I give my whole life to you Oh, Nizam,  
You've made me your bride, by just a glance.  
You've said the wonder, by just a glance.*

چھاپ تلک سب چھینی رے موسے نیناں ملائیے ایس  
بات اگم کہہ دینا رے موسے نیناں ملائیے ایس  
پریم بھٹی کا مدھوا پلائیے ایس



## Sudeep Audio

### Journey of an audio recording studio

September 23, 1977 was when the first recording happened at Sudeep Audio, which started out as a music store in 1972. It then got converted into a recording studio five years later, and is now an online store for musical equipment.



Nikhil Mehta is a kind, industrious man. With an M.Sc. from the Royal Institute of Science in Mumbai, the 82-year-old started his career by setting up a few businesses, like a corrugation factory and an electronics coaching class, but struck a melodious note when he accidentally came across a music album recording job. This task led him to open a home based audio recording studio. Mumbai was then home to primarily film recording studios, and around 8-10 smaller studios for radio commercials and private albums. (TV was just coming to India then).

Later, Nikhil roped in his 18-year-old nephew, Sunil Mehta. They worked out a list of equipment to be imported. Armed with a bank loan, Sunil travelled to Dubai and Singapore to procure the equipment. The import duty was in the range of 350 percent back then! (Today, the duty ranges from 18-40 percent.)

The next task was to spread the word among musicians and music labels about the startup studio. Sunil's mother, the late Kishori Mehta, was the first to commission recordings at the studio. One of her projects was the first-ever Bhagavad Gita series (narrated by Harish Bhimani), sung by Kavita Krishnamurthy, and many others. Nikhil learnt recording techniques on the job and handled it very well.

By word of mouth, recording projects starting flowing in. Nikhil's recording expertise, generosity, when it came to billing, and calm disposition were the highlights of the studio.

Some well-known recordings that happened



(L-R) Nikhil Mehta, Sunil Mehta, Kishori Mehta.

at the studio in the 1980s were Amol Palekar's Kachchi Dhoop, Chandraprakash Dwivedi's Chanakya, and remixes by Nandoo Bhende and Lesle Lewis, albums of Anuradha Paudwal, and several others. Nikhil also used to be a master editor on spool tape that got him work from Sunny Super Sound (a studio owned by Dharmendra). And he also did editing work for some songs from the movie Mr. India.

### The Move to Ahmedabad

By mid-nineties, Nikhil wanted to retire to a quieter city. So he chose to shift to a then sleepy-town - Ahmedabad. The studio was also shifted. By then, Sunil was already into his own business in Mumbai.

In Ahmedabad, Nikhil set up the studio in his bungalow basement and undertook audio archival projects. The digital era was slowly setting in. And he worked on transferring and mastering Indian classical music recordings for Sangeet Kendra, which was owned by the late Geeta Sarabhai.

He recorded folk instruments for Ram Leela as his last recording project at the Ahmedabad studio premises in 2013 before handing over the reins to his son Aditya who had made SudeepAudio.com earlier. Over the last decade, Aditya has put in all his work to build the online business and bring it to a level of satisfaction. The website stocks softwares from various vendors and they also came up with a YouTube channel which captures stories of sound engineers, musicians, and other people behind the scenes.





## Thoughts and ruminations

Sudeep Audio has never been funded by investors. With the advent of giants like Amazon, Flipkart and the likes, Aditya shares, “I am happy there is competition in our industry also. Otherwise, one tends to become complacent. Yes, at SA we don’t have money to splurge. We don’t even have fancy offices or HR programmes. A weekend ice cream cone keeps everyone happy at work. Salaries have been timely till date.”

The company earnings today take care of four employees and their families at the Mumbai office and three in Ahmedabad. “We don’t pay big salaries, but it’s enough to pay bills for basic needs and a little more. Not one employee has left the organisation in the last 10 years,” says a proud and happy Aditya.

But now margins have shrunk a lot. And sometimes they wonder how anyone can sell on these marketplaces at a loss. And how much loss can one keep bearing? “But the music industry always stands up for its people. There have been a few who negotiate for Rs 100 discount also. But many customers who had gone elsewhere to save a buck end up coming back to us for one reason or another. That keeps us all at SA hopeful of survival,” he says.

On a personal note Aditya concludes by saying, “My classmates from NMIMS earn five times more, and our family hasn’t been on extravagant vacations ever, but would I trade this journey for anything else? Absolutely not. I switch off my phones after 7pm and on weekends. We moved to a quieter city and the only pursuit is that of a joyful, peaceful life filled with a strong drive for honest work.”





# THE ELECTRONIC ORCHESTRA - FOR YOUR GUITAR

It's only destiny that decides whom you meet in life. When Germany-based Robin Sukroso met three IIT Bombay alumni, few could have guessed the direction of an exploration that began. Three years of research, development, and prototyping paid off and the trio came up with a mountable, wireless, super thin MIDI controller for guitars- ACPAD (Acoustic instruments + Pads) which was launched in December 2015. It is a serendipitous collaboration between musicians and technologists to build something that brings people together people on a musical thread.

It all started in 2008 when Robin was travelling across the world on a musical odyssey. A musician himself, he aimed to study diverse techniques and styles of music. He also wanted to develop a new product and was looking for engineers with the same level of skills.

Robin, at first, created a prototype-altered acoustic guitar in Germany and performed at music festivals and concerts around the world. While en route to a concert in Goa, his guitar prototype was damaged and he sought help to fix it. Someone suggested that he write to the students of IIT Bombay; of the three hundred

mails he sent, twenty replied. Two students from the electrical engineering department at IIT Bombay, Amaldev V and Deepak Malani, came onboard to fix the guitar. The duo was later joined by Avinash J Iyer, a product design graduate student from IDC, IIT-Bombay. The repair mission soon led to the development of a wireless MIDI controller for guitars.

## Strumming a start

ACPAD launched a campaign through Kickstarter in late October 2015, which continued till early December. The campaign helped them raise \$330,000 and bag 1,400 pre-orders from customers from across the world.

In the initial days, the team had to exchange ideas and communicate with different artists and engineers to understand the challenges they faced. Communicating their exact requirements to Indian manufacturers was one of the biggest challenges as the technology was very new to the latter. But the ACPAD team managed to meander through the maze and get what they required.

## Wireless MIDI controller

ACPAD is a thin universal wireless MIDI controller that can be attached to almost any acoustic guitar, bridging the gap between acoustic and electronic music. It works as a Universal MIDI controller with Ableton and

Cubase in wired mode via USB or in wireless mode using Bluetooth. Robin and the team have developed seven different prototypes so far. ACPAD comprises eight custom-built touch pads, two linear position sensing touch sliders, and 16 tactile buttons arranged on an extremely thin interface. The controller transmits the MIDI data wirelessly via Bluetooth to laptops, mobile devices, and integrates it with commonly used software. Ten preset buttons let the user save up to 25 presets for quick access. Its two independent looper channels enable live recording and trigger loops from the guitar.

## Current Status

In the last year, the 13 people ACPAD team has successfully delivered all the pre-orders which had accumulated since the start of the Kickstarter campaign and now actively sells the device through their online webstore. Their companion software is called ACPAD Replay. ACPAD is also collaborating with International bands and guitarists like Walk of the Earth and Tobias Rauscher as a part of the market outreach.



Sneak peek at  
<http://sneakpeek.acpad.com>



# from Switzerland with Love

*How a software developer in Switzerland fell in love with Indian classical music and spent the next two decades building software for the tradition.*

It was early in the 1990s when Mariano Etcheparebaorda, a young Swiss software developer had just started to learn tabla. “I wanted to create a tool to store tabla rhythms as array structures in folders and be able to play them at different tempos for practice,” Mariano tells us over email. Little did he know then that he had embarked on a ride that would become his life's work over the next two decades.

Mariano started working on the first software, TaalWizard, a tabla software in 1996. This led to the formation of Swar Systems which was officially registered three years later. This little software led to a host of products that Swar Systems has developed over the years such as SwarShala which is a full music software

to learn, practice and compose in the Indian classical music tradition.

Their other products include:

**SwarPlug** - a plugin synthesizer that features more than 76 sampled Indian instruments  
**SwarGroove** – a plugin that includes over 200 rhythmical styles from all over India

**Swar Studio** - a complete Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) to compose music, which also includes various Indian instruments

**SwarTrax** - Indian instruments formatted for various different keyboard models.

Over time, Swar Systems has also ventured into mobile apps- iShala (a light version of SwarShala for riyaaaz) and Tanpura Droid (virtual Tanpura).

The company has received love from the users



but has also been hit by piracy. “I’d rather not dwell on financial aspects, since the revenues are still quite limited. It’s somehow a niche market, and we are also heavily penalised by piracy, but we have good hopes that the improvements in all our products will properly increase these revenues in the coming years,” believes Mariano. Despite the various problems in the music industry, comprising artists, software developers, music streaming services, file-sharing services and more, Swar Systems is a good example of how if one has a product that is needed, customers will show up.

For Mariano, it has been a journey of wonder. He does play a little tabla but programming won over playing music. “I do play some tabla, even though programming took me away from practising it for quite some time. Now I enjoy the occasional practice, and some light classical or bhajan accompaniment. Regarding Indian classical music, I am deeply in love with it. It’s a sublime art form. I’m glad that despite the tragic demise of some of the greatest masters of each field, some very talented youngsters are coming up and paying proper homage to it. It’s reassuring to see this revival,” he adds.

As for Swar Systems, now that their range of products is large and stable with minimal support needed, the company has a foundation for improving and providing more features to users. Apart from software enhancements, Swar Systems plans to resample most instruments in their collection one by one to provide state-of-the art sound for composers and music lovers. “We are quite hopeful that even though Swar Systems has now about 20 years of existence, its brightest years are ahead,” concludes Mariano.





## WiFiDabba आजकल की बिजली

Internet is the new electricity. It's quickly becoming a lifeline on which services are hosted. A dystopian view is easy to pontificate for the future but the normalizing nature of nature is beautiful. Pictures from a startup in Bangalore called WiFiDabba presents a rather interesting and calming picture of how an Indian city or village would look like in spite of the mammoth leaps in technology.

[www.wifidabba.com](http://www.wifidabba.com)





# NILENSO, INDIA'S FIRST SOFTWARE CO-OPERATIVE

*Meet nilenso, a 'software co-operative' from Bangalore. A company that manages to have all its salaries and structures transparent along with a very healthy work culture*

What do people do when they come together to work towards a primarily economic goal? Well, for starters, they set up a business, a private limited or a proprietorship or any other form depending on their needs. But what if you're not happy with a structure where the owners take a call on most things and decisions are mainly based on what makes economic sense? What if you're seeking something else?

This was the situation in which this group of eight in Bengaluru found themselves. And they ended up forming a software cooperative! Yes, the exact premise on which Amul, the giant cooperative from India, was started.

## Rumination on the structure

When the initial eight members of nilenso, who were all techies, found themselves unemployed, they got together to decide what was to be done. "To begin with, we weren't even certain we wanted to start a company, much less how it should be structured," says Steven Deobald, one from the initial bunch of eight.

Before arriving at a co-operative ownership model, nilenso (at that time code-named

'Blueberry Farms') considered a variety of equity distribution models: equity dictated by tenure, individual "value", or participation. Vesting periods, cliffs, and countless share structures were thrown around. They even considered decaying equity models, where leaving the company initiated the decay of one's ownership.

For the members, every equity model had two fatal flaws. First, they were all pointlessly complicated for a company that only existed in their minds. Second, they couldn't construct an equity model that didn't fragment and rot over time. "We came to the conclusion that a cooperative was the structure least susceptible to organisational disintegration as it grows and changes," says Deepa Venkatraman.

## From there on

Thus, nilenso became the first software cooperative in India. Over three years later, 50 percent of the original "founders" have left, but the institution remains entirely intact with 100 percent of ownership with its current employees. Apart from Steven, Akshay Gupta, Nivedita Priyadarshini and Srihari Sriraman have stuck around. "Honestly, there is no such thing as being a part of the first eight here, it was only when Deepa spoke to us about this interview that it registered," says Nivedita.

Over time, the company has done many interesting projects but they are particularly proud of their work with Staples / Sparx, where they have spent much of the past three years building machine learning runtimes, annotation engines, a multivariate experimentation platform, and runtime

infrastructure. The company has also tried out their hand at building products of their own but they haven't kicked off as expected. Both their projects are in use in the open source world, the most notable being Kulu.

## Work++

The interesting aspect with nilenso is that it looks at work and life holistically for its employees and all efforts are towards achieving a well-rounded situation. Still working towards it, nilenso doesn't make high claims of working on earth-shattering projects but presents a calm picture of how the employees can get meaningful work and still have enough time to pursue other endeavours.

"Internally, our structure and policies are constantly changing. As much as possible, we try to announce these changes with a blog post or other documentation," says Steven. Over the past few years, nilenso has managed to release their Partnership Agreement as an open document, publish policies (salaries, menstruation leave, etc.) and make all internal

documentation and communication available to all employees.

Since nilenso doesn't have any "management" in any traditional sense, it is free to make its own policies. "Our menstruation leave policy and our maternity / paternity leave policy are based on what we, collectively, felt was the right thing to do. Our policy of continued education has its roots in the Fifth Principle of Co-operatives but goes beyond that: we are actively teaching our operations staff English, have an extensive library, and regularly attend conferences," says Deepa.

Where policy is too restrictive, nilenso tries to establish progressive guidelines. The co-op segregates and composts all its waste, and encourages staff to do the same at home. Most nilenso employees get to work by bicycle, though some are considering electric scooters and cars.

We are also free to spend our money how we see fit. In the early days, this meant ensuring everyone had a powerful workstation and a comfortable chair. Later, we began





experimenting with new business models. Where our investments haven't worked out, we have released everything we built as open source: (wikenso / kulu)," says Deepa.

## Thoughts on the current scenario and way ahead

nilenso has been a fabulous experiment till now. Talking of the downsides of the model, speed can be an issue. The structure inherently slows down the decision making process (which might eventually turn out to be for the better). The other flipside can be that nilenso probably loses a lot of potential members to conventional ways of thinking. Corporate co-operatives are a very common model around the globe but technology co-operatives are a new phenomenon. There are still very few truly employee-owned tech co-ops.

To sum up, Deepa and Steven write,

*'Impact' is a buzzword that is thrown around in both the startup and non-profit worlds. It is paradoxically vague and yet conjures up images of the altruistic elimination of poverty. Lately, we've preferred the term "progress" (in a silly attempt to reclaim the word from 19th-century industrialists). Eliminating poverty is obviously progressive. But we also place next-generation payment systems, unorthodox corporate structures, and deep-learning generative music synthesis software under this same banner.*

*At its core, progressive work ultimately means open (open source, open documents, open networks, open data) systems, which we can experience, directly or indirectly.*

The cooperative presents a pleasant alternative to the numerous technology startup stories we hear. A simple desire to work on interesting, meaningful projects and how best to collectively work towards making it happen.

## PRAKTI: MAKERS OF SMART STOVES



There are a lot of questions that arise when one speaks of better designed chulhas: 'Are they really needed?' 'Shouldn't people move to LPG?' 'How many people use chulhas?'

If one digs deeper, times haven't changed drastically in the developing world. Even by 2009-10, 76 percent of rural India used mud stoves and biomass as fuel. Globally, more than three billion people rely on solid fuels for cooking. What Prakti Design tells us is that biomass is not dirty fuel; it is the mud stove that needs to get more efficient. "We reduce fuel consumption by 70 percent, indoor pollution by 90 percent and, as a result, also help people save money alongwith being better for the environment," says Mouhsine Serrar who founded Prakti Design in 2007.





Regarding the LPG stove, Prakti says that LPG has definitely made inroads, but the cost is an issue. In practice, LPG is used to make tea, but rice, rotis, vegetables are made on the traditional biomass stove because LPG tends to be expensive.

## Distribution, sales and manufacturing

Technically, Prakti Design is competing against a market of unhealthy mud stoves that cost almost nothing. “While the market has huge potential, a lot goes into educating the customer; our team goes from village to village, conducting demos, showing women how an investment in our stove can reduce smoke to improve their health, while saving time and money by reducing the amount of wood used by half,” explains Mouhsine.

Prakti prioritises strong impact organisations-rural network distributors and microfinance institutes, and partners with them to provide stoves at an attractive rate, low enough for women to make the decision without the need to discuss with the family.

Prakti is currently working with 8-10 distributors and rural retail networks on a monthly basis, across Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry and Karnataka, and has sold more than 18,000 stoves till date. “We have come a long way from being the largest cookstove

research facility once upon a time, to now focussing on impact-based sales,” he adds. Costs for the stove vary by size and features, starting from Rs 1500 for a household stove.

The stoves are manufactured in Chennai. “We take advantage of Chennai’s superb manufacturing base: tooling, raw material, availability of both advanced production tooling (CNC, laser), as well as conventional production tooling,” adds Mouhsine. Today, there are 2,70,000 people in India, Nepal, and Haiti benefiting from clean-burning, fuel-efficient cookstoves made by Prakti.

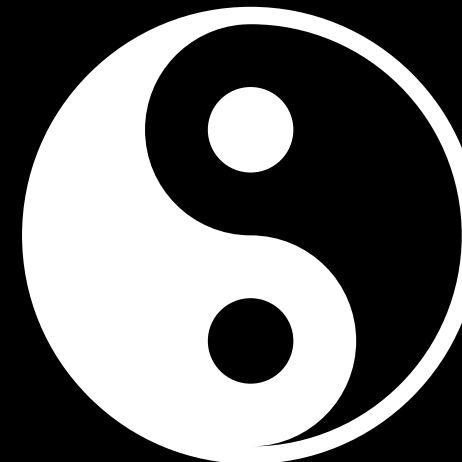
## Rural energy and the future

Rural energy is a massive sector. From Prakti’s perspective, “We value design+innovation+impact, and believe that rural energy might be the ultimate sector. The need is huge and a scalable solution requires continuous innovation, to improve performance and usability, while reducing cost.”

There are other efforts in the same space in India, from the likes of Greenway Grameen and the Himalayan Rocket Stove, and all of these initiatives are together in building for a cleaner future. As for Prakti, Mouhsine notes, “Our commitment to ourselves, to our boards, and now to story readers is we release a new product every year that has a minimum of 20 percent improvement in performance and 20 percent reduction in cost.”







## THE DISCONTENT WITH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Entrepreneurial instinct is usually lauded and appreciated. But if you scratch the surface and go a little deeper, what you often see is an inflated ego. 'I did this'; 'I am changing the world'; 'I am doing good to the world'. This is when we need to pause. When one sees this ego rising, it stops mattering what one is doing. There is no difference between someone starting a 'packaged chips manufacturing company' which tries to sell fried potato chips in plastic packets to children and someone who is setting up an organic farm to spread awareness about eating well and the environment. All that matters is intention.

You might as well make chips and spread love instead of spreading hostility by hating everyone who is not conscious towards the environment. Intention forms a connection; it goes much further than we think. And this does not mean becoming blind to the distinction of right and wrong. But the focus has to come down to intention. For the one walking on the path of knowing, intention is something only an individual can look at by diving deeper and deeper within oneself to know our true nature. If we remain true to ourselves completely, the intention will be pure. And that is what matters. You, me, us, nothing, all.



Three villages had passed and I had been hearing a distinctly recognizable whistling sound coming from far. I was curious but not so much that I would go after the sound.

I was staying in Markha village that day and suddenly around afternoon, I heard the same sound again. Just like a bollywood movie sequence, I played the protagonist and went in search of it. I reached this site.

Speechless! Absolutely astonishing! The grand-parents in the family were winnowing the fresh crop of barley with a rhythm of beautiful whistle accompanying it. My curiosity was at the top most level. “Julley ji! I've been hearing the

same whistling sound for the last three days. Is it some Ladakhi song? Why do you whistle?” “It is a tradition here. The whistle induces a wind-flow in the region that helps us in winnowing”. Tradition and beliefs.

Back in the places where machines could reach, none of this would happen. These machines would take just about 4 hours to accomplish the same task that people in these difficult to reach regions complete manually in a lot more time. “How long will you take to work on this entire crop?” “We'd sing, we'd dance and before we know in about 20 days, it'd all be done.” The old man, about 70 years of age, smiled and continued his work.

## Sounds of Markha





# ARCHITECT TURNS FARMER TO HELP VADODARA BECOME UPAJ

*Avanee Jain studied architecture but always felt a pull towards agriculture following which, she started an organic farm in Vadodara, Gujarat*



“I always loved gardening and spending time with the plants in our garden. Even as a kid, I used to have little fights with my mother about how much water needs to be given to plants so that they grow well,” Avanee Jain told us over Nimbu Pani at her natural farm Upaj on Sama Savli road in Vadodara, Gujarat. She studied architecture and practiced for a while but soon realized that farming is all that she wanted to do. Following her heart, she decided to take up a small piece of land which her family owned in the outskirts of the city and start her experiments.

7 years later, the city has swallowed the land around but Upaj farm has blossomed into a rich, fertile farm feeding many with natural, organic produce. “I have learnt from the local women employed at the farm, experts like Deepak Suchde and sometimes intuition. It has been a long journey, hard but fun,” says Avanee.

The farm has been supplying vegetables to a group of 20 subscribers and also via an Upaj outlet in the main city. They follow a subscription model where people can either book a 3kg or 5kg pack on a weekly basis. Every Thursday, the vegetables are harvested and delivered fresh in the morning at the customer's doorstep. Their pricing comes out to be around INR 70/kg. At the store, they sell loose vegetables as well but the focus is on increasing the subscriber base.

Upaj also conducts workshops and seminars for corporates, school visits and groups interested in learning more about natural farming. “Vadodara is a tough market for something like Upaj to survive. People appreciate the effort but when it comes to paying a little extra, there



is resistance,” says Avanee. Metropolitans like Bangalore and Delhi have shown an increasing appetite for more natural genuine products and it is only a matter of time till it percolates to tier 1 and 2 cities.

The spurt in the demand for organic products has also led to the rise of many brands trying to charge an extra premium which makes it difficult for the end consumer to choose a genuine initiative. And these are the challenges initiatives like Upaj have to tackle. For Avanee, she has been able to do it because of a very supportive family who has been with her in all her explorations which has resulted into a well managed farm which employs 5-6 local women from the villages.

To keep the venture sustainable, they also built a small cottage industry around seeds and growing plants. Upaj has a ‘Grow-it-yourself’ kit for kids (and adults) to experience the joy of growing a plant. “People in cities hardly get the space to experience growing a vegetable and fruit and I really want more people to experience the joy of doing it,” says Avanee about the intention behind these kits.



These pots are also well designed in an eco-friendly manner- the pot is made from coconut husk and the soil is rich in nutrients. There is a packet of seeds alongside (chilli, tomato, marigold and many more) with instructions about how to grow the plant. “We make the kits according to the season and test out our batches every other day so that every pot germinates,” Avanee tells us when we picked up a Chilli and Tomato kit to test it out.

Upaj doesn't aim to make large profits and grow quickly but wants to make enough to cover all its costs and grow sustainably. The Grow-it-yourself kits have done well and they want to take it to a few other cities in Gujarat like Ahmedabad and Surat. “We also have another

piece of land where we grow more vegetables and the intention is to do more of it so that we can spread awareness and help more people eat healthy,” says Avanee.

In India, one has seen a healthy rise in the number of urban farming initiatives and more are needed but it is heartening to come across initiatives like Upaj which are blossoming in smaller cities.



Paper pulp + agricultural waste  
= Awesome roofing material



*Hasit Ganatra made the roofing tile embedded with solar panels before Elon Musk and has many other innovations up his sleeve, here's his story*

We've travelled incessantly across cities and rural India over the past few years gathering stories. One of the recurring questions that arise is about housing and, more specifically, roofing. The way urban slums are coming up and the way rural societies are developing, the industrial world has force-fed a solution that is neither eco-friendly, nor functional, and it does not have an ounce of beauty. Moving ahead from the mud houses with bamboo roofs and other natural materials (we can still very well use them), people



are left with two options- expensive RCC or the mighty hot (in summers) and noisy (in monsoons) tin sheets. There are terracotta tiles in some parts but they are prone to breakages.

In Ahmedabad, our search for an answer brought us to Hasit Ganatra. A local lad who went to the University of South California to study engineering, Hasit has worked in the fields of rural solar electrification, electric vehicles and low-income housing. While figuring out an affordable housing solution in his last stint, he came across the dearth of proper roofing solutions.

My work in the rural solar electrification project took me to remote parts of the country and during my research around housing as well, I spoke with a lot of locals. And in numerous cases, roofing is the problem! People manage to get the walls together and up but roofing turns out to be the bottleneck.

Concrete is too expensive and tin sheets are a very poor alternative. “I looked around for materials that can be picked off the shelf but found absolutely nothing. I told the firm supporting me to do housing that solving roofing can create a much larger effect,” says Hasit. He started out by experimenting with materials in his backyard. There had to be a



material that is hard, light, waterproof and cost-effective. The answer took time to come.

“People called me crazy, they still do,” Hasit told us at his factory shed in Vattva, the industrial area in Ahmedabad. His company, Re-materials, has rented out six sheds, where 35 people work tirelessly to manufacture a material that can be an answer to good quality, affordable roofing.

Trying out multiple things—paper pulp, agriculture waste, plastic waste, etc. —it took a good 14 months to arrive at a mix that gave the first iteration of the material they have currently. A lot of people in various capacities came in to help Hasit with his experiments. “We rented a small press, got materials in very small quantities and tried out hundreds of combinations to arrive at a composition that worked for us,” recalls Hasit. And from that stage, it took three months more to reach a point where that material was waterproof. For waterproofing, they used a mixture of synthetic resin and a couple of other things, but in the latest development, they've managed to get rid of that as well and have a more eco-friendly layer that acts as a water-proofing material.

From the backyard to factory, it has taken a lot of hard work and persistence. Along the way,



Hasit managed to get two investors onboard- Deepa and Gayatri Prahlad (family of well known professor Dr. C.K. Prahalad) and Arpit Vyas, an industrialist from Ahmedabad. The product- Re-material's ModRoof is now ready for production and scale up.

Over one billion people in slums and villages worldwide are not safe, secure, or proud of their homes because they lack adequate roofing.

And providing a solution for this challenge is ModRoof's mission. Work has already started. “We've made more than 80 installations in Ahmedabad,” says Hasit. The product is ready and the word has started to spread. They already have inquiries from countries like Brazil, Mexico, Morocco and other developing nations. “There is a clear need for such a product and we're glad to have made something that answers the questions,” says Hasit.

To make the company financially viable, there is still a long road ahead. The company has a pilot manufacturing facility and are looking to expand to implement 500 roofing projects a month to meet their expenses. “That is how the world of manufacturing is. You need to hit some scale to make yourselves a force to be reckoned with. I want this invention to go the masses and not stay on the research desk,” says Hasit. As a founder, this is a great strength to have for a company that is so heavy on research and development. Most of Re-materials' manufacturing equipment is made in-house. From a pupling machine to a UV tester to an extruder machine, the team at Re-materials has taken up all challenges that have come their way.

“Give me six months and you'll see a sprawling cutting-edge research centre. We are a product company but the core is the research in our work,” says Hasit.



We also saw samples of some other products including roofing tile which has a solar panel embedded (yes, before Elon Musk showcased it to the world), modular wall system, furniture made from their material and more.

We went to a few installations and the families seem to be happy with what they have got. Re-materials has partnered with NGOs and a few micro-finance companies to get the installations going. People have come to them after seeing an installation and the word-of-mouth is also spreading in the communities. “We have an all-women sales team. Once a family uses our roof, they become our evangelists and we’ve managed to get a wonderful set of women who’re proud of spreading the work we’re doing,” says Hasit.

But all this comes at its own price. For instance, during a site visit, one of the families had drilled holes in the tiles and installed a Tata Sky inspite of being asked not to. Re-materials already has this problem solved with the new material but to ensure a fool proof solution, they have a team which regularly visits the installations to take feedback. The research mindset was also not easy to get in. “There will always be resistance at the beginning. But once the locals started to get the joy of experimenting and arriving at a solution, they now love the process,” says Hasit.

Re-materials has done a phenomenal job at arriving at a product that fits the market as well as checking most of the eco-friendly boxes. “We are clear in our mission of providing affordable roofing. Being eco-friendly just happened naturally and we’re glad,” he adds. Now, the company is devoting all energy to scaling up operations and moving to a single larger integrated facility from where they can start delivering on the welcome pile of orders.



## MOUNTAINS, MATHS, SCIENCE AND A WHOLE LOT OF FUN!

How do you intervene in an education system that is driven by fear and rote learning? Well, rooted in a small village in Himachal Pradesh, Aavishkaar is empowering underprivileged children with creativity, curiosity, and critical thinking. Through its programmes centred on science, math, and art, the NGO is making learning a fun process.

### Going back to one’s roots

Sandhya Gupta (50) and Sarit Sharma (52), both PhD's in Electrical Engineering, worked as research scientists in the USA for 15 years. However, in 2009, the couple decided to leave behind their nine-to-five work routine and do something more meaningful. “Living in Minneapolis, we had a long and fulfilling career. However, our society tends to keep engineers devoid of a sense of service towards the society. We decided to quit our jobs and move back to India,” Sandhya tells us.

The couple chose to settle in Kandbari, a village situated seven kilometres from Palampur, nestled in the Dhauladhar range of the Western Himalayas. “We had no past connection with the place. But since we lived in a cold place in the US, we wanted to settle in some place similar,” Sarit says.

Their daughter was over five years old and had to start school. As Sandhya and Sarit



*Meet the couple that left US to make Science and Maths learning fun in remote Himachal Pradesh*

visited several schools in the region, they were disappointed by the culture of fear prevalent in schools in India. Sandhya says,

“Kids run away from their teachers. Students are intimidated to learn. We believe that there shouldn't be any fear associated with learning. Education should eliminate fear and not ratify it.”

The couple realised that it was the government schools where children interacted and played with each other the most, although other issues remained. Sandhya and Sarit admitted their daughter in the local government school of





the village, and also started visiting the school during the afternoons to interact with the children, read stories out to them, and help them learn in a more fun way.

Over the next four years, Sandhya and Sarit developed a deeper understanding of both primary and high school education. They firmly believed that science and maths are the primary vehicles of learning and critical thinking, and decided to formalise their ways. “Science helps you understand the world around, and math helps you formulate it. We enjoyed science and math. The challenge was to transfer the same interest among children,” says Sandhya.

The couple came up with modules in basic science and maths concepts, such as air, light,

sound, magnetism, heat, addition, subtraction, multiplication, equation, polynomials, among others. These modules were intended to make learning fun and experiment based. They started approaching schools and providing hands-on and experiential maths and science programmes for students from underprivileged backgrounds. In February 2014, Aavishkaar was officially born.



## Making learning fun

Aavishkaar imparts learning through tangible and simple experiments, no matter how complex the theoretical concepts are. For example, instead of theoretically explaining the sum of the angles of a triangle is 180 degrees, a child is simply allowed to cut the vertices of triangles made from cardboard and align them to see how they make a straight line.

Similarly, concepts of reflection are explained through mirrors and lenses placed in smoke-filled cardboard boxes, and passing laser lights through them. Apoorva Bhatia, a teacher who volunteers for the NGO tells us,

“We come across many students who were earlier considered shy, disinterested, or

even dull but have suddenly started to shine. Once they have better context of their subject, and they can touch or feel a model or an experiment, they become much more confident.”

Till date, Aavishkaar has organised science and maths fairs, workshops, and residential camps with over 10,000 children from over 30 schools. The NGO has organised 270 programmes and 13 residential camps so far. Aavishkaar has also organised five teacher training workshops so far, through which they are helping more teachers learn and implement their alternative methods of education. These modules are developed in both Hindi and English.



## Empowering Dalit girls with scientific curiosity

Aavishkaar is also partnered with Patna-based organisation Nari Gunjan, which focusses on empowering Dalit girls and women through education. Many of the residential camps organised by Aavishkaar are in collaboration with Nari Gunjan, where these girls come and participate. Sandhya says,

“Most of these girls don't go to schools, and the ones who do start dropping out from school by the time they reach the eighth grade. We train them with math and science concepts that are useful in daily lives. Also, they are the ones who'd be raising kids. So if we empower a woman through education, we are empowering a future family.”

Sandhya explains how these camps help develop a culture of scientific inquiry. The courses are designed to enhance logical and critical reasoning. Very often, these children go back to their schools and share their learnings with their friends. “So the impact is actually in multiple folds,” Sandhya says. She also shares an experience where one of her students, after attending an Aavishkaar camp, went back to her school in Bihar, and had an interesting debate with her teacher.

“She had to go to the washroom, which she did without seeking permission from the teacher as we encouraged that at Aavishkaar.

When her teacher scolded her for doing so, she responded by saying, ‘you were busy teaching an interesting concept and the students were interested. I didn't want to disturb the class.’ Her teacher was speechless.”

Aside Nari Gunjan, Aavishkaar has also organised camps in partnership with other organisations, including Karam Marg, Kranti, Pushp Niketan, Saantvanaa, among others.

## Future plans

For the next one year, Aavishkaar plans to build modules across different concepts for all classes up to 12. The NGO is also collaborating with the Himachal Pradesh government and Delhi government to help train more students and organise teacher training workshops.

In the longer term, Aavishkaar wants to build its own campus, and create a large team of educators who travel across the length and breadth of the country, making learning a fun and hands-on experience through scientific inquiry.





There are a few things that always make me wonder. One of them is how incredibly mouldable we are. We are always a work in progress, always a story in completion. Every day, we are shaped by endless influences. And when we truly allow each colour to add onto us, what's created is something special. This is the story of a boy who chose to follow signs, allowed life to lead him and became adept at creating a musical instrument that some say is the oldest in the world.

Named after the Shiva temple in the vicinity, Bhagsu is now a bustling tourist town in

Himachal Pradesh. But look closer and you may still find some hints of a village hidden behind the cafes and the cars. From the tales we've heard, Bhagsu was once a gypsy town in the truest sense. Dusk to dawn, the village would see raggedy travellers gathering at random places, singing and dancing. Their instruments and their tunes were all the excuse that the villagers needed to celebrate. Much has changed today, but the legacy lives on through those who have seen the village in its vagrant avatar. One such person is Bhollu.

Bhollu is celebrated among travellers as a skilful didgeridoo maker. He's 29 and has been creating smiles through his craftsmanship for the past seventeen years, having started when he was just twelve. Always experimenting with new materials and techniques, he is a perfect example of what happens when the creator falls in love with the created. When he's not making a dig, he's sitting somewhere playing one.

It intrigued me. How did fate conspire for a small boy in Himachal to discover an instrument from aboriginal Australia? So I finally asked him one day, and this is his story.

"When I was about nine years old, Bhagsu was visited by mostly European tourists. My family, like many others, ran a homestay for them. One day, a tourist came in with an unusually long and oddly shaped bamboo staff. Every morning, he carried it to the fields, saying he was going to meditate. This was enough to make us jump up and stealthily follow the stranger. We sat behind the rocks whispering softly, when the man suddenly put the staff to his mouth and made a pulsating, monotonic sound. We ran through the fields screaming and shouting!"

## BHOLLU, THE MASTER DIDGERIDOO MAKER IN THE HIMALAYAS

How a 12 year old boy  
in a small mountain  
village chanced upon the  
art of making a musical  
instrument and fell in love  
with it





Bholllu laughed and continued, “But I was still curious and so, I followed him for a second time. I was smitten, how could a simple bamboo structure make such a sound!”

This traveller became the connecting point between Bholllu and an instrument from thousands of miles away. He carefully answered all the questions of a curious village boy and then bid him goodbye.

“The man left, but he sparked something inside me. A year after that, I had a passing thought that maybe I should try and make a digeridoo for myself. Why not, it would be fun! And that’s how it started. There was no internet back then, so it was a lot of trial and error. But I managed to make something close to what I had seen. Then one morning, a fakir passing by heard me play this instrument. He stopped and immediately asked if he could buy it. I had never sold one before but he willingly paid two hundred rupees for it. I was just twelve then, and you can imagine how exciting this was”.



“When I got to work a second time, my family noticed and asked me to focus on my studies, and I conceded. I had an active student life, actively participating in painting, yoga and playing the Indian flute. This went on for a few years. But life has a mystical mechanism for course-correction. When I was sixteen, my uncle got some bamboo shafts for repairing the roof of his home. I immediately felt like making a digeridoo again. It had been a few years now and it took some work. But it happened. This time again, a traveller passing by asked me if I wished to sell it and paid seven hundred rupees for it.”

“It was not a coincidence anymore. I knew that I could make a living through making and selling didgeridoos, but then again, it felt like much more than that. It was my calling, and to ignore it would be unwise and unnecessary. So I started planning my days, making sure I studied and spent time on improving my crafting techniques. Today, it’s been almost fourteen years,” he smiled and nodded gently.

We put our discussion to rest and sipped slowly on some tea. Along with didgeridoos, Bholllu now also makes Cajón – a percussion-based drum, originally from Peru.

The cup of tea was over and so were the words. I bid goodbye, promising to share the details of his story, if and when it got published.

It is normal to meet people through places, but rarely do we meet places through people. And I can say, from personal experience, that the latter is far more fulfilling. I’ve met Bhagsu through Bholllu. And through him, I’ve met not just her today, but all of her yesterdays as well.





# SVARAM: a soulful music laboratory



Aurelio has had a beautiful mystical relationship with sound and music. Born in Austria in 1960, he began his musical journey with the classical guitar, completing his baccalaureate in 1979. After this, he took off and travelled far and wide from Pakistan to California to the South Pacific islands of Marquesas, Tahiti and Fiji to China. Exposing himself to various cultures and sharpening his skills in playing and making musical instruments, Aurelio's journey has been one of exploration.

After his travels, he setup base near the Alps for five years before coming to the utopian township of Auroville near Pondicherry in South India in 1991. And this is where he has been for close to three decades now. His inner journey found and outer manifestation when SVARAM was setup in 2003.

SVARAM is a mystical world where some intense experiments with music happen-making instruments from scratch, researching on sound waves and their healing properties,

vocational training and lots more; SVARAM is everything one can imagine around music.

Aurelio started work with a bunch of local kids who initially came to play with the instruments but ended up on this journey of instrument making. Within a few years of starting, SVARAM was making fine quality instruments and is now a prominent commercial unit of Auroville. The unit conducts regular healing sessions and sound baths in Auroville is probably one of the most joyful experiences in Auroville. Open to long term volunteers and lovers of music, SVARAM is an invitation for people to join in this mega experiment.

For the future, Aurelio dreams of expanding SVARAM into a Campus: a combination of experiment and heritage, with a laboratory for sound research, an academy for musical studies, modern workshops and a vocational training center in musical instrument making...



## SOUND AS SADHANA

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” The Bible.

The world is made up of sound, which is vibrations and sound is all around us even in our own body. Our rishis called it Nada. We come from Nada and we are dissolved in it. When we weave the sound or when we are able to hear the sounds in a particular pattern, we call this music.

Every child is born with music in his being, when the child is in the womb, the sound of heart beat of mother is a constant rhythm that forms the basis of child's musical journey on earth. And throughout our lives we are in constant search of that inner harmony through rhythm. For most of us, music is reduced to just entertainment, and we forgot the origin of it, the purpose of it and how in the ancient cultures it was even used for healing and ofcourse meditation. When the ragas were discovered, they were systematically played at a particular time of the day, to invoke a deeper sense of remembrance and vibrations within our system, because the knower of ragas realized that at each time of the day, based on the movement of sun & moon, a particular type of musical vibrations will affect on a specific centre of our body mind.

So, yes music is a deep sadhana in itself. It has the power to take us to much deeper levels of our own consciousness. It has the power to invoke deeper Bhavas (feelings) in us and as we go deeper in music, our senses start to loose their grip on us and soon the mind becomes quieter. This is the beginning of meditation in us. And with more intensity and practice, we are able to go further beyond this silence too and touch the shores of a space where the inner music of life starts to play. Some call it cosmic sound, some call it the sound of eternal Om and some call it Anahat Nad. Its not important that by which name we know this “unstruck sound” but to realize and experience it as the basis of life, is the whole play.

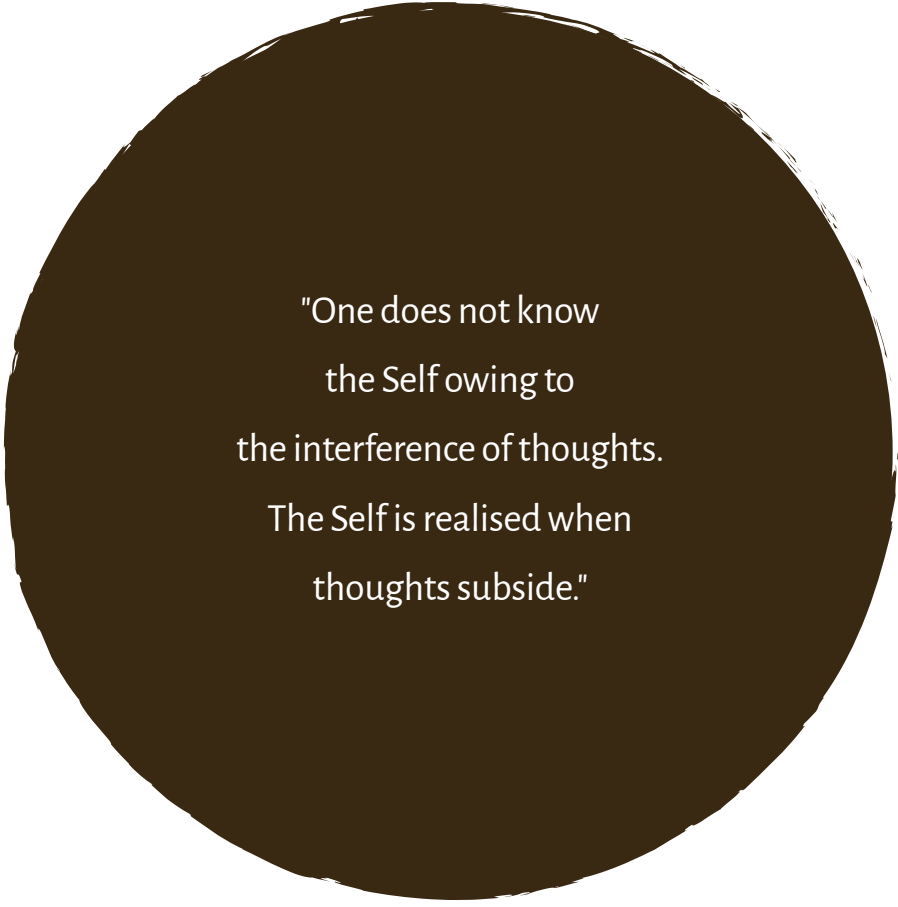
As great sufi master Hazrat Inayat Khan says “The knower of the mystery of sound knows the mystery of the whole universe.”

I welcome you all lovingly on this musical pilgrimage of Saadho...









"One does not know  
the Self owing to  
the interference of thoughts.  
The Self is realised when  
thoughts subside."

Shri Ramana Maharshi