Aakash Pipani- SBI fellow at Barefoot College, Tilonia

Tell us something about yourself.

I am basically an average north Indian guy from Lucknow. I did my graduation in Economics, worked with Zomato for 2 months and then joined as an SBI fellow here. SBI pays us a fellowship to work with Barefoot College under their CSR programs.

What made you leave the corporate world soon after entering it?

You see our whole life is a race. Race to get good marks, and then race to get a good college and a good job. Those who are at the top will get the best positions. I don’t like being part of these races and so instead of criticising the race while being part of it, I decided that I’ll quit the race and start my own race. I quit my job to challenge myself and see what I can do here.

I know of many young people who would like to work in the social sector but they say that the pay is not enough. Isn’t it a pay problem for you?

Yes what you said is absolutely true. If you have responsibilities and need to support your family with at least a middle class standard of living, it’s very difficult to work in the social sector. So in such kind of situations it’s better to have a full time job, support your family and then spend your free time in the social sector by joining in CSR programmes or as short time volunteers. You can’t give your 100% anywhere at home are begging you down.

How’s your experience so far at Barefoot college?

It’s been wonderful to be here. I got to learn so much and met many inspiring people. Throughout our school life we kept reading in books that the remote areas or the rural areas have problems. Most of us would just read and move on. It means so much for me to be actually involved in the field level and doing something meaningful for the underprivileged children at night schools and being involved with projects like RAAG at the bridge school at Singla.

Young people and school children in the rural areas have been trained to collect water samples and test them for their portability (whether they are drinkable or not) through mobile kits supplied by Barefoot, thus creating responsible and conscious citizens. Information thus gathered is fed into a software called JALCHITRA so that Barefoot has an idea of the water quality, quantity, sources, etc., at both the individual, village and cluster level. Villagers have been trained to use this software and update data.

Rainwater harvesting

Rainwater is provided for drinking water, while other rainwater is used to recharge the ground water. In summers, even if the hand pumps of surrounding areas go dry, there will always be water in the campus.

Open wells which have gone dry due to the water table receding to extremely low depths are also recharged by diverting the rainwater collected at other places into them. Barefoot has a storage capacity of 1 million litres of rainwater and the main tank has a capacity of 4,000,000 litres. Above this tank an open air amphitheater has been built to seat around 1000 people.

Community health care & social welfare

For any society to be happy and healthy social welfare is most important. And keeping this in mind, Barefoot College has been working very cost effective way. Availability of clean drinking water, training of traditional midwives, health workers, Barefoot lab technicians, traditional medicine (extracted from plants grown in the nurseries of the college), programmes for immunisation, nutrition of women and children, spraying of disinfectants, building of toilets and many other such steps have a long way in improving the quality of life.

Water

As we all know, water is the elixir of life. Life cannot survive without it. But a very big problem with water is that its distribution is not uniform and in places like Rajasthan, there is very less rainfall compared to say West Bengal, making each drop of rain and each water source extremely precious. So Barefoot college embarked on the mission of providing the rural people a mix of traditional and modern solutions to combat their thirst.

Most of the artisans are women. The main schemes. For this we also make use of various kinds of puppets - rod puppet, glove puppet and finger puppet. Ram Nivasji is our leader.

Why do you need to use puppets?

As our audience consists of people of all ages including children, we need to keep the attention of the viewers intact and children need something to focus on so that they do not get bored or disturb others. And that’s where our puppet shows fit in. We give our message through the movements of the puppets. So much so that even more than the performer or the dramatist, our puppet Jokim Chacha is well known for his good advice and information.

From where do you get these puppets?

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Community section

This section is responsible for making the rural people of Tilonia and its surroundings conscious about their rights and duties as citizens and also spread information among them regarding government schemes like MGNREGA, minimum wages, RTI, etc., through both the traditional and modern mediums such as street plays (something like the Jatras in Bengal), puppetry, films, photography, radio, etc.

Communication section

Please explain the work that you do in the communication section.

We use street theatre as a medium to spread information to the children and the villagers regarding social issues and government schemes. For this we use various kinds of puppets - rod puppet, glove puppet and finger puppet.

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From where do you get these puppets?

They could have been higher but I am quite content with what I am getting and would like to be doing this wonderful job as the environment here is unparalleled.

What was your motivation to join Barefoot College?

Yes of course, they could have been higher but I am quite content with what I am getting and would like to be doing this wonderful job as the environment here is unparalleled.