



NalandaWay

Annual Review 2008-2009

THE STORY SO FAR



It was December 2003, a young boy walked into my office in Chennai at around 8 pm. I was leading the European Operations of a multinational IT company then. This boy came into my cabin selling ‘agarbathis’ (incense sticks). My first reaction was, “How the hell did he get in here!” Then I started talking to him, and he explained that he was selling ‘agarbathis’ by night so he could study by day. He left a lasting impression on me, he wasn’t begging or stealing because he was in need; he was making good out of a difficult situation. I quit my job the next day and NalandaWay was born.

The boy was my messenger. He was my angel. He made me act on something that had been going on within me for almost a year. The communal carnage in Gujarat in early 2002, where over 3000 people including women and children were brutally murdered, made me sad and worried. I wanted to know how normal people like me could be part of such barbaric acts. My quest was to understand both spiritual and behavioural answers to the pogrom. Are people generally bad and does fear of retribution make them act good?

The ‘agarbathi boy’ affirmed my faith in the innate goodness of people — something that has to be nurtured and helped bloom among children, especially among those from marginalized and underprivileged backgrounds. Today, at NalandaWay, we help talented children from discriminated, marginalized low-income urban and rural slum dwellings find adult mentors, provide support to build a trusting relationship, nurture their artistic talents and create avenues to express themselves publicly on vital issues that affect them.

Presently, we work with over 5700 children in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Bihar and Jammu & Kashmir.

We welcome you to join us on this meaningful journey.



Sriram V. Ayer,
Founder and CEO



INTRODUCING NALANDAWAY



NalandaWay works with children from challenging situations from the poorest districts around the country, helping them voice their issues through theatre, visual arts, music, dance, radio and films. Over 5700 disadvantaged children and young people in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Bihar; and Jammu & Kashmir are involved in our projects. Our interventions have helped them learn creativity, life skills and self-confidence to create the lives that they truly want to create.

Over the years, NalandaWay Foundation has built lasting relationships and partnerships with UNICEF, World Bank, Novib, Ministry of Foreign Office, UK and US Consulate, World Vision, Save the Children, TATA Indicom, Deutsche Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Airtel, Forbes Marshall, ITC, Steria, Plan International and other individuals.

ACHIEVE THROUGH ART

OUR CORE STRATEGIES

1. TRAINING THROUGH ART: We identify and work with very marginalized children, including street children, destitutes, orphans, juvenile delinquents, children rescued from bonded labour, sex work, conflict areas, refugees, children affected by HIV/AIDS, disabled children and provide them training in arts, media, theatre, music and media. Art-based training helps them overcome depression, reduce disruptive behaviour and become creative.

2. MENTORING PROGRAMME: Training and mentoring a child through his formative years is of extreme importance. The main role of the mentors is to provide guidance and to be the role models to the children, so that they can discuss their personal problems and queries.

3. EXPRESSING THROUGH ART: Our work would be incomplete if we did not provide the children we work with a platform to express and showcase their talents. We achieve this through our films, exhibitions, concerts and social campaigns.



NalandaWay's training approach uses participatory drama as its core content. We use a variety of applied theatre forms, namely advanced role-play, improvisation, creative games and exercises, storytelling and other participatory training techniques.

The workshops act as a way to educate and inspire, bringing to attention a range of issues and contributing solutions for a better future. Participation in the workshops helps to develop:

- creative thinking skills
- leadership skills
- team-building skills
- self-awareness
- confidence
- empathy
- presentation skills
- communication skills
- self-expression
- social responsibility
- a space for building relationships
- self-esteem

In all our projects, we use theatre and drama techniques as the core platform. Theatre, we believe, helps us unlearn our conditioning and think 'out-of-the-box' about issues in our environment. Theatre is also an experimental fun way to learn complex concepts.

We provide training in creative arts like drama, folk arts, painting, sculpture making, music, dance, photography, film making and creative writing, based on their interests and talents.

We also offer creativity and empowerment training to teachers and staff in the homes run by the government or by NGOs.

We track every child's progress on identified indicators using a technology-based online system, which is accessible to all stakeholders.

TRAINING THROUGH ART



MENTORING PROGRAMME

CHALLENGES FACED BY AT-RISK CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Children and young people housed in residential care centres are emotionally disturbed; they frequently have been physically abused, are prone to violent behaviour and may have been involved in crimes. They often fare poorly in school, yell or physically fight to handle social conflicts and are highly likely to engage in risky activities.

Volunteers from different walks of life are recruited and trained to become mentors for children. Mentors commit to meeting with the children for an hour a week throughout the year. While mentors and students might spend some time on school-work, they also engage in other activities (such as playing sports and games, exploring nature, doing artwork, writing a story, eating lunch together, talking) that help build a strong relationship.



DR. KALAM LAUNCHES “PUDHIA PAADHAI”

On 22 June 2009, NalandaWay, in partnership with UNICEF, brought together nearly 1000 children from schools around Chennai to interact with **Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam**, former President of India and inspirational leader. Apart from spending many “inspiring moments” with the children, Dr. Kalam also launched **Puthiya Paathai** (The New Way) — an arts-based training and mentoring programme to benefit 1530 children from 18 residential centres run by the Department of Social Defense, Government of Tamil Nadu.

“Dr. Kalam has always been an inspirational figure for children around the country and we are very glad that he is able to be with them today as we launch this innovative programme,” said Thomas George, Communication Specialist, UNICEF.

EXPRESSION THROUGH ART

USING ART TO HELP CHILDREN DO EXTRAORDINARY THINGS

NalandaWay believes that every child is capable of extra-ordinary things. All that is needed is for this potential to be nurtured and mentored into fruition. And if this latent talent is used to express issues of social relevance, then we are well on the road to a different future for the children and our nation.

The therapeutic nature of art is well-documented and has been in practice in various forms. NalandaWay has innovated around this concept to engage with children in situations such as child labour, trafficking and other difficult circumstances. We have helped them overcome their trauma, fare well at school, and have inculcated important life-values such as discipline in them.

MUSIC MUSIC BAND FOR CHILDREN

The Ongole district of Andhra Pradesh is on the national highway and child trafficking for sex is a major issue in the area. NalandaWay, in partnership with Plan International, identified around 47 children and youth from this area and worked with them over a period of time to train them in folk art and theatre. As the children learned these skills, they were also coached by the trainers/mentors in social consciousness, communication skills, storytelling, drama, dance, music and playing musical instruments in the course of participative workshops. A similar programme with children in Krishnagiri district with the support of UNICEF was also conducted.

THEATRE INNOVATIVE THEATRE INSPIRES CHILDREN

Government special homes for children, which are run by the Department of Social Defense, house children from broken families, children who have run away from home and other children in similar situations. NalandaWay, in close partnership with the Department and with the support of UNICEF, worked over the last year to use the participatory-drama approach to encourage the children to take part in a theatre production. The highlight of this initiative was the theatre production entitled, **Paati Vadai Kaaka Nari**.





GRANNY'S TALES TAKE NEW FORM IN CHILDREN'S THEATRE

More than 60 children from various Government Children's Homes in Tamil Nadu came together to present a sound-and-light production entitled **Paati Vada Kaaka Nari**, a humorous take on the ancient fable involving a crow, a fox, an old woman and a vadai. The production, performed entirely by children, was put together with the help of NalandaWay Foundation and was the culmination of the 90-day long **Kanavugalin Kondattam**, a mega festival for children organized by the Department of Social Defense.

"We have used art and drama to engage with children at various levels," says Brama, Head of Projects, NalandaWay Foundation. *"But this is, by far the most enjoyable thing we have done — the response from the children has been amazing."*

The rollicking one-hour production was performed by the children to an entertaining sound track. The production played at the Museum Theatre on 11 March 2009 at 11 am to an all-children audience from Government Children's Homes around Tamil Nadu.

RADIO RADIO NALANDAWAY REPORTING

Radio is a growing medium to get information and news out to the general public, easily surmounting the barrier of widespread illiteracy to reach the common man. And when children become the reporters on community radio, its reach and impact become so much more powerful.

NalandaWay, in partnership with Panos South Asia, has been working with children and youth from Bihar and Jammu & Kashmir to train and mentor them into radio reporters as a way of expressing their issues and challenges. While the focus of this initiative in Bihar is on children, in Jammu & Kashmir, it is on the youth. The programmes produced are being aired on Radio Kashmir and AIR Bihar. Over 1000 children and youth are being trained as part of this initiative.





FILM

CHILDREN AS FILMMAKERS

Films, thanks to their widespread appeal, are a very powerful medium to reach messages to people everywhere.

NalandaWay has developed a technique by which children are helped to come up with story ideas based on their personal issues, script them, and work with a professional production crew to shoot and edit them into films. Working with over 750 children from 17 districts of Tamil Nadu, 17 films have been made so far, using the NalandaWay technique. Here are a few of them:

GOT YOU

Directed by Arun Raja

One day in the life of a perky young girl infected with HIV, who, though mischievous, is smart and independent. The story revolves around stereotypical behaviour of people towards children infected with HIV and dispels common myths around this issue.

SADUGUDU

Directed by Arun Raja

Five working children decide to compete in a local kabbadi match. This fast-paced short film makes a point about the lives, expectations and conditions of working children.

SENNAKUNNI

Directed by Pavel Navageethan

A humorous portrayal of examination day in the life of a boy in Nagapattinam. The film, set two years after the 2006 tsunami, captures the challenges faced by the community and children.

RANGARATTINAM

Directed by Pavel Navageethan

NalandaWay Foundation was the winner at the South Asia Region Development Marketplace 2008 organized by the World Bank. This provided NalandaWay with the seed grant and a platform to work on its latest feature film, RANGARATTINAM. Made in partnership with Real Image and Sathyam Cinemas, it is about the smiles, troubles, hopes and despairs of nine children who are inflicted with HIV. The film is currently under production.



SOCIAL CAMPAIGNS

ART, ARATTAI, AARPATTAM

Art, Arattai, Aarpaatam, a 23-day children's festival in November 2008, was the highlight of NalandaWay's year, and brought together participants from all our initiatives, children from schools around Tamil Nadu and others for a time of learning, sharing and enjoyment. It was a season for children, families and teachers to discover new experiences of the arts, to express, to experiment, to challenge, to be inspired and have fun together. The festival was conducted with UNICEF as the main partner, and provided an



opportunity to the most excluded children from villages, towns and cities to express their ideas and challenges through art and media.

The festival started off with a concert featuring **Sivamani**, the world-famous percussionist, who performed alongside a troupe of around 50 child artistes who were trained in folk drums such as thappu, thudumbu, parai, ghatam as well as in vocals. Apart from performances in schools and parks, the 23 days were filled with activities like art exhibitions, a film festival for children, seminars and workshops and the creation of a graffiti wall at the US Consulate in Chennai by the NalandaWay children. The goal of **Art, Arattai, Aarpaatam** — to create a platform for children to raise their issues and challenges and engage with their peers using arts and media — was successfully achieved in these exciting days.



WALL MURAL

Children, mentored by eminent artist and art director, Padmashri Thotta Tharani, exhibiting their newly-learnt talents on the US Consulate's wall



IN THE NEWS

SAMUEL VENKATESAN REPRESENTS INDIA AT THE J8

The frail, unassuming young lad is easy to miss as he walks around carrying a bag that is emblazoned with a J8 logo. But all he has to do is to start talking and one is enraptured. Meet 17-year-old **Samuel Venkatesan**, who represented India at the **Junior 8 Summit**, held alongside the G8 Leaders' Summit in Italy. "He was a rock star there," says Satish Tarnas, Programme Manager with NalandaWay, who accompanied him on the trip, organized and supported by UNICEF.

The J8 is an annual forum where young people from around the world meet to share their concerns and recommendations with G8 leaders and the world community on solving global issues. Samuel was one of the three young people representing India at the J8. His long journey to Italy started in Soolagiri, a small village near Krishnagiri, Tamil Nadu. "I am part of the child reporter initiative of NalandaWay. When I joined this group, I learned how to make videos and got interested in expressing issues through them. I've done two films on sensitizing teachers and on village superstitions," said Samuel excitedly. "I think the opportunity to be part of the J8 has helped me learn more about child rights and to become an advocate of children's rights." Samuel was a very active participant in the J8 and takes pride in saying that one of the key issues discussed with the G8 leaders was that of education for girls, and that it was proposed by him. "I want free, quality education for all children in developing countries and also to ensure the rights of girls. Special attention needs to be given to orphans like me," said Samuel when asked what his message to the G8 leaders was.



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LOGOS TO BE ADDED



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