

Introducing Waldorf, Threefolding to Indian Non-Profits in the US

by Gopi Krishna Vijaya

It is very important to communicate the fruitful and practical ideas gained with the help of spiritual science to the world whenever possible. Hence, there was an attempt recently to expose a major non-profit called Asha for Education to the ideas of Waldorf education and Threefolding of the Social Organism, on the occasion of the organization's 25-year jubilee conference.

Asha for Education Conference

Asha (meaning "hope" in Hindi) was established in California in 1991, as a 501c(3) non-profit to raise funds for underprivileged children in India. It has grown to more than 50 chapters spread across the US, India, Europe, and Canada. Asha is entirely volunteer-driven, with all volunteers contributing their efforts outside of their regular jobs. Volunteers hence take personal interest in identifying education-related projects in India, and supporting them through funds and other means. The projects involve a variety of cultural initiatives: supporting girls' education, people with disabilities, children caught in war-torn areas in Kashmir, small independent schools, vocational education etc. Over the years, Asha has disbursed over \$30 million to more than 400 independent projects across India.

The organization's bi-annual conference was organized in Seattle, WA, on July 29-30, 2017. On the occasion of having completed 25 years, the organizers were looking for a different direction and new ideas to carry forward the work. They invited the founders of the organization to give talks about its history, and also invited several other Indian non-profits (Vibha, CRY, AIM for



Seva, Sikshana, AID, and BSPES) to Seattle to figure out ways to collaborate with them in order to help on-the-ground projects more.

Context for New Ideas

The traditional non-profit approach of most of these organizations including Asha was mainly to enable the schools to grow large enough to be handed over to the government education, or public school system. This was mostly seen to be a successful end result of nurturing the project. In addition, assessment of the impact of a project was mainly with regard to results achieved in standardized tests or jobs obtained by students after completing their education.

As for the choice of projects, the decisions are taken by the volunteers at a chapter level, and there is usually a lack of knowledge about the merits and demerits of different types of education, especially the

introduction of tech devices in schools, remote teaching, etc. It was therefore felt, by me as well as my wife Snetu, who was part of the organizing team, that there was a crucial need to provide alternate ideas in these areas.

It is quite well known that Waldorf education was

founded by the desire to show by example how a school system free of state influence can work, to educate free individuals in harmony with their developing abilities. Since Waldorf arose after the failure of the Threefolding impulse during World War I, it is important to also know how it was a practical application of Threefolding principles. Both these topics had to be introduced to Asha.

To speak on these issues, Paul Gierlach and Gary Lamb were invited as speakers. Paul has been a Waldorf teacher for nearly forty years, with experiences as a class teacher in San Francisco, Detroit, China, and Japan. Gary



is the co-director of the Hawthorne Valley Center for Social Research and project coordinator of the Avalon Initiative, an education think tank, both located in upstate New York. He has been involved with Waldorf education for over 35 years as an economics teacher, administrator, parent, and grandparent, with special focus on curbing the improper use of artificial intelligence and screen technology in the field of education. Both kindly agreed to join us for the ride.

Conference Outline

The conference spanned two days, at the Microsoft Campus in Redmond, Washington. On the first day, the founders of Asha described the history of the organization, and one of them, Sandeep Pandey, strongly advocated for the introduction of common-core public education in India. A long-time Asha Fellow and partner, Mahesh Pandey, described the travails of operating a school for children of migrant laborers in rural northern India. This was followed by discussions with two other nonprofits, one of which tackled the issues with educating girls (BSPES). The other (Sikshana) works to enable students to receive lessons through computers, treating the student “as a customer.”

After lunch, attendees split into brainstorming groups on individual topics, such as volunteer retention, donor management, etc. The discussions on the topic “Paths Forward” were particularly spirited, with a lot of heat about whether or not Asha must take part in political activism. The day closed with talks by experienced volunteers and project partners.

Day 2 opened with a talk on Waldorf education by Paul Gierlach, attended also by some interested people from Seattle. His topic was “What *is* Education? The Real Metrics,” and he proceeded to systematically take

the audience through the experience of education’s seven-year developmental phases. He highlighted the fact that children have to be helped to enter their bodies fully and engage with the world in the early years, and any disturbance in that process was bound to have long-lasting effects. His emphasis was on showing the role of education in creating a free individual, who can then contribute freely to the society.

Gary Lamb continued the flow of Paul’s talk by highlighting the role of education as a social activity, in its connection to state (government) and economics. He distinguished between a healthy independent activity of three spheres—culture and education, state, and economics—and an unhealthy one that is present today where the economic force dominates the entire society. Asha is a fund-raising organization, and Gary described alternative

routes of funding education instead of the standard method of using tax money through government, for example, direct donations to schools and enabling tax-credit for these donations. He highlighted the role of the teacher, whose central importance can be masked by profit-driven and computer-based alternatives.

Afternoon sessions were dedicated to panel discussion between several non-profits, as well as the discussion within Asha regarding their internal dynamics and operating methods. The conference closed with an inspiring talk on Skype by a French-Canadian volunteer, Ma-

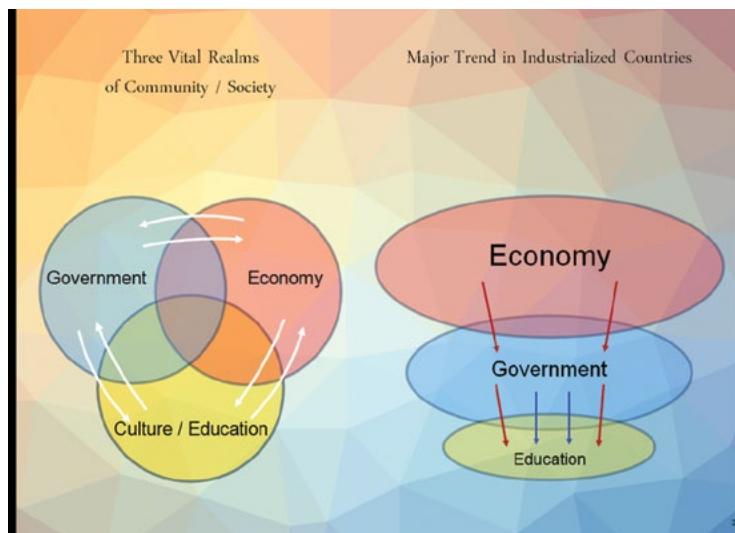
thieu Fortier, who had moved to India to set up a music-and-dance school, solely due to his deep interest in Indian culture and its growth.

Effects of the Talks

Gary and Paul, as the only non-Indians present at the conference, were able to give a different perspective to the



Paul Gierlach, making a point about Waldorf pedagogy



The imbalance in today's systems (right) from Gary Lamb's presentation

organization, which was received with enthusiasm by several attendees. However, it also confused a good number of the attendees, due to the novelty of the ideas. It was admittedly very hard for the majority of the participants to imagine the reality of the “cultural organ” of the threefold society, in spite of the fact that Asha was directly involved in nurturing the cultural life in India, because of the history of public education in India.

However, both speakers made clear that an organization like Asha, with its wide reach and engaged volunteers, can create a big impact if it considers the importance of education as an independent activity, as opposed to being an appendix of political or economic forces. The ideas provided in the conference are continuing to be discussed in different contexts in the internal talks of Asha.

As an experience, it was very educational to see the urgency of applying threefolding by clarifying it to as many people as possible: a small change in policy impacts the lives of thousands of people immediately at the grassroots level. The prevailing atmosphere regarding the excessive and unthinking use of technology at all educational levels was also something that had to be tackled, and a beginning was made to accomplish that here as well.

The coming months will tell whether these efforts will actually bear fruit or not. Overall, the entire experience has been an eye-opener in every sense of the word. It underlined the fact that what is needed most of all is to

communicate anthroposophy in as many circles as possible, in plain everyday language, in a way that can actually be grasped and applied. Bridge-builders are indeed the need of the hour.

Gopi Krishna Vijaya, PhD, is a physicist active in understanding technology and consciousness, and a participant in recent Natural Science Section conferences. Asha Conference videos are available at ashanet.org/asha-26

Economics Group of the Anthroposophical Society in America

The Economics Group of the Anthroposophical Society in America has been formed by eight members of the Economics Conference of the Goetheanum. The group has been established as a Subject Group whose activity is devoted to the study of economics based on Rudolf Steiner’s Economics Course (1922) and to the support of researchers in this field.

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Anthroposophic Psychology

Ever wonder what it would feel like to go through the world as if squished between two planes of glass? Or, what the world feels like when one yo-yos between the depths of despair and the heights of bliss in a matter of seconds?

The three-part Personality and Personality Disorder graduate program of the Association for Anthroposophic Psychology (anthroposophicpsychology.org) allowed counselors of body, soul, and spirit to explore these and other expressions of personality disorders through the three planes of space, an area researched by founder William Bento, PhD.

Difficult expressions of personality development were explored, going beyond symptomatology to connect each disorder to a higher ideal and a variety of healing modalities. Participants observed gesture and idiosyncratic movements and explored the twelve personality disorders through spacial dynamics, the zodiac, eurythmy, the twelve virtues, skits and plays, re-enactment of significant art, and applying elements of biography to each personality grouping. — Emily Thunberg, Salt Lake City, Utah



AAP Graduating Cohort, Sebastapol CA, April 2018: *Left to right, back row:* Kathleen Baiocchi, Susan Overhauser, Christine Huston, Sue Gimpel, David Tresemer; *middle:* Mary Fonte, Kathleen Thompson, Linda Delman, Laurie Schmiesing, Karen Guitman, Roberta Nelson, Tonya Stoddard, Pam Engler; *front row:* James Dyson, Cindy Taylor, Glen Williamson, Christina Sophia, Lillith Dupuis, Emily Thunberg