



## The Newsletter

MAY 2009

### ***Education & the World: In Conversation with Rajendra S. Pawar***

The series, Education & the World, provides an “outside” perspective on a number of educational issues through the lens and experience of prominent industry and government leaders.

Mr. Rajendra S. Pawar is Chairman and co-founder of the NIIT Group, that encompasses two businesses—NIIT Technologies Limited, the software and services arm and NIIT Limited, the leading Global Talent Development Corporation. Mr. Pawar has played a leadership role in nurturing NIIT and building it into a leading Global Talent Development Corporation. By pioneering NIIT’s innovative franchising model, he enabled the company to unleash a wave of entrepreneurship across the globe, providing young people with the opportunity to create viable businesses centred on IT learning. Mr. Pawar also led NIIT’s foray into the software and services market, creating NIIT Technologies, a global IT Solutions organization. NIIT Technologies serves clients across North America, Europe, Asia and Australia.

Mr. Pawar is a member of Prime Minister’s National Council on Skill Development, a council chaired by the Prime Minister of India. He is a member of the Planning Commission’s Task Force on Skill Development and has also served on the Prime Minister’s National Task force, which aimed at making India an IT Superpower by 2008. He is currently a member of the International Business Council of the World Economic Forum. Mr. Pawar studied at the Scindia School, Gwalior and completed his BTech in Electrical Engineering from IIT, Delhi in 1972.

Known for promoting industry-academia alliances, he works closely with many of the country’s well-known educational institutions and is on the Board of Governors of IIT Delhi, the Indian School of Business, and the Scindia School. Ernst & Young conferred on Rajendra Pawar its prestigious “Master Entrepreneur of the Year Award” in 1999. He has also been named the “IT man of the Year” by IT industry journal, Dataquest. He was also awarded “The Global India Splendor Award” on the occasion of 60<sup>th</sup> year of India’s independence, for his work on developing human resource potential.

Raji, as he is known to his friends, spoke with Arun Kapur, Chairman of Ritinjali, over a casual lunch. Their conversation was lively and candid, focusing primarily on Raji’s educational and professional experiences, his vision and philosophy, and his relationship with his children. His answers were thoughtful and earnest yet said a great deal about his approach to life, his professional commitment and leadership capabilities.

### ***On Lessons Learnt and Lasting Stamina***

When asked about his educational journey, both formal and informal, Raji commented that his tenure at Scindia School, in Gwalior and at IIT, Delhi were formative experiences. While in his final year at Scindia, he was selected by his principal as an ‘Overseas Placement Student’ to attend Cambridge University. However, he had different plans for himself: In his words, the idea of going abroad for university “didn’t excite me as it excited my friends. I felt more comfortable in my roots at IIT so to say. After IIT I was one of the few who didn’t appear for GRE, again it didn’t occur as being relevant to my life.”

His candour refreshing, he added that that both experiences though vastly different contributed a great deal to making him who he is today. According to Raji, "Scindia was a great place for introspection." The practice of Astachal – of observing, in silence the sun going down for instance, or just having such a vast space at one's disposal, made it possible to do a lot of inward thinking. Being one of the premier boarding schools in the country, it also required a great deal of physical stamina. By contrast, "IIT was about intellectual tenacity," where survival necessitated being incredibly persistent and hardworking. Here, Raji says, his "Physical stamina got supplemented by intellectual stamina... being with those batch-mates, all of whom had gone through a certain selection process, was the interesting part."

Raji elucidated further on the importance of physical stamina. In his experience, a typical working day for him can last up to 18 hours, and he thinks that making it successfully through such a gruelling day requires a great deal of physical energy. While he doesn't think that physical stamina is a requirement by any means it does help: "Particularly, if you tend to be picky and choosy about details then you need the extra tenacity. So I am very convinced that it improves probability of your success."

### ***On Professional Growth and Development***

Raji accepted his first job with Larsen & Toubro after graduating from IIT Delhi. It was here where he got his first lesson in how to develop the potential of employees: He mentions a project where his boss handed him a huge amount of responsibility to test a Switchgear engineering project; for him "the first lesson on how empowerment can be given." However, the stars clearly had a different plan for him: One day Raji received a newspaper clipping from his father about a Management Training Scheme being offered in Delhi. Curious about the program, and happy for an excuse to visit his family in Delhi, he applied and got selected for an interview. He was one of 14 applicants to be selected for the premier management program and credits his experience there as being tremendously beneficial.

The training program blended classroom learning with direct application and practical experience. But this practical experience, as Raji explained, was far more than merely applying theoretical knowledge, in the traditional sense. It was more like a mini lesson in decision-making, critical thinking and leadership. A one or two week classroom course in administration, for instance, would be directly followed by a stint in a factory. Raji explained that in one instance, while the unit head of

the factory was considered his "tutor," his "supervisor" was his administrative head. The tutor gave him a problem to solve that the administrative head of the company had been unable to figure out and gave him a timeline of 4 weeks to solve it, following which he would have to present his findings to the unit: "So the admin guys general motivation is that if I don't solve the problem it is better, because he won't look good." Meanwhile, he had to give a daily update to the tutor on his progress which was, in his words, "a direct connect to squeal." But Raji knew better than to do that: "They know that you are a nobody if you squeal. But the option is always there."

Then at the time of reckoning, at the presentation, Raji had to explain how he solved the problem he was asked to solve, while his supervisor is sitting there: "Just see what a brilliant mine field is created. You have to make sure you don't antagonise the supervisor, and you have to work hard to give him advice. You can always squeal to the unit head but you do it once and you're dead (in the management field, news would spread like wild fire). And finally, you have to end up with presentation that is worth it, because the unit head fills out a form about you, and in the appraisal there is one killer question: Is he management trainee material? Yes or no. No explanation. And if you get your second 'no' and you're out." Raji

concluded this story by saying, **“When you are talk about education versus schooling, this was it!** This was the most enjoyable part of that learning practice.”

### ***On Leadership, Responsibility and Next Steps***

After discussing Raji’s experience with the management training program, and how professionally rewarding that experience was, Arun moved the conversation towards its natural next step: how and where one learns to be a leader. On this, Raji had some interesting observations to make: Positions such as House Captain or Sports Captain at Scindia or later as Captain of various houses at IIT he saw more as “responsibility, that things should get done,” rather than positions of leadership. According to him, “a sense of responsibility was there, that something has to be done... even at NIIT, leadership [is seen] as fulfilling an obligation.” For him, it goes much beyond being about titles, and instead about an urge or desire he feels compelled to respond to. He added that when he heard about the “Servant Leadership model<sup>1</sup>” it fit in perfectly with this vision.

<sup>1</sup> “The servant-leader *is* servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is *leader* first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual

His vision of leadership was exemplified by recent NIIT projects. Raji described his on-going work in Bhutan: “So if I look at the extraordinary effort I’ve put into this project for Bhutan... We are working with 7000 govt officials, 5000 teachers, 11 higher education institutions, 168 schools... in the remotest corners of the country. It was such an empowering contribution.” Similarly, he spoke about the development of NIIT University, which is coming up in the Aravali Hills near Jaipur: “Society is missing so many dimensions, so when I feel that some of those need to be addressed then I have an emotional response. To me, university is that kind of thing. I am spending more time on that than I can afford... The question is can we create a model that is self sustaining and that can have a huge transformational impact? Those drivers are very very strong and give a tremendous amount of satisfaction. So outcome of that effort is not [financial].”

With the university, Raji’s vision is that they build a model that is self-sustaining and different. Where he sees the difference with NIIT Institute is the ability to facilitate “free thinking and deep research. Structurally, companies

power drive or to acquire material possessions...The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.” Robert Greenleaf, 1970

are not designed for that, whereas universities are. That is the complementarity I’m seeing. Vijay [Thadani, Co-Founder of NIIT] said it very nicely; that the research that the university is going to do will be the base on which vocationalisation can be done by NIIT. We need to find a good way to tell people that NIIT is building the boat and then letting it go without any strings attached.”

### ***On the True Purpose of Education***

Hole in the Wall (HiWEL), a recent project undertaken by the NIIT Group in partnership with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) provides another illuminating example of the kind of work that inspires and motivates Raji: “It truly excites me... so when I see this kid in front of the hole in the wall... He could become anything. And anyone. That is the power which is so interesting.” Breaking the traditional confines of a school, HiWEL takes the Learning Station to the playground, employs a unique collaborative learning approach and encourages children to explore, learn and just enjoy.<sup>2</sup> Despite incurring financial losses (which Raji attributes to fundamental economic problems with the design), he says that the continuing promise of HiWEL is that “even if a child is not in school, doesn’t know anything, doesn’t have teachers, [she]

<sup>2</sup> Learn more about HiWEL from project website available at <http://www.hole-in-the-wall.com>

doesn't have to open a book." Segueing into a brief anecdote about a 'quality baithak' Raji hosted at his house, he reminded Arun of a comment made by Kapil Dev: "Kapil said confidence is everything. That didn't trigger anything new in me, but it came back like a flash of lightening. So when a little child learns computing and goes home... he instantly knows more than his dad and mom and uncle and siblings. That confidence has been part of the cause for HiWEL's success... So in our case it is the opportunity to give that confidence to kids. **So the Hole in the Wall is that promise that even the most education-deprived child can open a window and become self-confident. That to me is the essence of education.**"

#### Updates on Ritinjali Projects.

#### Second Chance School

It is vacation time for the school going boys, so they spend their time doing their holiday home work and attending the evening computer classes. They also run errands and help in the general administration of the centre. Dinesh Kumar is back to attending classes at ITI and is gearing up for the exams to be held in July. Abhas Khan, Subodh and Anant have discontinued their training as crane operators at Ajit Pal and Sons due to a hitch about their entry passes. They are hoping to

be placed some where else for vocational training.

***Vinod Kumar is a shining example for the rest of the boys. He is doing well for himself at Linux Bazaar and earns a monthly salary of Rs. 3500. In addition he is also appearing for the first year BA Exam to be held in June.***

Manoj Kumar, who appeared for the class 12 CBSE Exams successfully cleared four papers but not Math. He is preparing for the Polytechnic entrance exam to be held in June.

Shyam and Abbas who appeared for the home science practical exams were given the required first aid kit and other grocery items. Text books and other study materials have been provided to all the boys.

Pradeep, who works at a cybercafé is keen to pursue a certificate course in computer applications under NIOS and will be admitted to this course during the month.

Ali and Faisal work very hard at their work places and have been able to provide for their family of four living in a small rented accommodation in Mahipalpur.

The team from Ranbaxy visited the Second Chance School for a routine medical examination of the boys.

#### NIOS

#### Cutting and Tailoring

***This course has been steadily gaining in popularity and the ninth batch, which is to commence shortly, has a record number of 25 students who have enrolled themselves for the course.***

Besides eight students have been admitted to the private batch and five students of the previous batch are being prepared for their exams to be held in October/November. In all 38 students are on the rolls and to provide individual attention to the students, they have been divided into smaller groups and classes will be held thrice a week for each group.

***Mridula, a student of the eighth batch has shown great proficiency in tailoring and she has been able to pay off the fees through the money earned by stitching clothes for her neighbours and bags for Ritinjali.***

***Radhika, another student, who has recently completed the course earns about Rs. 2000 by stitching clothes at home. Her sample of the Ritinjali folder has been selected and she has been given the responsibility of making about 200 folders for Ritinjali.***

***Suman Yadav, a student of the third batch who topped her class in the yearly NIOS Exams has***

*been appointed as a teacher at Ritinjali's cutting, tailoring and dress making centre at Kusumpur Pahari. Suman is grateful to Ritinjali for making her self sufficient and although she was earning as much working from home she readily accepted the job. It is her way of repaying Ritinjali and she is happy to empower the women of the local slum clusters with the same skills that have made her stand on her own feet.*

## NIOS

### Computers

The practical examination for the students of the seventh batch was held on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May. All the students appeared for the theory and practical exams and took the viva as well. The answer sheets have been handed over to the NIOS Office in NOIDA along with the list of awardees for both the computer and the tailoring courses.

The 8<sup>th</sup> batch revised the course work and underwent mock test based on the NIOS pattern. Practical sessions were held to distinguish between systems and application software. The students were also taught to differentiate various types of languages and software. They were given assignments on MS Word to create templates. Video tutorials on MS Excel and MS Word were used to make learning more concrete.

### Night School

Regular classes were held through the month and extra classes were given to weak students by either calling them early or making them stay back after class. The boys undergo Yoga sessions in addition to academic lessons so that they remain physically fit. Health line classes that are a part of the curriculum are aimed to make the boys aware of diseases and how to protect themselves from them. The ill effects of tobacco and other substances are also driven home and the boys are urged to give up on their addiction. Story telling, a regular feature has helped to inspire the boys and the counseling sessions provide emotional succour to them. Debates and a variety of indoor and outdoor games have been an outlet for their physical and mental energy and have sustained their interest in the classes held at the Night School.

The boys enjoyed the snack of biscuits that was provided thrice during the month.

The mobilisation drive to enrol more students has met with some success. Two new boys, Sakeer and Irshad, who work in the tyre puncture shop near the INA Market have joined the Night School. Irshad, who has passed class 10 wishes to appear for the class 12 exams through the NIOS Stream. Unfortunately, he doesn't have the funds to further his education and hopes that

Ritinjali will give him the financial backing to make his hopes come true.

### Kusumpur Pahari.

Regular classes in English, Hindi, Math and EVS were conducted according to the plans drawn up by the teachers at the three learning centres despite the fact that the attendance of the students was thin. Most of the families in the area return to their villages in the peak of summer and are expected to get back only by July.

Ms. Rohini, a volunteer, visited the centre twice during the month and taught the children English and Art. She conducted English conversation classes for the teachers and proved to be quite a motivating influence.

***Bhavik, a volunteer, takes computer classes once a week at the centre. The six children he tutors find him to be an excellent teacher.***

Cakes and cookies that were received from the Head Office were distributed to the children several times during the month.

The teachers have been driving home the importance of personal hygiene and cleanliness of their surroundings to the children and their efforts have had the desired effect.

Some of the children who were prepared for admission tests to regular school have successfully

cleared the tests and have secured admission in mainstream schools. The learning centres at Kusumpur Pahari were indeed a launch pad for many of these children and they now look forward to a new phase in their educational lives.

The teachers at Kusumpur Pahari undertook mobilisation drives several times during the month to bring in more children from the vicinity to the learning centres. Parents were encouraged to send their children to benefit from the learning programme that was tailor made for such children. As a result, four new children have joined the centre and have been attending classes regularly.

#### **Nathupur Pahari**

Classes were conducted at the centre despite the sweltering heat that thwarted the focus of the children to academics. The mobilisation drive undertaken by the teachers in the Nathupur Village and Pahari area to bring more children under the learning umbrella has borne fruit. About nine new students have been enrolled at the Centre.

Lessons in English, Hindi and Math, in addition to poems, songs and art activities have kept the children profitably engaged all through the month.

The children who now attend regular school and have yet been coming to the centre were helped with their holiday homework.

***Santhosh Kumar, who has been coached at our centre for the last five years, has successfully passed the class 10 examination from Upender Training Academy School.***

The walls and roof of the centre have been temporarily repaired. Cakes and biscuits were distributed to the children this month.

***37 students visited the Akshardham Temple and enjoyed their time spent there. We express our gratitude to Miss Mini Raheja for arranging this trip.***

#### **DRISHTI**

The Ritinjali staff met with the officials of C.S.E.R. [Centre for Research on Ethics and Rights in the Ritinjali office at Delhi to discuss the Drishti project. The End Line survey to be conducted in Jhalawar was discussed at great length and all the preparations for it were put in place. It was also proposed that the training of teachers should be held at the CRC level instead of the block level so that more teachers could benefit from the Life Skills training programme.

The Ritinjali staff also established contact with the students who had participated in the Base line survey and briefed them about the End line survey in June. The same set of students are required to participate in both the surveys and therefore the programme associates at Jhalawar and the

staff at Kota have been entrusted with the task of identifying the very same students for the End line survey.

The classroom implementation of the Life skills programme was checked on to see that it was progressing along the right lines.

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