

Altruistic mindset can help in producing solutions for global population

[Anil K. Rajvanshi](#)
[Nimbkar Agricultural Research Institute \(NARI\)](#)

anilrajvanshi50@gmail.com

The title of my talk is little philosophical, so I thought the best way to show how altruistic mindset helps in developing technologies for poor is by giving my personal example.

I was born and [raised in Lucknow in early 1950s](#). My father Shri. Jagadish Prasad Rajvanshi was a Swatantrata Senani (freedom fighter) and went to jail with Gandhiji for the 1942 movement. After 2.5 years he was released from Lucknow jail in 1946. He liked Lucknow very much and decided to make it his home.

I went to St. Francis School for my Senior Cambridge and then went to IIT Kanpur (IITK) in 1967 for my studies in Mechanical Engineering. From IITK I went to U.S. where I got my Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering in 1979 and taught in University of Florida for 2.5 years. And then in a fit of madness and arrogance [left a lucrative career in U.S.](#) and returned to rural Maharashtra to work for rural development.

I feel my father's idealism and his national fervor inspired me and together with my exposure to [Indian philosophy and spirituality](#) at a very young age, made me come back to India and take the plunge to work on developing technologies for rural poor. Spirituality also helped me practice intense meditation and resulted in development of powerful concentration.

When I came back from US in 1981 to rural Maharashtra it was a tough decision. Phaltan was just an overgrown village with hardly anything available. For every small thing to purchase we had to go to Pune – a 4-

hour journey by road. So even to make a long-distance trunk call, quite a number of times. I would get on the bus and go to Pune to make those calls.

However there was a junoon to do something interesting and when you have the junoon and the passion then the pinpricks do not bother you.

I have written about this part of journey in some details in my book [“Romance of Innovation”](#) and would like to talk about few of the interesting inventions and technologies that we developed.

Thus our work on Electric mobility; cooking and lighting solutions for rural households; rural restaurants; solar powered water cleaning system; all came from the altruistic mindset and the desire of helping people.



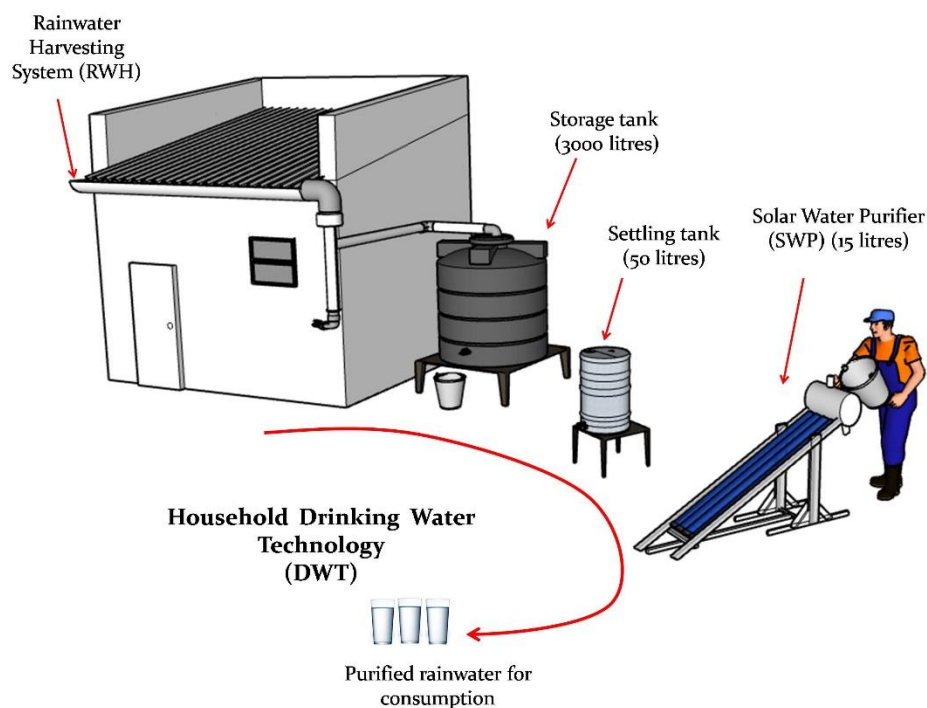
- Electric rickshaw – I was moved by plight of rickshaw pullers in Lucknow. Interviewed hundreds of them to understand their plight and discussed with them about solutions. Based upon their feedback we

produced [India's first e-rickshaw in 2000](#). I am happy to say that lakhs of such rickshaws are on the Indian roads.

- Cooking and lighting solutions– I was moved by plight of unelectrified hut dwellers near our Institute in Phaltan. They wanted a clean and excellent cooking and lighting device. [Lanstove](#) was an outcome. Received [Stockholm award](#) by Princess Victoria. One of the other awardee was Tesla Motors.



- Digging deeper we also found out about their health problems because of poor nutrition. Resulted in the concept of [rural restaurants](#). Amma's kitchen in Tamil Nadu and Shiv Bhojan in Maharashtra are outcomes of this concept. Around 1 crore meals are served every day.



- Water purification – school children and their poor health because of polluted drinking water. Our solution of [rainwater harvesting and cleaning it through solar water purifier](#). Also a great learning tool for the students.
- We have put all our work in the public domain so all our writings, books, ideas are [available freely on the net](#).

During the creative solution phase the only thought was to find the best technological solutions. The greed creeps in during the marketing and manufacturing phase. Enlightened corporate captains can reduce the profit margins for marketing and manufacturing of goods and technologies for poor. The present system of using corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds is a step in the right direction but much more needs to be done since it is a forced solution by GOI rather than from any altruistic mind set of the corporates.

What corporates can do

According to the latest data there are close to 370 million people ~ 30% of India's population who are poor. Poverty is described as living with < \$2/day or ~ Rs. 150/day. For a family of two earning members it comes to ~ Rs. 300/day or ~ Rs. 8000/month. During the COVID pandemic the number of people living below the poverty level has increased very much.

At the same time 1% of India's super rich have 60% of total national wealth. This number has also increased during the pandemic. Thus we have a strange situation in the country of ever-increasing chasm between rich and poor. This trend is also visible in almost all other countries of the world. With internet and social media availability this is creating tremendous societal tensions between the rich and the poor.

We all want the poor to improve their lives. This can happen when either the money is available to them, or goods and services are available to them at affordable prices.

Affordable price is very much possible if the corporates reduce their greed. I feel there is a need for a national resolve that we will not milk the poor! Profits can be made but at a much lower level for providing services and goods to the poor.

For this to happen we need to develop an altruistic mindset in all sections of the society especially in the captains of the industry. Such mindset can then help in reducing greed and help to produce affordable technologies and solutions for majority of the population.

You as young students are the future of this great country and some of you in future may occupy high positions in the corporate world. So this talk is very much directed to you.

How to develop altruistic mindset

- (1) We are defined by our thinking and so need to develop a powerful brain. A powerful brain can think about the problems deeply and can analyze and produce solutions. The history of mankind is the history of great inventions produced by very fertile and powerful brain.
- (2) A powerful brain is produced by focusing on a single thought for a long time. This is the essence of Yoga and is also called concentration. Concentration can be learnt and with practice increases in intensity and duration. This process should start at young age when the brain is supple and can continue throughout life. Love for reading books at young age helps in this process.
- (3) A powerful and deep-thinking brain also becomes spiritual. A deep thought on any object or subject focused for a long time ends up in removing its gross form from the vision field so that only its essence remains. That is spirituality and is also called Samadhi in Patanjali Yoga Sutras.
- (4) Such a brain also becomes empathetic and sensitive. This is the genesis of wisdom and non-violence. Sensitivity is an outcome of realization that all life forms on this planet earth are interconnected, since they are all governed by the same physical principles – some we understand and others not. Thus empathy, sensitivity and wisdom are related.
- (5) With wisdom and sensitivity comes reduction in greed and development of altruistic tendencies. Such a powerful and sensitive mind can then produce technological solutions which can help mankind.
- (6) Technology is a double-edged sword. It brings great advantage to mankind. At the same time it fuels greed and can be used for destruction. This is because of our desire to have control over events and people and technology provides us the power and means to do so.
- (7) Altruistic mindset helps in getting us out of the “control syndrome”. This allows us to let go of our “possessions” and frees the mind for creative work. Thus other thoughts about selfish personal gain or hurting others are reduced substantially; allowing us to work for betterment of mankind without too much profit motive.

- (8) However a mind with less processing power or less wisdom again reverts to its basic state after the invention is developed and all the insecurities like personal gain, control, etc. start manifesting again. Many examples of good and useful inventions by small-minded people abound in history, such as those by Shockley who developed transistor but was also a very mean person; Fritz Haber (Ammonia and Chlorine gas which killed hundreds of thousands of soldiers in WWI); Henry Ford (industrial revolution but also created labor unrest); Steve Jobs (iPhone and greed). Such examples exist in large numbers in Silicon Valley and other high-pressure start-ups and technological hubs all around the world.

What each one of us can do?

- (1) When the greed is minimized the quality of thought produced is very high. Einstein, Newton, Buddha, Christ changed the course of mankind's history. All of us cannot become Einstein, Newton, Buddha, etc. but in a small way can produce solutions for small problems surrounding us without thinking too much about profit motives. All our individual efforts can then collectively produce bigger benefits. This is what Gandhiji taught us by showing us the power of numbers.
- (2) This process is further helped by sharing ideas. Quantity begets quality. The more ideas you get and share, the higher is their quality. If you give Rs. 10 to somebody and get in return Rs. 10 – each one of you will have 10 rupees. If you give one idea to somebody and get another idea from him, we have two ideas each! That is how knowledge adds up. Thus we should share our ideas freely and TED talks are an excellent forum for sharing them.
- (3) I feel our technological revolution will increase manifold when we develop altruistic mindset. I therefore feel a sufficient and necessary condition for highly advanced technological civilization is high level of wisdom developed with the help of spirituality.

- (4) Wisdom will also lead to development of technology in a sustainable way. This is because with wisdom we will take into consideration all the natural forces so that we always remain in equilibrium with environment in our technological development. This is how nature evolves. Hence such an evolution will be environmentally friendly, sustainable, and backed by efficient technologies.
- (5) Such technological developments through altruistic mindset can lead to a new Mantra of India's development which could be [spirituality + technology = happiness and sustainability](#).

[HOME](#)

TED talk given at MNNIT, Prayagraj. April 2020