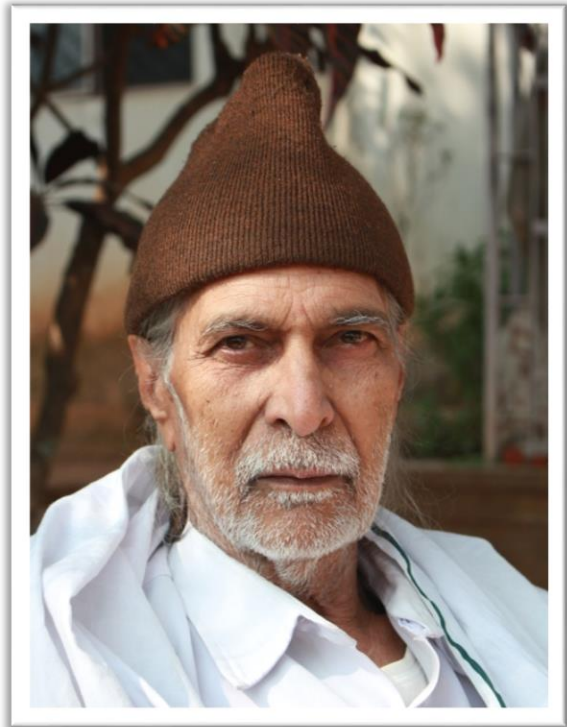


Paras, A Life History

A short memoir on life of Paras by Archana, Amit and Shailesh



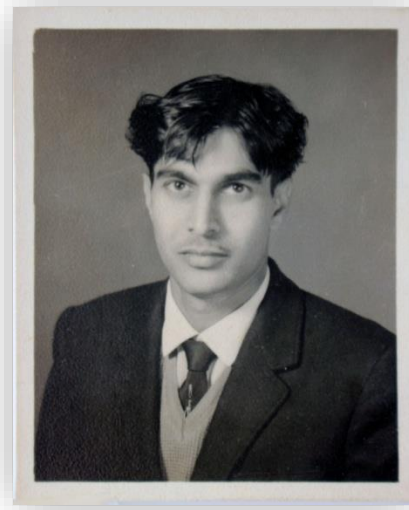
Paras Nath Singh (1940-2020)

Paras was born in 1940, in an interior village of Bihar state of India. His father was a farmer and the family had agricultural fields and mainly depended on farming work for livelihood. He was one of the youngest of the 6 siblings, 3 brothers and 3 sisters.

From childhood he was keen about reading and learning. He was one of the first in all nearby villages to pursue higher education in science. He completed his schooling from Bihar and then moved to St. Xavier's college in Ranchi. Studying at the college he was very inspired by the simplicity and dedication towards society of the missionary Fathers, which lifelong reflected in his personality. While studying at the college he fell ill severely and went back home for recovery. Prescribed with bed rest due to

weakness, he continued his habit of reading. He read books from various philosophers and thinkers which had a profound effect on him. It was at the college that he met Jaya and Hari for the first time.

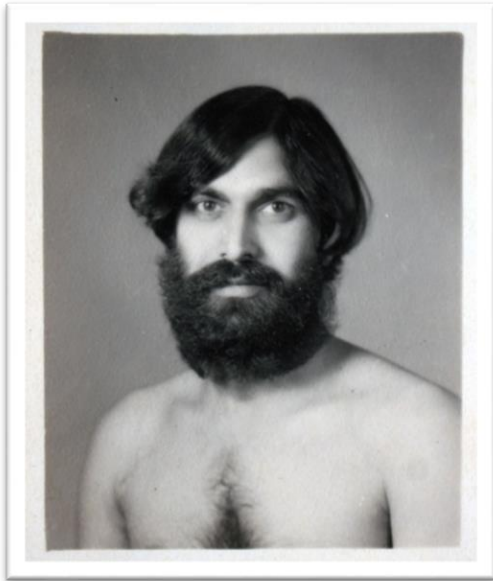
After college he set off on a philosophical journey. He studied The Bhagavad Gita and Transcendental meditation and took to teaching the same on the banks of river Ganges in Patna, Bihar. There, he taught at Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Ashram along with 2 other teachers, one from Sweden and one from The United States. Teaching remained his favorite work lifelong.



At St. Xaviers college, Ranchi

He always advocated women's education and was the first in his own village to send his niece to school as opposed to the local tradition of denying education to girls. He used to say that one educated woman can educate the whole family. He was also the first person in his village to rejoice, with folksongs being sung, on birth of his daughter. It was quite unusual as birth of a girl was a sad moment for most because she

was considered a burden. He believed in Gandhi's words "Be the change you wish to see in the world".

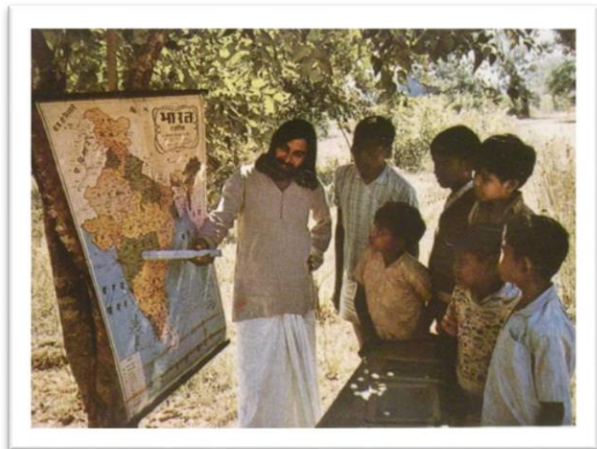


As a meditation teacher, early 1970's

In 1974 he, along with Jaya and Hari, co-founded Jagriti Vihara, an organization to educate and empower the remote tribal people of Jharkhand. Here, he dedicated 50 years of his life in service to people in the areas of education and women's empowerment.

Speaking of the early times at Jagriti Vihara he always remembered: "Where the center campus stands now was a clearing in the forest where only shrubs and a few Sal trees grew. There was lack of basic amenities like water, electricity and roads (which were mostly a beaten path through the bushes). The forest was filled with wild animals like snakes, hyenas and bears that could be spotted roaming close to the houses at night, once in a while. So, if we had to move at night, we always carried a lantern and a stick for protection, to scare the wild animals away in case they came close. The first thing decided to be built at the center was a well for water. A few temporary mud houses with earthen roof tiles were also constructed to serve as living

cottages and kitchen and dining place. The first concrete building to be built was the Main Building. I still remember the speech I gave about its necessity which people liked so much and supported us. A morning assembly place was also built near to the building. But this was only the beginning of our hardships. Building materials were to be brought in by buses or trucks from market places which were far away. But the bus stop was a few kilometers away and we would unload those materials and again put them on a bullock cart which we arranged from nearby villages. We had bicycles as transport and would ride to the villages to connect with the tribal people and to educate about the importance of education, health and skills. The villagers were very shy and reluctant to join in at first but with constant effort they started to understand and started coming to make shift schools under a banyan tree at the center. We taught both children and adults there. Later some more concrete buildings were built to serve as skill centers where spinning thread from cotton with help of a Charkha, and handloom weaving was taught. We also planted mango and guava orchards."



Paras teaching children under a tree, mid 1970's

"A school building and many more things were built in coming years. With hard work and continuous efforts the organization evolved" he added.



Sweden, summer of 1992

He visited Sweden, Norway and Finland in summer of 1992. He very much liked the natural beauty and admired the work culture and values of equality and honesty of the people there.

He liked Mahatma Gandhi's thoughts on truthfulness and J. Krishnamurthy's on educational reforms; "My experiments with truth" and "Letters to the schools" were among

the books which he always kept with himself. He believed in free and practical education and always emphasized that being illiterate doesn't mean being uneducated. All along his life teaching children and even grownups remained his favorite activity. He was also always ready to help anyone in need in any way he could.

In February 2019, he was diagnosed with throat cancer. He fought bravely for 16 months taking his last breath on 2nd of June, 2020. Many people turned up to offer their last prayers. All those who knew him remember him for his honesty, simplicity and kindness.

He is survived by wife Panna, daughter Archana and sons Amit and Shailesh.

We would like to end this memoir with a stanza from the poem 'Stopping by the woods on a snowy evening' by Robert Frost which he liked very much.

***"The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep."***

Glimpses from his life:-



Sweden, summer of 1992



With youngest son Shailesh at Jagriti Vihara, late 1980's



Paras with family at Jagriti Vihara, (From Left) wife Panna, daughter Archana, sons Amit and Shailesh. Photo from late 1980's