

Plants grow but not ourselves ...

Place: Horticulture Training Centre, APD
Jeevan Bhima Nagar, Bangalore

Date: 24th September 2003.

Persons participated:

Nagaraju (person with mental disorder)
Karthik (Co-trainee)
Ramesh (Trainer)
Siddalingaiah (Trainer)

Vijaya (BasicNeeds, India)

Written by: D M Naidu

During the second week of September I took Megha Sakya from Nepal who came for induction into BasicNeeds work to the Horticulture Training Centre of APD. While taking him around, I introduced Nagaraju and Thimmappa both undergoing training in horticulture along with other persons with disabilities. These two with mental illness have been getting used to some routine and rhythm while undergoing training. I saw child like (warm & as is) behaviour of Nagaraju. I was bit moved by his way of addressing Hegde, the Head of the training centre 'mama' (uncle) whilst all others call him 'Sir'. Both his way of talking and body language demonstrated some relationship between two human beings; some thing personal and not trainer and trainee. I decided to know more about Nagaraju; hence this writing. *Another reason is that of deadline for life story writing.*

About Nagaraju

Vijaya, my colleague, and myself were sitting on a carpet in the classroom and were waiting for Nagaraju. He came with a broad smile and sat in front of us. I asked him about his lunch. He said, "I had my lunch and was cleaning (swabbing) the room. It is just half finished. I was asked to meet you. Here I am." I told him that waiting for him to finish his job was not at all a problem, as this dialogue would take more time. But he preferred to continue as a beginning has been made. I asked him to tell about him self. He said, "I come from Maradasana Halli, Y N Hoskote Hobli (Hobli is a group of villages). Nagendra from Siddapura brought me here and left. What more is there for me to tell." I asked him to tell about his parents, brothers, sisters etc. In reply he said, "I do not have any one. I do not know my mother. I used to live in B.Hosahalli, 2 kms from Maradasana Halli. My age is about 30 years. I used to sleep in the school premises. I used to do some work for Sathyappa, a petty businessman, in the village and he used to give me food. Any thing else you want to know; I better to finish my cleaning job." "If finishing your job is the pre-occupation, please go ahead, we will continue later" was from my end. *I was wondering why he was feeling so responsible.* Once again he wanted to continue the

conversation and said, “Nagendra, from Narendra Foundation took me to a doctor and I used to tablets. Every month he used to give me tablets. After some time Rajanna asked me to water plants and also to clean the premises which I was doing. Some four months ago I have been brought here for training.”

Training

I asked Nagaraju to let us know about his learning during the last four months in the training. He said, “I water plants, remove weeds, clean the garden, carry pots and also do potting.” I asked to explain what is potting. He said, “Take a pot, first put the bottom (drainage for excess water), put some sand, then fill it with mixture of soil and fertiliser. At the end you insert a seedling and keep it out.” “Then what happens Nagaraju” was my question. He said that plants are watered and they grow. Then in a humorous way, I told him, “We also eat and drink; are we growing?” Nagaraju smiled and said, “plants grow; but not ourselves”. *I thought he was referring to growing tall. But philosophically the statement questions the very definition of growth & development.* Referring to the training, he expressed his happiness being with people and said, “Here we are given money which is pooled in and we buy rations, toilet soaps, detergent soaps, hair oil, etc. People cook but not me; I do other things. I get up in the morning. I have my bath and then breakfast. I also wash my clothes. We work from 8.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. with lunch break.” *It sounded complete training – not just gardening, living together, learning to manage one’s own life, sharing and helping each other.*

Future unknown

I asked him about the medication. He said that he has a good friend in Karthik who gives him tablets regularly i.e. three times a day. He also said he does not move so closely with others as he does with Karthik. When asked about the future, he gave two answers and sounded not that sure of the future. First he said Hegde would give him the job after training. Then he said immediately after training Nagendra would take him back to the village and Rajanna may offer some work in the Foundation. He repeatedly said that he would go to the village.

Sensitivity

In between the conversation we slipped from Kannada to Telugu. I told him that Vijaya doesn’t know Telugu; would it be ok continuing the conversation in Telugu. Nagaraju said that conversation should be only in Kannada.

We thanked him for his time and asked him to send Karthik. Smilingly he questioned, “Is all over? May I go now?” *The interaction might not have seemed two intelligent people engaging in intellectual and logical debates; but it was very much human and definitions and explanations of mental disorders did not surface.*

Friendship

Karthik, a young boy with legs affected by post polio paralysis, joined us for a discussion. I asked him to introduce himself. He started, “I come from Madurai in Tamil Nadu. I live with my old father and stepmother. My brother got married and lives on his own. When I was a child my mother left us and she lives some where around Madurai. I do not meet her and do not intend to see her. From the age of 10 I have been working. My last job was in a canteen. Unfortunately it had to be closed. When I was moving out with my bag, Daniel’s brother (Daniel works in APD) talked to me about APD and its training programmes. That is how I landed here and I like this place. I asked him to tell about Nagaraju. He adjusted his sitting position and said, “In the beginning Jagadish, a wheelchair user, was giving medicine to Nagaraju. Whenever Jagadish went home at the weekends, there was some discontinuity in administering medicines. As I have decided not to go home till I finish my training, I was found suitable to give him tablets regularly. I started understanding Nagaraju as I took some responsibility for his medication. He used vomit after intake of food. He was also picking up leftovers thrown in the dustbin and eat. I used to feel very bad and started talking about it. He does every thing that is expected from him. He gets angry when irritated. Only once he beat a trainee. This particular trainee locked Nagaraju’s cupboard and Nagaraju was in problem to take out his clothes. He knew that particular trainee alone was capable of locking with his key and got wild and gave a good punch. In my opinion the trainee was wrong. There are some people who tease him. Nagaraju also urinates in the premises (not using the toilet). Even if I forget to give the tablet he asks for it. I keep water jug next to me and there were occasions when I gave medicine at 11.00 o’ clock in the night.” *I could not stretch my imagination to understand the reasons for such caring and friendship. It is so silently demonstrated bonds.*

“Karthik, what do you think is the problem with Nagaraju?” was my question. He said, “Nagaraju has some mental problem. But he has been doing every thing like any body else with the help of tablets.” I further asked him what he would do if he came across such people in Madurai. He said that he would talk to people about the need of diagnosis and treatment and some one has to care in administering the medicine as I do it now. *One person comes from Madurai in Tamil Nadu and other from Y N Hoskote in Karnataka meet in Bangalore and the learning/training begins.* Karthik also said that whenever he saw a plant it was just a plant and now plants are going to be his future. We wished good luck to the soft-spoken Karthik and took leave off him.

Trainers’ views

Ramesh said, “In the beginning for 15 days there were some problems like getting out of the campus, frequently asking to go home, demanding coffee, sleeping separately, preferring to be lonely, etc. Now we do not have any problem with him. He does every work when asked. One has to schedule his work and monitor. He does not disturb any

one. Some times other trainees tease him. When other trainees talk about going home for the weekends, he too asks for Nagendra. During the theory classes, he finds it tough and some times go to sleep. Some times he writes in his notebook that is written on the black board. He loves going out to other horticulture units or plant décor work. He takes bath every day but not does not wash clothes regularly and wear them. He hides the best clothes and doesn't wear them at all. He is hard worker and would be ideal in a group but not as a responsible gardener, planning & executing.”

Siddalingaiah also confirmed what Ramesh said and further he said, “We committed a small mistake in the beginning by giving him Rs.10 to his hand. The intention was to watch his behaviour. He went out bought some eats and tea. When he exhausted the money once I found him stretching his arms. I talked to him and prevented him from such habits. We do not have any problems with him. He does very hard work and is meticulous about keeping the premises clean; even one dry leaf he sees, he quickly picks it up puts it in the pit.” I asked him whether he would be happy to have such trainees in future. He said, “These two people have been good and it is very much possible to train such people. However, we need more inputs from Janardhan about this particular illness and management. We do not know when they behave badly. I remember once Nagaraju getting wild with Sulochana when she was unreasonable and threatened him. He is very co-operative if we behave well and knows from whom to take orders. On the whole this has been a good experience to see such people getting used to particular systems like any one else.” We thanked Siddalingaiah and took leave off him.

For Vijaya and myself it was a great learning and we received some thing but in turn we were not that clear of any thing offered to them except wishing them good luck. It is one way of mainstreaming the issues of mental illness.