

Dr. Bargavi Davar (BD) speaks to Sai Prasad Vishwanath (SPV)

SPV:

it is it is it is a pleasure that, you know I have the chance to talk to you today.

So now I was very very obviously must have heard it multiple times, phenomenally inspired to read, what, what you have achieved over the years. And thank you, thank you so the first and the foremost question that I have for you personally, is having read through your childhood experiences and what has happened to your mother during that phase. Very often people ask themselves the question why does it happen to me. Why me why not someone else or, you know, what wrong did I do to face this. So, was there a scenario where that had cropped up in your mind and what what would your answer be to people who are facing similar such questions.

BD:

You know in all these years, nobody's ever asked me this question.

SPV:

Again, please feel free to talk, whatever.

BD:

Well it's it's ya know, it's really a very interesting question. Thank you so much for asking me this. Actually I, you know, reeled back and tried to remember, you know whether I ever thought that fate was responsible or karma, or you know, why me question. I must have had these thoughts when I was much younger, but in my adult consciousness whatever I recall of it. I don't remember being stuck in that in that frame. For one thing, you know I had a lot of caregiving duties and my mother was not there. And so there was my younger brother and there was my father who also had a rather serious visual impairment, and slowly getting disabled we had retinitis pigmentosa. And so yeah, so I had to keep house, you know, take care of my brother or get us all to school come back finish my studies, you know, so I was a cook from very young days from the time I was 13-14 I was full-fledged householder, stepping, stepping in for my mother my aunt was there for a few years when I was very small. But then after that it was just very practical matters of getting the sushi and cleaning and dusting and jale removal I was in fact I have great pride in being a very young person who would cook for, you know, shararth, you know, after someone passes away, you have a ritual period of mourning. So I was very proud that I knew the menu for those 13 days of mourning what you can cook and what you cannot cook so Yeah so I think I had too many things on, I was also very active in sports, you know, cycling, badminton and all of that. I was very much into music, I of course there was a very deep sadness and I think I was not talking much I had a stammer. I could not express myself very well, and I was, I was socially a disaster. I had no friends. I had friends but I would just be one silent spectator. I didn't know how to have fun till today, those things are true. And I had deep depression, through my childhood days I suppose. Luckily my physical activities helped me to just get by, I was very suicidal, negative. But somehow the topic of karma and why me it did not come to me.

SPV:

It's very interesting that you bring that up because I know I was more curious a little if I may ask at all, is what what keeps people going, especially what kept you going, I know you have spoken about multiple activities that you've caught up. But for a person who finds it difficult to get out of bed, you know, wondering you know what's there at the end of the day, there is just me and there's no meaning, how do you assign meaning to the little activities. And is it a scenario where you ascribe meaning to things or not what point do you start thinking, hey there is purpose to why I have to get up today.

BD:

It's a very deep question Sai. You know, so there was a time I lost my child I was about 32-33 and that was an earth shattering event for me, I mean, forget about all that I went through in my childhood mental hospitals, all of that. But this one in 19 mid 19 1990s It was earth shattering, she was born with multiple, birth defects, and I was with her 24 by seven. And she was swaddled in bandages And she was in complete pain throughout those 24 by seven, I was hearing her cry. But believe it or not when of course she didn't survive those days and eventually the doctors began just a lot of experiments are her her lungs was failing or her heart was failing. She was growing smaller and smaller, she could not feed she could not eat anything they tried tubes they put her on ventilator. Oh my god. Those were days of torture for her and for me, and, and my loss was unbearable, because I had stayed with this really tiny being, and I felt very responsible for her. And it was a pretty hopeless situation I should say. And one thing I remember is that even in that misery she was able to smile at me when I would come into the room she would turn and then she would give me a smile I still, you know, just makes my heart beat when I remember her smile. But, after she died of course I was completely completely depressed for four years it took me four years to get out of that. And eventually I realised Sai that she, she, she, you know for pain or misery or suffering, it does something very very enlightening. That's the lesson I got after I got over the depression that was another story. After I got over the depression, every night I will say please just take me away and I don't want to live so many nights I had terrible torturous dreams, there were a lot of bad stuff happening at the time. And after I got over and became a human being somewhat, again, you don't I started to think that why did she come into my life. Okay. And then I realised that I had some really hard lessons to go, our lifetime with a four years or five years or six months or 60 years or 600 years is still short life is very short. I made a resolution that you know come what may this child has come to give me this lesson that in life is suffering, however long we live there is suffering. And yet in the midst of that, we can smile. And that could be a single purpose that she lived for that in the pain and in the midst of all that you know the bandages, not able to eat...just imagine six month old how hungry she must have been, not being able to feed every time she had any feed at all, she was going through, and facing the risk of death. So that's the level of suffering that she faced, and yet in the middle of that she could smile, and she continued, we allowed her to pass on though. We took her home because we could not tolerate the torture that medical system was inflicting on this, this child. But it gave me this lesson that every moment I spend on this planet is precious. And it's such a blessing that she was in my life.

SPV:

Can I dare to say at this point that your education in philosophy had got something to do with it at all.

BD:

Well, I don't know chicken and egg (laughs) chicken and egg no now I'm a full blown Buddhist many years I spent being an atheist, because of my mother's deep devotion to god forgetting of any anybody else and anything else. So many years I spent really not connecting with God figures or spirituality. I was very much into existentialism purpose of life, the option of suicide, all of that, for many years. In fact of after my daughter died I don't mean in a ontological sense I don't, for me God is a metaphor that drives my life. God is not a being, which is there, who I will go to after I die or something like that I think God is metaphor which drives my life, to a certain direction, a sense of purpose, all of that. And yeah so there is that..yeah..so god of small things is great because it gives me small things to feel success about to enjoy the moment to moment things. So I have a garden, so small things stick to in small things every day. So prayer, being with nature, these are a big part of my daily life, purpose and fitness so

SPV:

That's wonderful. You know even when you were talking about the same I was a little more curious on this point where you build your inspiration to go forward, and then you have a conviction saying yes I can pull this off. So I was, you know, now wanting to know one what was the inspiration, and two what was the conviction, at what point did you start believing that, yes, this is the point where I'm going to pull this off in my life when I performed it or when I founded Bapu Trust. I will execute this mission and commit to it for life. And know that that is what I'm born for. So, just wanted to know your journey.

BD:

Well, you know I tell my daughter, my daughter struggles with purpose and you know what is my life about. You know, so you can't fast forward your life to like 50 and say that I want to reach 50 Now you just have to live your life and I see also that, you know, adult people, people should be born adults at the age of 40, they should not be born as children [laughs] I went through life, you know, there was no digital world, and there was no computers we used to play a lot me and my brother and we used to cycle I used to cycle. I don't know 100 kilometres, or there was no limit to how many miles I could cycle when I was very young. And in the middle of a completely dysfunctional house. I would be just. I used to paint a lot so there were all those things but calling I don't know maybe when I was 45-46, that's when it occurred to me that, but I knew what decisions I should not take and that was not because of a deep sense of like purpose or anything, was a lot like [inaudible]

I just unwound my way through college, my mother tried to make me a doctor I refuse that because I shiver When I think about psychiatry I shiver even today. So it didn't work for me, and then I resisted my dad's pressure, you know, traditional Tamil family they want their kids to be doctors or engineers and both, both of his children both my father's children who resisted that my brother became amazing photographer genius. I'm doing what I'm doing and before that, this is where I knew I would land. I knew that I will not do medicine, spiritual, and I have made life resolves, that's for sure. I have made some life resolves that I will not waste my time. And no parties no sushi gathering I am still extremely poor I'm not at all socially adept I am not socially skilled. I don't create opportunities for this, you know, so I have my god, I have my prayers I live a very private life. So these are all things that have been there

since very long not to waste my life as an interim fitness is very important for my family, you know, Tamil Nadu and all that, we marry into to each other's families. So I, by the time people are forty they would have had like two heart attacks one or two bypass cholesterol will be [laughs]. Oh yeah, so this is something of course mental illness, that's another big story in the family. So I was very sure that I have to take care of my health and fitness whatever my age I just have to you know keep cycling, running, whatever it takes so I never stopped that never stopped. My connection with nature again I've been a gardener for I am almost 49 now, and I've been a gardener for almost 40-45 years. My connection with nature, never stopped Never stopped Yeah, and so these are the things that I see continuing as purpose in life, not that I'm going to become some, founder of Bapu Trust no

SPV:

Got it Got it. so you've been mentioning cycling so just sort on a light-hearted note, was that a birthday gift, a cycle or how did you get into it.

BD:

Good question. My brother had a cycle, my brother is my teacher as far as any transport is concerned. He's an excellent driver so I think he taught me cycling when I was quite, quite small, was being boys, I also used to ride a bullet bike for some time, I was not good at it but because we, our family had a lot of boys you know we used to hang around with them. And so we ended up with both of these kinds of... cycling I remember, I also used to go for rifle shooting. I was part of NCC National Cadet Corps. Generally physically very like up and about my mouth was shut. Don't speak. This also has continued, C, and that's why these questions are like you know...I wonder if I am making sense. [laughs]

SPV:

No you're making perfect sense. So, since since we took a lighter question we are getting into a serious question now. So I'm sure a lot of times what happens when, as a teenager, or even as a young person in college there is a lot of stigmatic issues that you're faced. You'll also develop trust issues like the next time you talk to someone they really want to share your experience, or they want to kind of elaborate your story, or do you want to be misunderstood. Now, how do you, what what would your advice be to someone, let's say who's young and who's kind of facing those trust issues not just from a mental health standpoint but, in general, especially given the digital era. You know the anonymity involved around human interactions, these days, a story of yours, and how you built trust over the years,

BD:

it's again very difficult question. Honestly, I want to share that safety, and feeling protected. Those were the primary motivation for for me. In fact, until very recently, I think, two -three years ago, I don't think I shared my story. December 2019 We had our dissemination seminar in Pune for Bapu Trust, into a public trust, that was the first time actually publicly put out my story, to the extent possible. Also there was a chronicler from New Yorker, who was very interested in the story of the public trust. And so I want to be the brother and I, we've shared a lot with her, but it's not, it's not very you know today, a lot of people share their stories, Very, very openly as a way of advocacy or as a way of saying that this is who I am and I should be accepted. But it was so so difficult for me to remember that I mean, our family of course was shamed because my mom was not there. And they kind of put my father on a pedestal,

because he didn't marry again. They saw him as someone who devoted his lifetime to caring for me and my brother. Yeah so but, but we were quite shamed I remember instances when they were a shadi or other functions that might not be invited, even if she was in the city at that time. And we were seen as poor bacharas as you know the hand me downs a little paternalistic attitude, and nobody would talk about it, nobody would talk about it but today people are because they know Bapu trust is talking on behalf of my mother. And I did at some point tell people you know when we started, I used to tell people, you know all those people who abused who humiliated who insulted who treated my mother badly whether in the family or the mental health system, Bapu trust will show them. this happened say 19 90s I was really involved in the women movement I started to see my mother in a very different light. I saw the impact of patriarchy on her, I saw the impact of caste the expectations from a Tamil brahmin eldest daughter-in-law of a family.

I saw all of that. Because of my involvement with the women's. And I said, Bapu Trust will speak. Amma didn't speak I didn't speak but Bapu trust will speak we did I think so we reached a certain height in our stature and we have brought respect for certain communities which was very big taboo and we have worked at this for 20-25 years. I think so that this is something that um, my mom would be proud, but felt guilty all my life, that I never did anything to stand up to my mother for my mother. In my family there were so many in my memories. I remember people calling her.., she also had polio on one leg. So she had polio. She had a very distinctive stoop with which she would walk there were gait problems. And so, and I do remember, family members, [inaudible] both crazy and lame, all of that so I'm really glad that we started the Bapu Trust [inaudible] as evidence that another way is possible.

SPV:

And when you started the same know what, what were the strong points of opposition. The reason I'm asking that as a lot of people would be inspired Listening to you on when they start out, you know, they would start with a point of inspiration, but there would be a backlash. So, just to kind of get your journey in the initial days, you know, what was the point of opposition and how did you find the courage to keep going in that.

BD:

Yeah so I My first book was published in 1995 It came out of my PhD, which I completed in the Indian Institute of Technology Mumbai. And I was very proud of my achievement, but after that I fell sick, I became depressed and still I wrote two more books by 1999 I wrote two more books, and by 1999 we also started the Bapu trust. By then, people had read my academic work, and they thought of me as an academic person may be a psychologist, maybe a psychiatrist, and they will call me to all these different platforms and I will go and I will talk about it, they should not be institutions, what is the psychiatric drugs it is killing people it is making...my mother really suffered with the psychiatric medications she received. She died,.. so and so I used to go and speak like this and then say Did you really write those books? [laughs] You know, because what is that, and, but we were doing good work at the time, women and mental health. So, then I started to talk about my own depression. I would joke about it in very elite academic forums I would say that guys. You know, you should know that I wrote this, it was quite an even today people refer to this book by Sage Publications which was in fact the first path breaking book on the topic of women, women's issues women's mental health, all of that. So I would say that I wrote it when I was completely crazy. So, you

know, so, and I take it as a a very, very profound thing to say that completely crazy. So much of creativity that I wrote a world famous book, and it got published in international internationally acclaimed publishing Sage Publications. But then people started to see hey, you know this this person is not one of us. Then I stopped getting any of those academic invitations otherwise when you write a book in universities will call you and say, Why don't you speak was to me, let's do a research programme together but all that stopped. And to some extent that continues, I think so. I have a lot of now people have started to speak up. I would go to forums where people with all good intentions would invite me, and then people have literally laughed at me. Just make me very sad I'm still in touch with some of those schools. It used to make me very sad. We used to talk about human rights for persons with psychosocial disabilities at that time it was called mentally ill people living with mental illness. And people would just laugh at me. Just laughing. you know a lot of humiliation. And more than that it is the silence, you don't get invited to consultations or you don't get invited to any conferences. So you, you're like, actually you just walk in and there were some highlights and there were some donor agencies and I remember [Action Aid/inaudible]. At that time, they said, like, Okay, what you say seem to be interesting. So can we support you for a community mental health programme. And we said yes because development is the larger issue. You know, under which all of us are covered. Yes. And why is it that people with mental illness are not covered in that. So there were some developments linked to donars were asking this question, Action Aid being one of them. And they said yeah please you know you were just critiquing this and critiquing that why don't you go and start a programme and see what happens and we did in 2004. They gave us small monies and that programme sustained for 20 years, and it just moved from strength to strength. By then by 2006 the Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities came in, and it gave us more confidence in the way we were looking at ourselves and what we need, we started to speak about it more and more, and we were totally involved in the CRPD. I have to mention Prof. Amita Dhanda who had great faith in the work we were doing. She just recently retired [inaudible] so I have to mention her because my writings was a beacon of light at a time when everything looks so bleak in India and Asia Pacific region.

Then so, really, her writings or her research her very academic kind of support and validation from my, my thought process that no, you know, this type of coercion that exist in mental health system is supposed to be caring. You're not supposed to know bundle up people and take them somewhere and force drugs into their throats. This is not care.

SPV: True True.

BD:

She understood that. [inedible] there are a lot of her writings are about why the Indian legal system, like most Commonwealth legal systems is allowing this to happen. Yeah, and so there have been like, I wouldnt have survived without highlights, like Action Aid believed in us Amita Dhanda believed in us and like this there were several other

highlights, people who believed in our vision. And so a lot of our early years were just spent convincing donars convincing academics convincing people. So we set up this whole. What can I say strategy. We said that we are into Socratic dialogue goes...whoever comes before us

we'll say there's a different way of doing this. Would you like to partner with us, and that's what we did. And later on a trainer told us that if you are coming into these spaces saying that you're so angry, you're so upset with confrontation you're aggressive. Nobody wants to see the chip on your shoulder there are chips on everybody's shoulder so just be just be peaceful and learn to dialogue and that's what we did years and we continue on that path. A number of people we can dialogue with our capacity for holding dialogue has improved, much, much, much more. There is a whole cadre of people in Bapu Trust and beyond in our partners, you know, all of us who are able to hold confidence in the vision of the Bapu Trust. So it's a large community of people [inaudible]... we have been able to influence policy in places.

SPV:

So, reflecting on that experience also would you characterise yourself still as the angry young woman who started a difference, or are you still no are you now that diplomat who is going to collaborate with various stakeholders to make this rule change.

BD:

Well, see the anger dropped off you know the thing is that there are so many personal things that have happened to me, that I associate my anger with those personal experiences. And so I was angry because my daughter was treated in this way, I was angry because my mama was treated in this way, I had incredible memories. It was smell memories sound memories imagery that I could not forget for a long, long time. The anger dropped off because you know after my daughter died. I'm still alive. Okay, what do I do now. And so I had to do something because the anger was coming in my way alot. And so I started meditations, I joined a meditation group, then I got introduced to Buddhism I met some amazing people Asha Pillai, Rupal Sarah they taught me For me it was you know they taught me some methods of using creative expression to release my traumas. So I got over the depression slowly slowly. And yeah, so it took a lot of time to shed the anger. But now, I think I spend half my time in just all these healing activities for myself but also for other people. So it really helps me a lot and those really really work for me. What did not go, it was not the anger which was the problem it is the trauma and its impact on my senses, and that's why I call myself a person with a disability. People look at me and say "kahan he yeh disability kahan hai?"

You be with me when I'm triggered and then you will know. And I don't do anything, when I'm not, I'm not going around beating people or shouting. I'm not doing anything. I'm just in my room saying, body please calm down, you know, please calm down. That's all I'm erupting in rashes I'm having like all kinds of body symptoms, it is very typical of long term trauma child. And I feel that you want to peel off my skin. It's like burning. Now how many of those physical sensations which is really about trauma Yeah, and so that has remained that hasn't gone [inaudible] a lot of things in this regard. Also, it's such a body activity personally. Even now, many hours of just sheer physical labour, I do a lot of gardening, walking, but it hasn't gone, so that has led me...

SPV:

Outside of yours over the years, how have you seen our community change for the better. Have you. Has there been positive change at all like by itself, the cultural change aspects around stigma and so on and so forth.

BD:

Think so. Today, I think people are much more accepting of particularly during corona times you've heard a lot about mental health issues that people are talking about it a lot, a lot. And we have never been as popular as we have been. So I think the stigma is dropping. Slowly, particularly among young people. I have never addressed so many young people as I have in this last year, the digital world has opened up support systems in a way like never before, the disability movement is now open to look at us and say hey, if you're not part of us join our group. You know, so and then these are all very welcome initiatives, the government does not forget us policy, they call us disability policy they will call us and we are in fact working a lot with government as well. Good support not money wise, but in terms of partnerships in terms of all of the terms of trainings. So, we are doing a lot of trainings these days including for government cadres. So I would say that once though I think for me, I mean I don't know how people look at it in our programme we have the extensive use of our Aayush methodologies, not so much, aayurvnda but definitely yoga. Then we use a lot of homoeopathy then natural healing, what they call naturalpathy. Then we do meditations, you know, then we do creative expression for for recovery so we do a lot of that of course we also do healthcare general health care, because we work in poor communities, you know, people, people really neglect their health so we still see a lot of say TB. We see a lot of malnutrition, anaemia, all of that. So, yeah, and people are even in the musty areas, nobody is saying hume sirf roti, kapda, makhaan chahiye. People tell us what their mental health issues are, and they are able to come to us and say, we need your service. That's why 20 years we have continued to work in these areas. Earlier it was difficult now you're all over the place, we are offering services. Yeah, so, I think so definitely there are a lot of changes.

SPV:

And, you know, given the digitization and the opening up that you spoke about. Do you think that is there a need where we create our own model of solutions or, you know, are we more prone towards adapting the western model of providing solutions.

BD:

Absolutely, it's a very big question for us, and we have been talking over infact we were the the first to say let's decolonize mental health institutions.

So...mental institutions are a colonial programme. Whoever said that if you put somebody away in solitary confinement for 90 days, they would come out feeling happier. Ofcourse not. It is common sense that put somebody inside an isolation room for 90 days, and they'll come out feeling better, with good mental health and happiness, of course not.

So this is a completely colonial perspective, you know, and so, and they did this with people with leprosy, people who are seen as [inedible] tribes. No, the criminal tribes are then people who are seen as vagrants and pauppers, people with intellectual disabilities, so its very colonial perspective in these institutions have existed forever at least 200 -250 years. And it's a very common phenomenon in Commonwealth countries most of them have been colonised by the British it's a very Commonwealth phenomenon. And so to think beyond that I say jokingly that we cannot redesign the Indian railway, and we cannot redesign the Indian mental



health system, because we are so colonial in our outlook. And definitely we should start looking at what Indian mind traditions have to offer.

And I'm of course like a strong, strong practitioner of Indian mind traditions which are over 2700 years or so old, old healing practices. And so we have used a lot of those for recovery we believe also a lot it's just sheer fitness, you know, and you have icons today you know like Milind Soman and everybody's running, everybody is walking, so why not persons with disabilities, we should have more and more sports for ourselves. We should just be out there in the sun, doing stuff. So, we believe a lot in fitness, we offer this also in our communities, nutrition

Did you know, Sai that doctors are not trained in their curriculum in nutrition, couples are not trained and so it's part of, again, it's a very old colonial framework of building curriculum, so the doctors are not trained but you will find nutrition usually and, you know, family homes and home science and find it in home science and now these days there is a different line of people who are doing nutrition studies. But doctors don't know what to teach.

But doctors don't know what to teach.

So, so there is that yeah so we do believe that there are loads of Cultural Resources, social capital from our own families neighbourhoods communities which we need to mobilise for, for the good of all.

Also, be more inclusive so we're talking a lot about strengthening support systems, and bringing people together to support for each other. I say often, you know, somebody asked me what was the main ingredient of your programme, it is love and affection.

And I hold by. I hold by it. Support, and so having some empathy and compassion. Being able to support each other. I do believe that caring is something we need to teach. It's not, it's not a human instinct.

Somewhere we fill ourselves with layers of filters which makes us forget that our essential nature is as a social being, and we need it to be caring and affectionate. Not that we should not, you know, be like, really firm in our communication or force. We don't need to mince our words, that's not the case, but we do need to be much more supportive of each other in our communities. So that we build things together, and also include people who are not in that race, who thought for themselves, I think that's, without it being the charity mode is not arey bechara isko dede aisa nahin as an equal partner. As part of our relationship with another human being with as dignified as we are. So that's important.

SPV:

So, it's, it's interesting in that answer you also brought up actor Milind Soman so I was wondering, you know, how does what what is the biggest contributor to the stereotype, both positively and negatively, that is happening in the field, for instance, you know, for a long time Bollywood had these scenes where people with visual disabilities were either singers on trains, or they were just, you know, people who would beg on trains, And slowly it started to

change, but have there been players who have been contributing to stereotypes, either negative or positive and if you had a superpower to kind of sort that out, what would it be.

BD:

Yeah, so I can't think of enough because I'm off movies, actually I only watch one or two, but my all time favourite used to be this movie where it's very very culturally grounded movie, forget the name how could I have seen it so many times this is Akshay Kumar, where he acts as a psychiatrist, and there is this dancer who takes on multiple personalities.

SPV:

I think it was a Rajinikanth movie Chandramukhi's remake if I'm not wrong.

BD:

That was my all time favourite where the psychiatrist is so open minded so minded that he is able to culturally, use the cultural resource that he was getting, there was this older exorcist,

SPV:

Bhool Bhulaiya

BD:

Same, same, same, very interesting. Yeah, I mean that if, if every psychiatrist could do that, I think it's amazing. You know we've gone to many mandirs, dargaas where exorcisms and all happens we've gone to churches, we've gone to many places, we ourselves our ABT Artspace therapy practitioners. Sometimes the mind wants a relief from the day to day boredom of living question that you asked me right in the beginning. And so today I want to be like you know, Deepika Padukone another day I want to be like something else, so why not. My daughter and I talk a lot about okay today. Are you a man or your woman, or are you something in between. Based on that we will dress. And sometimes I wear like I'm a hero today. And then I will wear these big boots and then I'll have to have a power meeting so something like that you're wearing. And we all do that we all have persona, we all have masks and. And so, this movie Bhool Bhulaiya rely on that resource very well. The fact that sometimes our...we cannot take the burden of daily life. We need these little pressure cookers to go off. You know, every now and then and then we have many cultural resources for that possession by another being, is part of that, so. Yeah, so I really love that movie and we have watched it many times over.

SPV:

Now, I'm going to rewatch that again.

On a completely tangential note years before that when my parents took me to a school, and the principal there was not comfortable admitting me to the school because of the disability.

Since times have changed, and especially in the mental health space If a parent goes to us and wants their child to be admitted, who would you be advising better the principal to be inclusive of the child or the parent to be more understanding of the needs, and look what would your line of thought be and what would your advice be.

BD:

Well it's good that I mean a lot of people have different opinions about the national policy for education. It has got a number of good elements, you know, and the good part about it is that it's emphasising lifelong learning for all children. So I really liked that part. And also I like the. I like the idea that disability, children with disabilities are included in that policy.

Even we get a lot of a lot of invitations to speak to teachers to speak to schools to speak to the children, all of that. So I do think you know the other day, only I was having this conversation, that if I had to choose only one group, I would choose the parents of course it's not true that we should choose only one group, we should talk to everybody. That is the full meaning of inclusion, because unless the whole ecosystem changes to see specific change on inclusion will be so difficult to accomplish, but I think that parents today...oh my god!...really need to work for them, you're working a lot with the children. But my daughter and I plan to start up university for all parents before you, before you, you know, before you have a child.

First, join our university, and get a certificate that you're fit for parenthood and then start a family. Oh no oh no this is so so so so so important because we've been talking to a lot of young people who are going completely crazy. Because of the home environment. Many people called me also and come across during Corona times. And they would say *Ghar mae conflict hai*. And I said, you know *ithne saal aap logon ne saath me* you were family, but you never looked at each other you know wife is going in one direction, possibly, parents are going another direction children going in some other direction. Now you have the time one and a half years sit in the same house, and look at each other very nicely and compassionately and say, Hey, I've been married in the last 20 years now who exactly are you, now please ask them this question and start having decent conversation. This is so important to your child. What is his or her deepest wishes for their lives. It's a miracle that you all have come together to share this household, share this home. So find out who each of you are.

So that's what we have been telling people, so if there was one group I would talk to parents.

SPV:

And if, how do you see this space evolving over the next 15-20 years, what is there do you believe we have the critical mass to create the change or...

BD:

Absolutely. I think we have the critical mass, people are thinking about this, people are talking about it. Many people are just jumping in and taking actions you know we know about climate change, we know about mental health, we know about sustainable development goals with the UN is open for new ideas. Our government is open for new ideas and communities are realising that in the end we can't just be saying that, you know, *jo building mein lobby main hai woh hamara nahin wahan ka kachada hum nehin utaayenge aaj woh utana nahin rahta* we don't have that environment people are noticing and saying hey lobby or staircase, it's still my building now, it's still my society now. I have to do something about it instead of saying that the government should come and do something about.

And so, residents forum, you know there are people talking about volunteering to the housing societies, I think that there is a lot of hope a lot more people are running for me that's a very good indicator than before.

SPV:

that is a metric that you're using. And if, if, in hindsight. As the founder of Bapu trust, you would like to change one thing about your trust, or the way it is running,

BD:

Well I would have brought in nature and conservation long back. I wouldn't have thought of mental health as a unique subject and standalone subject, I would have brought in, now we have recently changed and amended our trust deed to bring in more of mental issues, because many of us, including me, a large part of my recovery is by connecting with nature, and really getting nourishment and also contributing to the, to the well-being of my plants in my own homes and so I would have done that a long, long back.

SPV:

My final question. You have given me, cycling, and you have also given me gardening as two activities that allows you to connect to nature. So tell me three more that people can try out.

BD:

One day is really really looked at, nutrition, I mean, for me when I was completely depressed I started reading a lot on food, how it affects our mental health. It's incredible the type of information which is there on food and well-being, you know, Indian foods we are too much into carbohydrates you know we eat too much rice we eat too much rotis, we eat, you know like there are parents will say that my child is choosy about what he or she eats. *Arey give char thappad* [laughs] and he has to eat everything.

And when my daughter used to go to school, she was like barely five, six years old, but teachers used to be amazed, the kind of vegetables, he or she would have all kinds of Capsicum chawli papadi all that boiled and tossed in some oils and spices. And, oh my god and those habits have remained within so we neglect, we eat too much carbohydrates too little proteins.

So I would really we have a little book called mental health on your plate.

So people who when they look at the plate, they should see will it feed my brain today or not, will it fill my stomach or. This is that stomach is only the size of how we fill it. Oh my god. Yeah, no, no, no. Mental health is completely food dependent. This is something that we have to absorb so this is one. breathing practice, I know that the corner a lot of people are getting into breathing because we need lung capacity.

Breathing practices breath practices, really, it helps to stabilise one's capacity. You know, I also went through a divorce once and by then I had done two three years of meditation, so when my lawyer, and it was a domestic violence case, you know, I understand, domestic violence, and we went for 490 or 298 whatever. And then of course later on it became a mutual consent for the first meeting before the judge my lawyer said, Please don't speak

because you know you don't sound like an angry person, you know you don't sound like something has happened to you You don't sound like a victim, you don't have those kinds of emotions. I then I finished three years of very serious meditations. So, yeah, so it was like it was like that. So, meditation, and people feel that their anger, gives them their identity so that's not the case your speech will be far more firmer and clearer if you're in a calm place to deliver that. My advocacy levels have advanced many times over because I meditate. I don't waste my words, I can clearly say what I want to say and I say I stop your bullshit. I can say that without being angry. So, this is really something its a lifesaver believe me. You asked for three things two things come to me I spend a lot of my life on these two things,

SPV:

cycling, gardening, looking over the food, breathing, and one more just for fun.

BD:

Well creative activities. I would say prayer but for me that comes under creative activities. I do a lot of chanting and painting.

SPV:

So, what's the best place you have ever travelled to.

BD:

I've gone all over the world my favourite place? Can't think of anything.

SPV:

So in another life outside of what you're today what you would have been.

BD:

I guess gardener, maybe an earthworm, you know, I have great respect for earthworms. Earthworms are the most hardworking, they are the busiest and they work with waste and they convert that into compost so I would be that.

SPV:

Thank you so much. It was a pleasure talking to you.