From Corporate to Community: Journey of a Social Entrepreneur

Prashant Pal[*]

Abstract

This article is based on an interview with Prashant Pal, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Pure India Trust. Prashant graduated in science and obtained Master's degree in Management from Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati University. Before taking a plunge in social activism, he worked with Accenture Ltd., Tata Teleservices, Aegis People Support, IBM Daksh, Bharti Airtel, Idea Celluar Ltd., Fareportal, etc. Prashant set up Pure India Trust in 2013 after having successful and significate corporate stint at leadership positions in various organizations. In this interview he shares insights from his journey from successful corporate life to a leading social entrepreneur of North India. Srirang Jha conducted this interview for the scholarly community as well as practising bureaucrats, managers, leaders, political activists, social workers and philanthropists.

Keywords: Pure India Trust, Skill and Entrepreneurship Development, Empowerment of Women

What triggered formation of PURE India?

I come from a village Manoharpura in Karauli district of Rajasthan. The district is one of the least developed (aspirational) districts of India. Level of education in my villages is really low. There was hardly any person who passed 10th class till 1990 from our village. Hence, I always had a desire to work for such poor people who are not aware about the development and still living in really bad conditions. I was lucky to get education somehow and I got opportunities to work with a few world-class corporate houses. But my life turned for good when Anna Hajare Ji was staging his fast in Delhi to fight against corruption and I was working in Philippines. The Anna movement motivated me to convert my desire to help poor in reality and I came back to India in 2012 and started the NGO in Mar 2013 with intent to help poorest of poor in the field of education and employment.

What are the vision and mission of PURE India?

Our vision is to create an environment which inspires every youth to be confident of achieving a better quality of life and become a responsible citizen. Following are our key goal statements:

- Provide skill training and entrepreneurial opportunities to 500 women
- Achieve less than 10% School drop-out rate in government schools
- Provide career mentoring to 50000+ students

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In the current scenario, what are the problems faced by institutions like PURE India in the country?

I personally feel that there will always be some problems around and that inspire me to work hard and focus on continuous improvements. However following are some of the challenges we face in our day to day operations:

- Corporate decisions to work in the villages or areas near their offices only and this do not allow them to consider and approve projects coming from such districts / villages which are more than 20-30 KM away from their offices.
- Challenges of reaching out to decision makers or right contact person in different corporate and this is a bigger challenges as our project may not reach for consideration.
- Corporate policy of considering project for one year duration only
- Challenges from community people are different as now a day we find most of the youth do not focus much of real learning or gaining skills to succeed but always look for short cuts to gain quick money. It create lot of challenges in identifying really needy people who need support to be successful
- As the same time we face challenges of identifying workforce for our NGO and not many people are sensitive to work with a mind set to support people but to want to work for money only.

What are the thrust areas of PURE India?

Our mission is to deliver quality education and provide employment opportunities to women from under-served community. In short below are our thrust areas:

- Holistic development and strengthening educational foundation of 1-8 grade students
- Empowering women by skill and entrepreneurship development
- Provide career mentoring to students of 8-12 grades to ensure students take right career decision at right time so that they not spend time in doing degrees which are not of their interest

How do you mobilize resources for PURE India?

Mobilization is our expertise and we use different tools to mobilize people:

- We believe in "word of mouth" publicity and many of our beneficiates bring people to us
- We have built strong relationships with Anandwari workers and local active women. We use them as our brand ambassadors to encourage local people to take advantage of our NGO activities
- We invite most if the village/slum people to come and visit our center and see the activities happening and try and get advantage from the services
- We have also help more than 12 women to become entrepreneurs now from 12 different villages and all of these women are our point of contact for local people and they are also our showcase success stories to local people
- We organize parent teachers meeting at our NGO every month and the family members and mother of our children refer other local people many a times to our
- To enter into new market we get connected with local schools, Skill centers, NGOs, Women self- help groups, Anandwaris, community centers
- We also distribute templates and use announcement to create a quick publicity

How do you look at the experiences of working with the communities in different states of the country?

We have been working in Delhi NCR, Rajasthan, Haryana and UP. We find different challenges/ have different learning from different community as micro level but at macro level challenges are same. However we are very flexible in working as per the need of the local community and we customize our activities based on the local needs.

How PURE India has evolved over the years?

We started PURE India Trust in 2013 and in the initial years we put in our own money wherever help was needed and it was initially a hobby or a weekend activities but later while working with different NGOs/Schools we learnt that doing mere activities would not bring sustainable development so in 2015 we started our own development center at Delhi and slowly we have increased our foot prints across North India. We have grown at faster pace with the help of many individual corporate people and they started contributing to our NGO.

What are the major accomplishments of PURE India?

Following are some of the achievements we have so far:

- One Student got "National Bravery award 2016" from honorable PM of India
- Students supporting directly or indirectly   : 3000+
- Free Computer labs established in villages   : 15
- Students educational encouragement Scholarships   : 180+
- Girl educational encouragement Scholarships   : 54+
- Currently students studying at 3 owned centers   : 300+
- English Learning Labs established in villages   : 8
- Book Libraries established   : 6
- Women provided "beauty wellness Skill Training   : 24
- Youth provided "Advance computer training"   : 84
- Youth provided employment in organized sector   : 23
- Number of free medical checkup camps organized   : 9
- Number of free dental checkup camps organized   : 1
- Number of free eye checkup camps organized   : 1
- Number beneficiaries from medical camps   : 1200+

How do you measure impact of your social interventions?

Impact assessment is a continuous process in our NGO. We are a group of corporate people and I am personally is a Six Sigma Master Black belt so I believe in measuring impact of our every action. Following are some of tools used by PURE India

- Success stories of children / women from our NGO means Before and now status
- Quarterly Score card of our students
- Participation of different students in our different activities
- Salary / amount earned by our students from different skill learned / businesses started
- Number of people come to us from a word of mouth
- Number of people skilled and employed at different level
- Number of students enrolled in higher education with our scholarships
- Number of drop our student come back to our NGO and re-start their educations
- Number of women re-start their education / skilling process after marriage
- Number of people get successful and come back to us
- Number of student work with us a volunteers to help other student to grow

How do you see PURE India growing and contributing during next ten years?

We believe in the maxim "sky is the limit" and as an NGO we want to bring highest recognition for India in the field of social service ….. In short

- We want to bring another "Nobel prize" for India in next few years
- We will expand our operations not across India but also in other countries to help thousands of poor children and women.