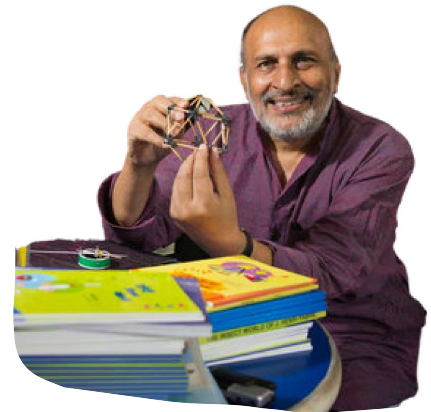


MY LIFE TALE



Arvind Gupta

I was born in Bareilly (UP) in the year 1953. I am 70 years old now. My parents never went to school. My father had a small factory making washing soap. He did not do well in business and was always indebted. But my mother was very understanding, and I greatly benefited from her wisdom. I was the youngest and had two elder siblings. In those days, girls were not allowed to go to school. But my mother intuitively understood the value of a good education. So, she sent all of us to the best convent school in Bareilly.



I don't remember my mother ever asking me to do homework or study for tests or exams. She was happy with me doing whatever I wanted. We couldn't afford to buy toys, so we often made our own toys using old matchboxes, cigarette packets, etc. I remember a rich relative gifting us a Meccano set.

“And somewhere there are engineers helping others fly faster than sound. But, where are the engineers helping those who must live on the ground?”
(Young Oxfam Poster)

I played with it for years. I made many more models than were listed in the instruction booklet. My mother was kind. He just let me be. She was happy to see me play and never asked me to study. At home, there were no books to read. So, I read very little as a child. Despite shortages, I had a happy and loving childhood. I still remember my math teacher. I had opted for advanced math in Senior Cambridge. The very first day our math teacher, Mrs. Frey, said, Children, I'm not too good at advanced math, so you will have to figure it out for yourself. What an honest confession from a teacher! She realized that I was very good in math but poor in English. So she spent hours talking to me in English. This improved my English comprehension and expression. I got distinctions in English. My mother and Mrs. Frey gave me high self-esteem and self-worth.





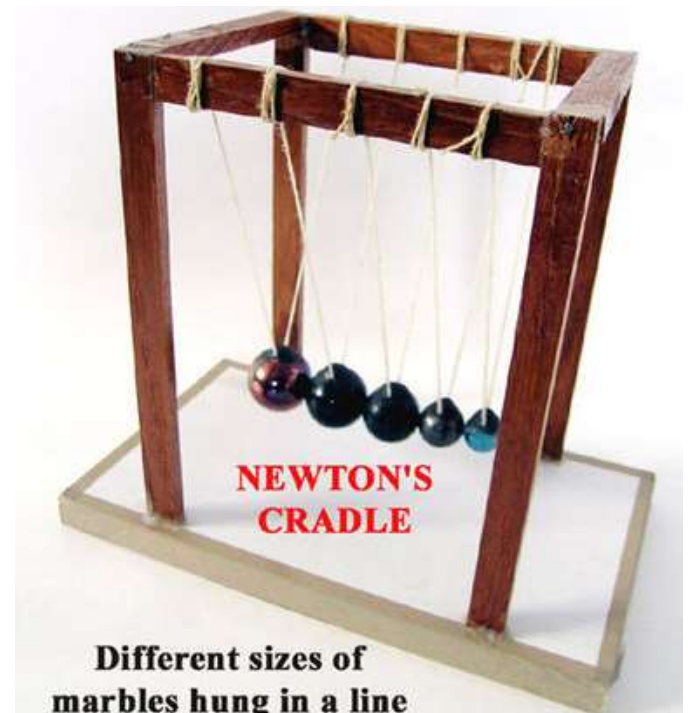
The defining political slogan at that time was:
 "GO TO THE PEOPLE,
 LIVE WITH THEM, LOVE THEM,
 START FROM WHAT THEY KNOW,
 BUILD ON WHAT THEY HAVE."

In 1972, Dr. Anil Sadgopal, a PhD from Caltech and a senior microbiologist at the TIFR, came to IIT to recount his experiences of teaching science to village children in Madhya Pradesh. His talk stirred me deeply.

In 1975, I joined Tata Motors in Pune as a graduate engineer trainee. After two years, I concluded that "I was not born to make trucks". So, in 1978, I took one year off to work for the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Program (HSTP). Since there were no science labs in the villages, all science education consisted of memorization of definitions and formulas. The HSTP aimed to revitalize the learning of science through simple activities using local, low-cost materials. During the first month, I designed the Matchstick Mecanno using bits of a cycle valve tube and matchsticks to make 2-D and 3-D structures. This hooked me to science teaching for life.



I was lucky and unencumbered by parental expectations. I was free to chart my own course. I continued to pursue my passions—I designed low-cost science toys and wrote scores of science activity books. Coming from the Hindi belt, I was acutely aware of the dearth of good material in Hindi. Over the years, I have translated over a thousand books on education, peace, science, and great children’s books into Hindi. I presented over 120 films for the NCERT, which were repeatedly beamed on Doordarshan under the Tarang program.



In 2003, I was invited by Prof. Jayant Narlikar, India’s most decorated astrophysicist, to work at IUCAA’s Children’s Science Centre, located at Pune University. It is a very unique and dynamic science center. Our small team made 2-minute short, crisp, and catchy videos on science activities titled Toys from Trash. We also documented them in sequential photographs and books. Today we have over 8700 short videos on YouTube in over 15 languages, with a viewership of over 100 million!

I wrote 25 books. My first book, Matchstick Models and Other Science Experiments, has been translated into 13 languages, including Chinese. All the other books were also translated into several Indian languages. All my science activity books and thousands of other educational books can be freely downloaded from my website, <http://arvindguptatoys.com>



Over the years, I have received numerous awards for making science fun for children. In 1988, I received the inaugural National Award for Science Popularization among Children. Later, I received the Distinguished Alumnus Award of IIT Kanpur, INSA's Indira Gandhi Award for Science Popularization, and the Padma Shri in 2018.

I have been privileged to conduct workshops in over 3000 schools across the country, many of them in municipal and poor schools. After every workshop, I see a smile on every child's face. There is a gleam in their eyes. I see great hope in these children.

In 2011, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer. It has been over 12 years, and by God's grace, I am still able to do a few things. I have a deep and abiding interest in children's literature. So, I still manage to translate a book a day into Hindi.



Some of you who read this article might like to see my TED Talk.

TURNING TRASH INTO TOYS FOR LEARNING
https://www.ted.com/talks/arvind_gupta_turning_trash_into_toys_for_learning?language=en



The educational terrain in our country is very harsh—almost barren. It is rocky terrain, full of stones. Even a good seed will wilt away in the absence of soil. And there is very little soil to nurture young minds. Intellectuals have a small but historic role. Whatever our circumstances, we have a humble task: to create a fistful of soil every day. Once there is good soil, millions of flowers will bloom. Then surely, one day, we will have a spring harvest.

Arvind Gupta is a renowned Indian toy inventor, author, translator, and scientist. He was awarded "Padma Shri" by the President of India. This prestigious recognition is a testament to his exceptional contributions to the fields of innovation and education.
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