

Who is the inspiration behind Lumens School?

Mr M R Raghavan & Mrs Aruna Raghavan

Mr and Mrs Aruna Raghavan were born and brought up in Vile Parle, Mumbai, which is one of hubs of education. Aruna Raghavan says, she married Mr Raghavan as he had a dream to work for the betterment of rural India at young age. So in 1982, at very young age of 22 they both decided to work for 10 years in corporate world and at 32 leave everything and work to bring a meaningful change, what in education, we over the years as students, did not appreciate. They actually left their cosy world at the age of 32 to bring about a change and shifted to a very remote village of Tamilnadu without knowing anyone there or even knowing Tamil!

Raghavan was a practicing CA, a software consultant and until recently, a member on the board of Cipla. Aruna, MA, MPhil was a sub-editor in TOI. They gave up their lucrative career and spent more than 10 years in understanding various schools, philosophies and reviewing numerous techniques in education. They worked in schools starting from a school in Dharavi slums of Mumbai to Kodai International, one of the best IB schools in India and learnt how schools are run across various strata of the society. They read about various education systems like Steiner, Froebel, Montessori, Glenn Doman etc; philosophies of Swami Vivekananda, J Krishnamurty, Shri Aurobindo and the Mother of Pondicherry and they developed a method of teaching called as **QuadSeek**, which was scientific and systematic enough to suit any board or child and still allowed immense freedom and joy of learning to children.

Inspired by the technologies of the west and philosophy of east, they first started experimenting on their own daughter by homeschooling her. Their daughter, Nirupama, at the age of 4 years could read and speak 4 languages, if given $x + y = 10$ and $x = y$, she could give the values of x & y . She could read books by Enid Blyton and even Reader's digest, talk about triangles and quadrilaterals and its angles. She is also one of the youngest author to have her book published by a renowned publishing house when she was just 8. At 15, she was one of the youngest translators in India when her book 'Partiban's Dream' was published. She was not a super child. The super thing she had was the teaching methodology used by her parents, **Aruna Raghavan** and **M.R. Raghavan**.

C.Subramanian, the then Governor of Maharashtra (former Union Minister of the Green Revolution initiative), appreciated their work and had tested Nirupama by inviting her to Raj Bhavan where she had read out Times of India to him at the age of four and even answered his quiz on Maths.

Shri C. Subramaniam showing interest in what they set out to do, asked them, "What are you going to do for India?".

As per plan, the couple, led by their dreams and with their limited personal resources, moved from Mumbai to a tiny, remote village, Arasavanangkadu, about 300km from Chennai to start a small experimental school known as **Shikshayatan**. The schools is completely free but has state of the art facilities like 60 computers for 210 children, enviable teacher-student ratio of 1:12, library with more than fifty thousand books etc. They incorporated values in Education of the orient with technologies of the west. They found the synergy both innovative and spurring. "QuadSeek" was initiated. So far they have helped start more than 20 schools, including 2 in Malaysia, powered by QuadSeek. They have coached teachers in more than 50 schools across India and have conducted workshops for innumerable parents on educating and upbringing their children.

The Raghavans have been running this school for more than 24 years now, which is completely free. They have transformed generations in the village and they now teach the children of their alumni. Arasavanangkadu, to date frequently doesn't have electricity for 8 hours a day, leave aside bank or a general store. Obviously there was no school for their six-year old daughter; they home-schooled her.

The students at Shikshayatan are children of farm labourers, most being first generation literates, are a pleasure to spend time with when they talk of World Geography and History in different languages, including English and do Science Experiments in the kindergarten. Apart from education, these children are also extremely good at sports and regularly win at district level in various sports and art. The bliss on their faces, their values and conduct is envy, especially when you know that some of them may not have had breakfast and most of the days have rice and salt for lunch.

Fuelled by success of Shikshayatan and words of Shri C. Subramaniam, they have set out to spread this innovative and effective method of teaching to 100 schools and as many children as possible.

Apart from the Shikshayatan, Raghavans run a science lab on wheels for neighbouring schools in that area as most of them don't have one. They are also working on a project called as Purnashiksha ahiyaan, where they are helping 40 neighbouring schools in their area with infrastructure, teaching and learning material and teacher coaching.

Wanting to avoid any attachment, Raghavan doesn't have any personal investment and still generates money by working with various schools as well as generating donations from his friends and well wishers and donates generously to the needy.

Raghavan also adopted and worked extensively to help tsunami affected village, Vellapallam in Tamilnadu. He also volunteered during floods in Bihar and earthquake in Kuchh.

Some other information on Raghavans...

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<http://www.motherservice.org/ShikshayatanSchool.htm>

<http://www.thecreativeschool.in/creative-school-gratitude-and-acknowledgements/>