

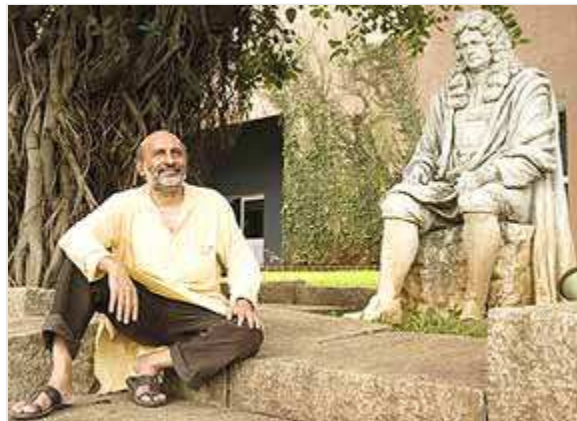
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Winners

ARVIND GUPTA

By Meeta Bhatti



Arvind Gupta is a 'back excellence. Like the popu animation series by the sai makes real the fantasy play th every child's mind. Surround 54 year-old, in his corduro kurta, walks around barefoot University Centre for As Astrophysics (IUCAA) at Pu creating teaching aids that h "toys" — the only time he v (that he has crafted himself goes to the canteen for lunch on the campus. His office i Gupta's finds from the garbage cans or his own hol broken CDs, used Tetrap valves and tubes, film rc

plastic straws, used refills of ballpoint pens, all types of paper, worn-out bathroom : matchsticks and matchboxes, mirrors, bangles and combs. And hanging from soft-board doorknobs and handles are Tetrapak butterflies, needle and thread acrobats, paper bird: skeletons.

These form the bedrock of fundamentals in science for young students who visit IUCAA th batches of 50, of which Gupta maintains a schedule on the Monaco Hindi calendar hanging by the window. Dr Jayant Narlikar, the famous astrophysicist who set up the centre, assign at IUCAA to Gupta in 2004 (until then Gupta was a teacher on the move). This year, in completing three years here, Gupta has finished uploading over 700 books for children teachers on his website, www.arvinduptoys.com. Inaugurated by former president A P J June 2007, the website is a treasure-trove of rare books, also translated into Hindi and Ma and his friends. Soon the library will also benefit the visually impaired who can read book screen-reading software like JAWS.

"Only those teachers who punish kids by making them stand outside the class go to h Gupta. "After all, it's outside the classroom that children learn the most." His role mode Gandhi's contemporary Gijubhai Badheka, the teacher who broke all norms to sow the see in his students. Badheka's *Divasvapna* (Day Dreams), an account of the teacher's Montessori education, is one of the books on Gupta's website. First published in 1931, it w before the National Book Trust printed it again in 1990 — since then it has seen five reprir books on the site include the classic *Totto-Chan* stories, Isaac Asimov's series of scie Irawati Karve's *Yuganata*. And there are 18 books of architect Laurie Baker. Having brief Baker in his youth, Gupta met Baker again eight years ago and digitised all his books, even of them in Marathi.

"It's my dream to make this online library as big as www.gutenberg.com, the world's database of free books. Our focus will be on valuable literature that is out of print beca

didn't find it viable to print another edition," says Gupta, who quit his job as an engineer at early 1970s to train rural teachers. Partners in project were experts who had quit their respective jobs to reshape the educational milieu. "It was a time of intense political churn when a lot of socialists were released and a bunch of us decided to contribute to change," recalls Gupta. "We believe we couldn't sit in an office and write curriculum for rural teachers. Our syllabus for children is for their own fingers." Gupta handed over the responsibility of earning to his teacher-wife Sunita to pursue her own interests for making teaching aids, which remains an equally important component of his website.

Already up on the site are over 25 educational films, all of Gupta's own books and over 250 — Gupta's beloved "toys". Each is accompanied by an illustration and DIY details. There are blow balloons, coke can airplane, three-blade paper fan, portable generator, windmill and to name a few. In few easy steps, these explain the science behind centrifugal force, fire, magnetic levitation. "The line between science and fun is very thin," says Gupta. "It's how you can not] that puts the joy back into learning."

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