

A touch of gold

Sue Knight



The Taj Mahal; a testament to love. I have seen it in pictures so often in my life and here it was – breathtakingly beautiful, shining white marble standing out against the pure blue sky. Our guide turned to our Indian friend, Ashok and whispered a question in his ear. Ashok nodded and the guide pointed up to the bronze spike on the top of the dome. Once that spike had been covered in gold but this had been removed by the British during their rule in India. The guide had checked whether it was OK to explain as some British get annoyed with the suggestion and confront the bearer of the news.

Sunita had lived in a very rural part of India outside Chennai where roads barely exist. Here achingly arid land can be swamped with torrential rain at the time of the monsoons. Sunita was a daughter in a country where it is believed that 10 million female fetuses are aborted every year. Often left in the care of her uncle Sunita would be made to stand silently under the mosquito infested Banyan tree. Any sound or any movement to alleviate the pain of the bites would be met with a beating.

In contrast Soraya was born into a caring wealthy family in Rajasthan. Talented and motivated she nevertheless followed her family's wishes and committed to an arranged marriage with the son of another wealthy family in Agra, a nnnn miles from her home. As is the tradition Soraya moved into the home of her husband's family and dedicated herself to her husband and their children. Her home was elegant, cool and a home to four generations of the family. Her great grandfather now 100 years old sat gracefully and peacefully in the shade on the porch as his grandchildren cycled round the garden under the arching bougainvillea and the servants bustled about letting in visitors and serving them deep gold tea. An idyllic existence? Yet Soraya could not expect to travel further than her own family's home town and even then would not be expected to ever travel alone. Her talent was restricted to serving the home and her in-laws.

6 years ago I received an email one of many that I receive from India every year but something about this one attracted me. I am not entirely sure what it was that spoke not just to my head but mostly to my heart. I remember offering to send some of my books to help Ashok with his studies of Quality Control and the role of NLP in that. Then the following year when he travelled to England to receive an award for the work that he had done we met up briefly during his stop over at Heathrow. 19 years old, slim and passionate about learning Ashok asked me to allow him to represent me in India if I ever considered working there. A most unlikely contact I could not have imagined at that time with only his success in his studies to recommend him and his attitude I nevertheless agreed. It is too long a story to tell here of how he sacrificed his goals to support the family business and obey his father's wishes to help his brothers or how he almost turned to the life of a religious man and of how he moved us all with his brief presence on our master practitioner course but two years ago he invited me to come to India to teach NLP. Since then I have run foundation programmes and conferences to business leaders and management organisations there. I have even presented to the local police department in Chennai, a police department that is influenced by the principles of the Beatitudes.. Put in a link here to Pradeeps site...

And last year I returned to Kerala to train the Brain O Brain team in the principles of feedback and teamwork and modelling excellence. I am not entirely sure who was teaching whom. The learning was a very mutual process. And there is no doubt that Spence my husband and I have been so very very enriched by our work and time with this team in India. And late in February we extended this training out to more of the trainers and teachers of the children. And the goal? To create 10,000 NLP Master Practitioners of the

children throughout the country. Indeed they are already Master Parishioners the training will be an acknowledgement and confirmation of all that they already do and know unconsciously. And we will be modelling the best, Mahatma Gandhi, the current president, Nelson Mandela. Brain O Brain knows that the future leaders are very much in their caretaking at the moment. It took 22 years to build the Taj Mahal a vision so well planned that the architect knew in advance to create 22 steps to the startlingly white terrace that surrounds this majestic palace. And 22 years from now most of the children in this programme will be approximately 30 years old... young leaders of the world.

I was in India to work with Brain O Brain, a family run business dedicated to the development of the thinking and learning power of the children of India. With a structured syllabus they teach the children how to do complex mathematics using at first an abacus but subsequently to do the same with their mental agility only. What is the point you might ask in a world where computers can do the most complex calculation in response to a single key stroke on the keyboard. The trainers and the facilitators in Brain O Brain do much more than teach the children to do clever maths. The children learn to memorise the abacus moves in their muscle so that the abacus itself becomes redundant. But they are also learning how to use their whole body to learn and simultaneously they build motivation, a sense of competition and a belief in themselves. Brain O Brain are building the leaders of the future not just for India but for the whole world.

India already has one of the most progressive leaders in the world running the country. Name name...a Muslim was voted into power by Hindus. His goal is for India to be a world super power by 2006. Learning of the corruption in one of the southern states he summoned all the politicians there to a briefing by him where he challenged them to explain why they were never cited by the children of that state as their role models for the future.

India has a growth rate of 9% per year and that is expected to be a conservative figure in the years to come. It has its troubles but it also has a culture where people of different faiths, different languages and different traditions live side by side. A first visit might mistakenly lead you to believe that all is chaos but much of that chaos is the result of some of the most rapid growth and development in the world. None of the northern European sense of structure and order here. Freedom is a prized value and Indians admit and recognise that chaos is sometimes the price for that but it is a price that they are prepared to pay. If you think that Europe

offers an example for new India you would be wrong. India is the new Europe. We have a lot to learn here.

Brain O Brain and the three brothers who run this Anand, Arul and Ashok Subramarian succeed in the unexpected. A southern India based business (although that is too clinical a term to describe what they do), they have created a network of trainers and facilitators and franchisees not only across the south but unusually across the north too where Hindi is the language, a totally different tongue to their native Tamil Nadu. They have representatives in every state and the news of their success is now spreading to places outside of India. Ashok was preparing to fly to Dubai where one of their teachers had moved and was preparing to start a centre there. So a small growing Indian business you might think? No they are already training 10,000 children and expect to have nnnnnn by the end of next year.

It is a measure of the generosity of heart that is so characteristic of the Subramarian brothers that knowing the family of Sunita they offered to bring her and her friend to Delhi where they gave them work at their offices there. I met Sunita and her friend only last week. She organises the office there, and has become one of the teachers running a class for the children every week. She and her friend are gracious, humble and very very talented. Her family have entrusted her care to the brothers and they are very intelligent of this huge responsibility. It is likely that it will be they who find her husband but one who supports her and her personal goals.

And Soraya... well she also is teacher. Part of her home in Agra has been converted to a classroom where each day she teaches these young leaders including her own children. I sat at the back of her class and admired her confidence her talent and her authority as she built champions not just in Maths but in life skills and global awareness.

And the spire on the Taj Mahal... well I wondered about suggesting to the British Government that they might now replace that plundered gold. And I might still do that. But something more significant occurred to me and that is that if I and others like me can support these passionate and dedicated Indians to achieve goals such as these then perhaps we might consider ourselves to be replacing that gold bit by tiny bit.

You can see an example of what Brain O Brain is achieving here.....
link to their video

Sue Knight is an international trainer and coach and author of NLP at Work. She is an adviser to the British Board of NLP. You can learn more about Sue on www.sueknight.com

A P.S. I am often asked to contribute to sites like Wakkipaedia, NLP Gripe forums and Nutworker chat rooms. I rarely read them. When I do I am amazed by how much energy some people put into the philosophical debates to oppose NLP. What do I say? Let those people ask Sunita, Soraya and the thousands of children who are growing their excellence into the future what they think.... Maybe even better they might redirect that hot air to putting back a bit more of the gold themselves?