

The Bellur Krishnamachar & Seshamma Smaraka Niddhi Trust (BKSSNT)

Fundraising and the Charitable status of the BKSSNT

The BKSSNT - or Bellur Trust as we call it is a charitable Trust formed by Guruji, his family and students to achieve social, health, economic and educational reform for the people of Bellur and other backward villages in India and to further the practice of yoga especially in schools.

The Trust is recognised by the Govt of India under a special section of the Charitable Associations. This means that foreign contributions being received by the Trust's bank do not incur any fees, so every penny which is raised by YOU goes to the Trust.

BKSSNT relies on donations from Guruji's followers which boosts the considerable amount of money donated by Guruji and the Iyengar family themselves.

So why not organise a fund raising event – a yoga day, a social event, a competition.....be imaginative and support Guruji in his vision for change.

Here is some information

Bellur is a village in Karnataka, Southern India, famous now as the birthplace of Bellur Krishnamachar Sundararaja Iyengar – more commonly known as Yogacharya BKS Iyengar.

Bellur is just one of the many very poor and backward villages in India, a community of people belonging to the lower strata of society with reference to their social status and economic background. Until recently the village had probably changed little since BKS Iyengar (Guruji) lived there as a young boy. The only amenity was the Primary School, which had been built by Guruji with help from money raised by English students in 1967. Guruji's father was schoolmaster at a school nearby as there had been no school in Bellur itself until this time. There was not even a clean, fresh water supply until 2004. Bellur represents the plight of many such village communities in India.

Guruji's vision for Bellur is to establish it as a model village through the provision of educational, medical, social and cultural facilities and opportunities to raise and enhance the general quality of life and improve future prospects for the young in the community – and also of course to teach them yoga ! From this firm foundation lasting social and economic reform can be achieved.

The Aims of the BKSSNT are:

Educational

1. To set up Primary and Higher-Primary schools, at Bellur Village as well as other backward areas in the country.
2. To up-grade the already existing village schools to a higher grade.
3. To set up technical and education institutions to provide job orientated courses and vocational training that is applicable and will uplift the rural youth and improve their employment prospects.
4. To support and provide adult education centres in rural areas.
5. To set up libraries and reading rooms in villages.

Social

1. To improve living standards at the village level, especially with education in the problem areas of alcohol and tobacco consumption.
2. To provide clean drinking water facilities and improve the sanitary & drainage conditions at villages, thereby improving the general public health.
3. To educate and create awareness among rural people about the latest developments in the fields of agriculture and allied areas and to support their actual implementation.

Health

1. To create awareness among rural people of the importance of individual as well as public health care.

2. To establish primary health care centres at villages as well as in backward areas.

Cultural

1. To promote and further the technical and artistic skills of the rural people in the field of traditional handicrafts and help to establish cottage industries.

What has been achieved so far:

To date the success of the BKSSNT in carrying out Guruji's aims and establishing very real and significant changes for the Bellur and Kolar district is beyond question. The BKSSNT has:

1. Erected a further level to the existing primary school building, providing a large space for yoga classes – the RIM Hall (Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Hall)
2. Erected a 50,000 gallon water tank to provide fresh clean drinking water to the villagers, the most simple yet most basic need.
3. Purchased 15 acres of land on the border of the village and established the necessary infrastructure of boundary fences, power supply and road access.
4. Built, equipped and staffed a High School (Smt. Ramamani Sundararaja Iyengar High School) (Education had ended for most, especially the girls, after 7th grade. Guruji works at a tremendous pace and inspires others to do likewise. The school building was started in January 05 and students were admitted on 1st June 05. Students are now travelling 30 – 40 kilometres to study there as it is already seen as a place of true learning.
Recently the first batch of students have graduated from the High School and some have gained places at engineering colleges in Bangalore. Some students are already excelling in yoga and will take part in the regional competitions - see Iyengar Yoga News Feb. 2011 for recent information)
5. Provision of free education to those who belong to the weaker sections of the society who live below the poverty line. The Trust estimates that this is 50% of the students.
4. Provision of free school uniforms, free books and stationary and free midday meals for all students.
5. Payment of the teachers' wages
6. Built the Ramamani Sundara Raja Iyengar Hospital to provide for the healthcare of villagers from Bellur and the local district. (previously families would have to carry their sick relatives many miles away for treatment)
7. Built a Guest House (to provide accommodation for visitors to Bellur, who may be making a pilgrimage to the Patanjali temple or assisting in the work of the Trust)

Future plans are to:

1. Build, equip and staff a Technical College providing vocational skills based courses suitable to the community, eg stone masonry, animal husbandry.
2. Build, equip and staff a Further Education College and a College of Nursing.
3. Provide 100% free education
4. To further equip and staff the hospital
5. To establish small cottage industries eg horticulture.
(Cultivation of the stony land is not very easy or productive, although there are tomato fields and some farms in the area.)

The plans are very ambitious and will obviously need a very large amount of funding to see their completion and maintenance. The benefit to the villagers of Bellur has already been enormous, but the establishment of the High School, Hospital, Technical College, etc will benefit the other villages of the whole locality as well, so the projects reach beyond Bellur itself.

“Eye Camp” June 06

A mobile van – India’s first mobile refraction unit - came to the Ramamani Hospital with satellite link to one of the leading ophthalmic hospitals in Chennai. A team of doctors carried out eye examinations on 818 villagers. Special eye charts were used as most of the villagers are illiterate. 192 pairs of glasses were made on site in the mobile van equipped with all the technology necessary to make prescription glasses within a few minutes, all free of charge. About 40 villages were transferred to hospital for cataract eye surgery.

Since then there have been several “Medical Camps” to detect and treat common illnesses and alleviate un-necessary suffering.

Tourist attraction

Bellur has not always been a nondescript village. It did have an important place in Indian mythology and 1000 year old temples with ancient carvings still exist as ruins in the village, which indicate its status in the past. However over the centuries Bellur had come to an appalling state of social, economic and cultural ruin. A few years ago any tourist wanting to visit Guruji’s Bellur would have been taken from Bangalore to the other more famous Bellur which has famous temples renowned for their intricate carvings. There would have been no reason to visit this remote village, but now Bellur is getting onto the yoga tourist map. Guruji has financed the building of the first Patanjali temple in India. It is an impressive colourful structure which also houses a beautiful Hanuman relief which is 1000 years old and which was in the village when Guruji lived there. In fact his home looked out onto the site of the idol. There is also a covered community area in the temple complex which can be used socially for events such as weddings and celebration meals. The temple is helping to reinstate Bellur to its old glory and is making it a tourist attraction. The villagers, who previously had few visitors, especially Westerners, are getting used to visiting dignitaries and yoga students curious to see Guruji’s birthplace and the temple. Consequently the villagers are keen to keep the village tidier !

Judith Jones

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