



Benevolent Organisation for Development, Health &
Insight (BODHI) Australia

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Aryaketu
Aryaloka Education Society
Nagpur, India

Dear Aryaketu

Please find my draft report for my visit to Nagpur and Raipur, Feb 22-27 inclusive. This has a lot of detail, and will be used to help write my own report to BODHI Australia,

Kind Regards, metta, and Jai Bhim

Colin Butler

Aryaloka Computer Education visit by Dr Colin Butler, February 2018

I arrived at the Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar International Airport, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India on Thursday February 22, 2018 having flown from Kolkata on IndiGo airlines, arriving in the evening. I left on the morning of Tuesday February 27. It was my second visit to Nagpur but my first meeting with Dharmachari (Dh) Aryaketu, whose work with the [Aryaloka Computer Education](#) (ACE) has been supported by BODHI Australia since late 2016, following recommendations from Dh Aryadharma (initially in 2014 and 2015) and also Jen (in 2016), who each live in Sydney, Australia.

Dh Aryaketu met me at the Nagpur airport in his own car and drove me to his well-constructed and comfortable home, which is shared with his parents, his wife (Sheetal), his son, one of his brothers (Darshan) and other members of his extended family (see figure 1). This house is located near [Nagaloka](#), a well-established centre run by TBMSG, the main Triratna-associated NGO in India (see figure 2). This is near the road between Nagpur and Kamptee, each of which has important [historical associations](#) with Dr Ambedkar.¹ I stayed in this house for five nights and spent four full days with Aryaketu, his colleagues and family.

This house has three stories, the top floor of which is occupied by one branch of ACE, and which also serves as home for up to 10 female students, who live together for the duration of their 6 month course. Sheetal gives them computer instruction and also serves as their “house mother”. Without this residential facility these students, who come from disadvantage backgrounds and whose homes lie in scattered rural villages, could not undertake their studies.

ACE was started in 2000, by Dh Aryaketu, when aged 27. His vision was initially met with skepticism from some of the more senior members of his order and community, but he also had some support, including from a professor of information technology (Prof Maiske) (who I coincidentally met on Feb 25 at the Buddhafest). Dh Aryaketu’s own training in computers is from 1993 (when computers in India were all in black and white and before the invention of the mouse) and he appears to have a natural aptitude for them. He told me that he could have obtained employment as a computer programmer with a multinational company, but that he instead preferred to create his own organization, particularly to try to empower disadvantaged dalits from Maharashtra. He foresaw that the transmission of knowledge about computers would help enable a right livelihood for the students, and he also hoped that the NGO he created would be the basis of a right livelihood for himself and his family.

After a difficult first six years, great progress has been made. In 2006 the UK-based Karuna Trust started to provide funding after initial declining. They also provide advice and training such as for report writing and financial and other forms of management. They provide training in India to the staff, given by someone from the UK and some Indian residents.

Since December 2016 BODHI Australia has also provided funds, approximately A\$30,000. However, to date, none of BODHI’s funds have been to help directly with running costs; they have instead been used to provide scholarships, in each case for 50 students in two batches of 25. These scholarships pay for the course fees, over a six month period. Living expenses are met by a local donor, and visitors from the UK help with teaching English and workshops.

Dh Aryaketu is today a senior member of the Triratna community in Nagpur and has travelled 7 times to the UK for meetings with Triratna (approximately every 2 years) and the Karuna Trust. He has also visited Hungary, to assist with a Triratna project there, working

¹ A meeting of the All India Depressed Classes Federation was held in Khamptee, attended by Dr Ambedkar. [See here](#) and [here](#).

with gypsies. This international travel has been funded by Triratna. A Karuna-appointed programme manager (Akashamitra) visits ACE at least twice a year, staying for 2-3 days each time. He has been coming for the last 3-4 years, before that there was someone else.

Audits of ACE are conducted every year, by a well-respected auditor. ACE has FCRA (Foreign Currency Regulation Act) status, and has 7 trustees. The composition of these trustees is largely stable. Four of them have been with ACE since its inception. Naturally, some are more active than others. I did not meet any trustees of ACE, other than Aryaketu.

ACE currently operates from three locations in Nagpur, and one in Raipur, the capital city of Chhattisgarh, which is an adjacent state formed in 2000, by the division of Madhya Pradesh, until then the physically largest state of India. Raipur is about 5 hours by train from Nagpur and about 16 hours by train to Gaya, but is close to parts of Orissa. Several trains run each direction each way each day between Nagpur and Raipur. (Nagpur, located in central India, is near the eastern border of Maharashtra and is also close to parts of Orissa, including Bandhara, a Tibetan refugee settlement, visited by Dr Kathy Holloway in 1990, for BODHI.)

I visited and inspected three of the ACE centres; the main one in Nagpur (Indore), the one above Aryaketu's house, and the one in Raipur (see photos). The Indore centre has 24 training stations, i.e. screens and keyboards, several of which are linked to a single computer, sufficiently powerful for several students to use simultaneously. The computers looked modern (see photo) and can easily run the software. There is also access to the internet in these centres.

The building at Indore has several rooms and provides adequate space for 24 students and several staff (see figure 2). It is owned by ACE, as is all the equipment, including a generator to protect against blackouts. The building is comparatively quiet, on a side road, but in a central part of the city. All parts of the building are continuously filmed (cctv), and the students are aware of this. The files that are created from this filming also serve as evidence to the government inspectors, who may inspect them. In the past this centre had one severe problem with a power surge which damaged some of equipment, but the chance of this recurring has been reduced by an improved central power grid, with less fluctuations. Other precautions are used but may not be sufficiently powerful. In the future this problem may be reduced by solar panels. The building is secure and is insured against fire and theft.

Staff: There are 13 full time staff and 10 sessional teachers working in all 4 centres.

I met several of these staff members. In addition to Aryaketu and Sheetal, I met Darshan who works at the main centre, in the office, as well as teaching, Sabina (a teacher and administrator), Lakesh (a computer engineer who is the system administrator; i.e. who maintains the equipment), and Mr Gary, an English teacher (see figure 4). In Raipur I met the manager, Akshayvajra and a teacher called Sanjaya (see figures 5,6).

Courses taught: Four courses are currently taught: MS Office (including Word and Excel), internet, and Tally (an accounting programme) basic and advanced) in 4 models. Most students also enroll in English classes. In the past, computer animation was also taught however this proved too difficult to sustain, although there were some outstanding successes, including to a former female Chakma student, who now has very well-paid work as an animator.

These courses are accredited by the state government of Maharashtra, who issue an award called the MS-CIT (Maharashtra State Certificate in Information Technology). The courses are designed and overseen by the Maharashtra Knowledge Corporation Limited (MKCL) (www.mkcl.org). ACE is an authorized training centre code no. 14210091. Exams are

conducted by the MSBTE (Maharashtra State Board of Technical Education) see website: www.msbtte.com

In a typical year almost 1,000 students start training (400 from Indore, 200 from Chhaoni (also in Nagpur), 160 from the centre at Aryaketu's house, and 200 from Raipur. About 70% of these students are female. The dropout rate is about 10-15%, and this is lower than previously. Of those who complete their course, about 8% fail their initial exam. If they fail they are given two more chances to pass, by sitting exams at one monthly intervals. Almost all students eventually pass.

Selection Process: students are selected if they have some English and are judged as having some capacity to use a computer. Students need to be able to write their biodata in English. Most students from villages and slums have never used a computer before and those from a village have probably never seen a computer before.

Disadvantaged students who live in various slum areas of Nagpur are encouraged to apply to ACE by a field worker who visits 20-25 homes every day (6 days a week, for 3 hours a day). The current field worker has acted in this role for about 3 years, following his predecessor who did this for about 4 years.

Students from villages learn of the course through word of mouth, including from previous students from those villages. They may also hear of it from Triratna, who have a spiritual teaching outreach to many villages. Students don't have to be Buddhists. Besides being Buddhist, some students are Hindu, Moslem and Christian.

The standard of teaching, equipment and supervision is superior to most other computer training centres in Nagpur and Raipur and the centres have a good reputation. Many graduates are able to obtain work, some in the IT sector. Students' prospects for obtaining a right livelihood are also enhanced by improving their English. Residents (especially if from villages) also improve their chances in life by learning from each other, by the discipline of living as a group, and by meditation. The residential students in Aryaketu's house also sometimes get English tuition from foreign visitors, who sometimes stay for weeks or months.

Conclusion

I thank Dh Aryaketu, his family, and the staff and students of AEC for their time, hospitality and friendship. I hope the supporters of BODHI Australia will continue to support this project.



Figure 1. Dh Aryaketu, founder of the Aryaloka Education Centre (AEC) (centre) with his family; Nagpur, Feb 2018. From left to right: Dharshan, Mr **, Mrs **, Dh Aryaketu, Sheetal, ** and Kundun



Figure 2. Dh Aryaketu (on right) with Dh Viradhamma; Nagaloka, Nagpur (Feb 2018)



Figure 3. Students, Aryaloka Education Centre (AEC) (Indore (Nagpur). Picture of Dr Ambedkar on the wall.



Figure 4. Mr Gary, an English teacher, at AEC, Indore, Nagpur



Figure 4. Some of the new graduates, with their certificates AES, (Indore), Nagpur



Figure 5. Student, Sanjaya (teacher) (centre), and Akshayvajra (R), AES, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, Feb 2018.



Figure 7. Akshayvajra outside AES, Raipur, Chhattisgarh