

NGO gets UN recognition for promoting social cohesion

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● Beyond borders

Engaging India, Pak in cultural activities

Delhi based Non-Government Organisation, Routes2Roots (R2R) has been recently honoured with the award of 'The Inter-Cultural Innovation Award-2016' from United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) in Baku, for its 'World Largest Oral History Programme, Exchange For Change'.

R2R has been trying to promote people to people contact between India and Pakistan since 2004 through cultural activities such as art, theatre, music and festivals. Their 'Student Exchange Programme' is an off-beat one, where they have connected over 12,000 students aged between 9-14 years from 37 schools across seven cities of India and Pakistan.

Their idea is that, India and Pakistan share boundaries, similar histories and cultures and also misconceptions about each other which have contributed to growing tensions. R2R is trying to erase these misconceptions. Rakesh Gupta, founder of R2R spoke to *Metrolife*, regarding this achievement and what it means for R2R, which can be inspirational for some social entrepreneurs.

Excerpts:

How did R2R widen its reach?

R2R was formed in 2004 for enhancing people to people contact through art, culture and student exchange programme. It was primarily set up to enhance the cultural co-operation amongst the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries, but gradually expanded its operations beyond SAARC nations. There were seven founder members of R2R initially.

How did you gather attention of the youth to join your NGO?

The programmes and the uniqueness of the mission was the inspiring factor in many

people joining this organisation. We believe success instills inspiration.

Are you surprised with your success?

The success of our initiatives and the support that we got from the people was overwhelming which enhanced the pace of our growth. Numerous inter-country programmes were organised which were attended by national leaders, diplomats and importantly by large number of common people.

Were there any hurdles that have moved you?

There were times when we could not raise sponsors and funds for our programmes, and we were feeling helpless. At that stage we were thinking of abandoning some projects. But we did not cancel any of our projects and also did not compromise with the content and quality of the programme, which resulted in creating a

robust image of ours in the donors mind. Even now we struggle for raising funds and obtaining permissions. However, it has become a routine and does not hamper our growth.

Why did you think of an NGO like R2R?

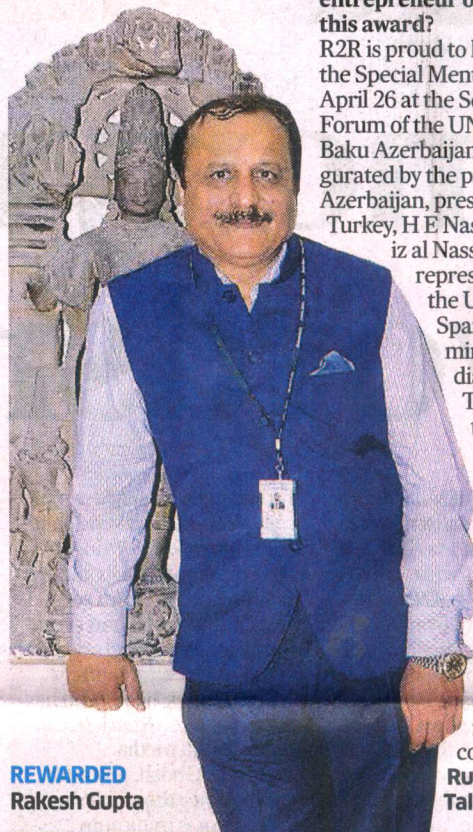
We do not know of any such NGOs who are working in the same space as that of ours, that is building peace through enhancing cultural tolerances.

What helped you make R2R what it is today?

I belong to a business family and my experience in managing businesses helped me to conceive, fund and execute newer projects for this NGO. R2R is a place where I work for my passion and thus have no job profile cut out for myself. All of us in our NGO do all the work that is required to be done.

How do you feel as a social entrepreneur on receiving this award?

R2R is proud to have received the Special Mention award on April 26 at the Seventh Global Forum of the UNAOC, held in Baku Azerbaijan. It was inaugurated by the president of Azerbaijan, president of Turkey, H E Nasser Abdulaziz al Nasser, a high representative for the UNAOC, the Spanish foreign minister and Indian diplomats. This is one of the most prestigious recognition received by R2R. This will benefit R2R in enhancing its capacity and replicating this project in other countries.



REWARDED
Rakesh Gupta

Ruchira Talapatra