

# Science of Skill

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**SCIENTIFICALLY SPEAKING:** Gupta with the toys he's created at IUCAA

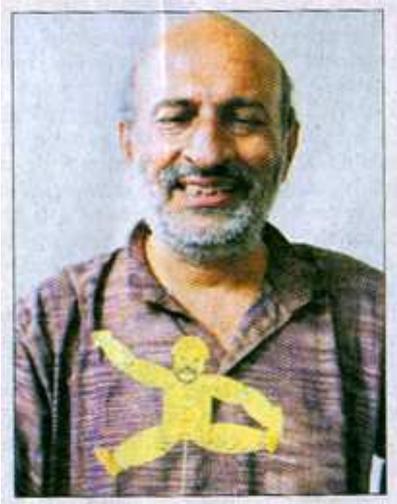
*For scientist, writer and educationist Dr Arvind Gupta, 'work' is the mantra of a good life, says Tania Roy*

A little pathway leads to the brightly lit IUCAA Children's Science Centre (Muktangan Vigyan Shodhika). Huge glass panels and tall ceilings allow the warm sunshine to penetrate the two-storeyed building at the Pune University campus. The level of sound pollution is zero, creating a perfect ambience for work. And if you look at the spaces on the walls, you'll find impressions of a genius. Genius because it requires a special person to appreciate and understand the ways of making scientific toys from trash. Also, the numerous children's books that Dr Arvind Gupta has authored give an insight into this 'extraordinary' scientist's mind.

## Daybreak

Taking a peek into his daily chores, Dr Gupta reveals that he simply cannot think beyond work. “Work is my passion,” says the ex-IITian whose day starts at 6 am. An hour-long walk in the sprawling University campus sets him off for the day.

Back home from his morning regimen, breakfast is at 7.30 am. “It is mostly *idlis* for breakfast; I hardly eat out,” says Dr Gupta. At home, he catches up with work — scanning or translating books — till about 8.45 am.



## Digital world

In office sharp at 9 am, Dr Gupta gets busy with mails. “There are about 60 to 70 emails to write every day. Before computers came in, I used to write 50 postcards a day,” he reminisces. In fact, his daughter, who is doing her internship at Vellore, still requests him to send her a handwritten postcard once in a while, he quips.

A massive amount of his time goes into uploading books on his website ([arvindguptatoys.com](http://arvindguptatoys.com)). “Almost three hours a day,” he continues, “There are about 700 books and 800 photographs telling you how to perform scientific experiments and create toys. Many old books have also been digitized to make them accessible to all.”

Translations are part of the process. Many of his books provide explanations in English and Hindi alongside. “There are about 100 books translated to Hindi and 70 books in Marathi on the website,” he says, adding that “there have already been 42,000 downloads or hits. Digitizing books makes them available to young readers across the world.”

When it comes to recycled products, Dr Gupta knows how to put them into use more than anyone else. Teaching children how to create toys from rubber slippers, matchsticks, magnets, straws, pencils, paper, which otherwise would go waste, he, along with Dr Vidula Mhaiskar and Ashok Rupner (also working at IUCAA), conducts children’s workshops three days a week.

“Last year, we had conducted 200 workshops,” he says. The sessions are from 9.30 am to 1 pm. From Matchstick Mecanno to Flexagon, Flapping Butterfly, Balancing Nails, *Sudarshan Chakra*, Matchbox Train, Newspaper Caps, Floating Forks, Straw Spinner, Paper Skeleton and Paper Frog, Dr Gupta has modeled / adapted them all. About 50 children from various schools - private, municipal corporations, NGOs attend the workshops. And in the end carry home their prized toys.

“The workshops are a two-way process — we teach them skills and the kids pass on their creativity to us. Children are original thinkers,” he says.

He lunches between 1 and 2 pm. “My wife doesn’t allow me to have meals at the IUCAA mess, so it is home-cooked food with less oil and less salt,” he says, “and *lauki* (bottle-gourd) is a must at lunch time.”

Work, again!

For a man who has spent 25 years freelancing and working in 16 countries and several schools, work is therapy. “It is a continuing process whether at home or office,” Dr Gupta admits.

So, the post-lunch session involves writing or digitizing books, making new toys, scanning images, email ing and attending to visitors. Dr Gupta also nurtures a passion for trees, often accompanying visiting student groups for tree walks. At 5 pm, IUCAA closes for the day but his creative mind continues to work. For Dr Gupta, there are no after hours!