

**Somen Debnath**

**Around the World on Bicycle Tour  
for HIV / AIDS Awareness Programme and  
Seminars on Indian Culture (2004 – 2020)**

**16 years, 191 countries, 200 000 kilometers, 20 000 000 people**



**Presentation**



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## Mission around the world

My name is Somen Debnath, I am a resident of the village of Basanti, which is located in Sundarbans, West Bengal. It is well-known that Sundarbans is a great mangrove forest and the largest tiger reserve in India.

I am on 191 countries tour and I will achieve this goal with completing my journey in the year 2020. I will cover almost 200 000 kilometers and will reach to nearly 20 000 000 people. My travel is supported by donations from people and companies.

Through my bicycle tour around the world I am tempting to spread awareness about HIV / AIDS through lectures and I am also giving seminars about Indian culture. The focus of my HIV / AIDS Awareness Program is on underprivileged poor people, urban/rural and tribal population worldwide who have the lowest level of awareness about this deadly disease.

I would like to present to you my "Around the World on Bicycle Tour for HIV / AIDS Awareness Program & Seminar on Indian Culture". I started this program on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May 2004, just two days after I acquired Bachelor degree in Zoology from the University of Calcutta. I have also completed "Visarad" in Fine Arts from the Sarbabhartiya University.

**Inspiration** for my mission came to me at the age of 14 when I read an article entitled "AIDS is Deadlier than Cancer". It was about a homeless person who was laid down in front of the Medical College of Calcutta, abandoned by his villagers and left to die alone. It made a huge impact on me afterwards and I started asking my teachers at school about AIDS / HIV, but they could not give me any answers at all. As a consequence, two years later, I decided to get specialty training at W.B.S.A.C.S. (West Bengal State AIDS Control Society) and begin awareness campaign about HIV / AIDS starting with educating my own teachers. AIDS – related stigma and lack of knowledge about this deadly yet preventable disease motivated me the most. My mission spread first to people from my village, then my country and now it is a global campaign.





## **Strategy**

To educate people from different parts of the society by raising awareness among students of schools, colleges, universities and also encourage these institutions to start a chapter on HIV / AIDS awareness program, promote the use of needles and syringes among drug-addicted people and use of condoms for sex-workers. My aim is also to bring awareness among the youth and encourage Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the respective countries of the world.

## **Short term goal**

The students, youth and communities who benefit from awareness program will spread it in their societies of respected countries. Besides, I am also keen to present India and Indian culture through seminars.

## **Long term goal**

To raise global awareness on HIV / AIDS prevention by educating local people around the world with my mission.

## **Achievements**

Till today I travelled 97500 kilometers in the whole India and other countries of Asia, Europe, Africa and Middle East.

So far I reached 79 countries and I conducted everywhere awareness programs for NGOs, schools, colleges, universities, red-light areas and numerous roadside restaurants. I feel honored to be rewarded by 17 Presidents, 49 Prime Ministers and more than 120 Ministers all over the world. The last 72 Ambassadors of India whom I met always encouraged me and supported my journey.

Newspapers and televisions all over the world are publishing reports about my travelling and journalists are supporting my mission.

With love, peace and happiness,

*Somen Debnath*





## Travel until now: continents & countries

### ASIA (24 countries)

India - Nepal - Tibet - China - Bhutan - Bangladesh - Myanmar - Thailand, Indonesia - Singapore - Malaysia - Sri Lanka - Pakistan - Afghanistan - Tajikistan - Uzbekistan - Kyrgyzstan - Kazakhstan - Azerbaijan - Georgia, Armenia - Turkmenistan - Iran - Turkey.

### EUROPE (42 countries)

Bulgaria - Macedonia - Greece - Italy - Croatia - Slovenia - Austria - Hungary - Serbia - Bosnia - Montenegro - Albania - Kosovo - Romania - Moldavia - Ukraine - Belarus - Poland - Slovakia - Czech Republic - Germany - Lithuania - Latvia - Estonia - Finland - Sweden - Norway - Denmark - Netherlands - United Kingdom - Ireland - Belgium - Luxembourg - Faroe Islands - Iceland - Liechtenstein - Switzerland - France - Spain - Portugal - Cyprus.

### NORTH AMERICA (2 countries)

Iceland - Greenland North Pole.

### NORTH AFRICA (4 countries)

Morocco - Algeria - Tunisia - Egypt.

### MIDDLE EAST (6 countries)

Jordan - Israel - Palestine - Lebanon - Iraq - UAE.

For some problems and difficulties I couldn't reach to **Libya** and **Syria**. I will be glad if I could travel to these countries later on.





## A map of my journey



*A Google Map, made by a friend in Germany is here: <http://somen.dmr-solutions.com/>*



People are my God



## **Planned Itinerary: 2013 - 2020**

### **MIDDLE EAST** (7 countries)

**Qatar – Bahrain – Kuwait – Saudi Arabia – Oman – Yemen.**

### **AFRICA** (36 countries)

**Eritrea – Sudan – South Sudan – Ethiopia – Somali – Kenya – Uganda – Tanzania – Zambia – Zimbabwe – Mozambique – Madagascar – Mauritius.** Then I will continue to **Swaziland – Lesotho – South Africa.**

Afterwards I will travel to **Namibia – Botswana – Angola – DR Congo.** Then to **Gabon – Cameroon – Central African Republic – Chad – Nigeria – Niger.**

I will continue to **Benin – Ghana – Côte d'Ivoire – Liberia – Sierra Leone – Guinea to South Part of Mali** and **Mauritania** then to **Senegal.**

These are the 36 countries that will include North, East, South, West and Central Africa until 2015.

### **SOUTH AMERICA & NORTH AMERICA**

I will continue to **Brazil – Paraguay – Uruguay.** Then to **Argentina – Patagonia – Punta Arenas** to **South Pole Antarctica.**

Then I will continue to all **South, West and North America** till 2017.

I will continue to **Canada.** After I will travel to **Alaska – Russia – Siberia – Mongolia** and **China** till 2018.

Then **Korea – Japan – Taiwan – Philippines – Papua-New Guinea** to **New Zealand** and **Australia** in 2019.

In 2020 I will travel to **Sumatra – Indonesia – Singapore – Malaysia – Vietnam – Laos and Cambodia – Thailand – Myanmar – Bangladesh.**

Approximately on the 27th May 2020 I will be back to **India.**





## **Social Assistance, Humanitarian and Charity Work for HIV / AIDS Awareness Programs in different communities and countries**

So far, I served 2920 days of social assistance and charity work in different regions of India and in all the countries I travelled.

I started to be involved in social activities when I was 14, with an NGO from my region, West Bengal, called Champa Mohila Society.

I used my knowledge and skills for painting and drama to help orphans and women education. I organized various workshops, seminars and cultural events in the different groups where I was involved as a social worker.

Starting with 2003, I started working for the National AIDS Prevention and Control Organization (NACO).

Since 2004, when my global mission started, I covered almost all the provinces of India, from Sikkim, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar Island, Kerala, Karnataka, Gujarat, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, etc.

I worked with different tribal communities in India, such as the Jarwa Tribe and I met more than 10.000 sex workers.

In Nepal and Bhutan I got involved in educational and cultural exchange for students and youth in schools, colleges, universities. In Nepal I also followed the pilgrims at Lord Pashupati's temples in Katmandu, Pokra and Nepalgang. I did similar work in Myanmar, Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia.

In Sri Lanka I worked with a tourist development corporation to promote HIV / AIDS awareness program for students and in the communities for prostitutes.

From October 2007 I travelled to Tibet, Afghanistan and then I passed to Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaidjan and Georgia.

In Afghanistan, at Kabul, I organized, on a project with the Kazi Charity Society, a medical camp for general medical check-up for dysentery, in a partnership with the Sports Ministry.







From August 2008 I travelled in Europe, where my main work consisted in giving seminars in universities and colleges, public and private schools, meeting with people from disadvantaged communities.

According to the situation, I either talk about my experience regarding HIV / AIDS awareness, or I present a seminar on Indian culture.

In Georgia and Bulgaria I also gave lessons of yoga to children affected by HIV / AIDS, working with the Vivekananda International Charitable Society.

In Macedonia I participated in a campaign concerning Roma people. I often live in Roma communities.



*HIV/AIDS awareness programme & cultural exchange @ Centro de Estudios Marni, Spain.*

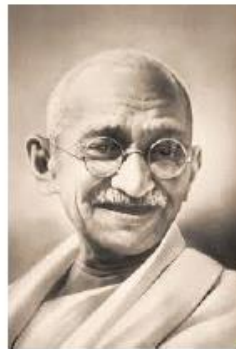
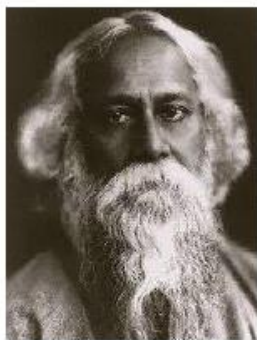




## Seminars on Indian culture

*“India is my mother, Indian people are my brothers and sisters, India is my love, my realization, my feeling, my God, my blood, my spiritual Guru, my happiness” (Somen Debnath)*

I come from the country of Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, Amartya Sen...I have in-depth knowledge of Indian culture both from my University studies and thanks to my own curiosity and interest.



I believe our manners, our way of communicating with one another are one of the important components of Indian culture. Even though we have accepted modern means of living, we improved our lifestyle, our values and beliefs still remain unchanged. A person can change his way of clothing, of eating and living, but the rich values which we receive from our culture remain unchanged because they are deeply rooted within our hearts, mind, body and soul.

Indian culture is a more than 7000 years old culture, we treat guests as God and we serve them and take care of them as if they were a part and parcel of the family itself.

Elders and the respect for elders is a major component of Indian culture. Elders are the driving force for any family and hence the love and respect for elders comes from within and is not artificial. An individual takes blessings from his elders by touching their feet. Elders drill and pass on the Indian culture within us as we grow.

Even though India is a country of various religions and castes, our culture tells us just one thing: “phir bhi dil hai Hindustani”.





## A sport related event

I am also a promoter of sports, as I consider cycling one of the best ways to keep your body in good shape. I follow the steps of the first Indian globetrotter, Bimol Mukerji (1903-1987), whose book I read when it was re-published in 1998. Bimol Mukerji was also from Bengal and he went on an epic world tour on a bicycle from 1926 to 1937. He travelled on a low-budget and he was driven by an insatiable thirst of knowing the unknown world. Just one year before his death, Bimol Mukerji published a book relating his adventurous journey, called “Du chakay duniya” (The World on Two Wheels).



## Painting and Indian theatre & drama teaching

I am a landscape painter, I have a degree in Fine Arts, “Visarad”, from the University of Calcutta. During workshops, I like teaching children to make aquarelle paintings. In the different provinces of India, in tribal and disadvantaged communities, when I worked with orphans and when I met children in different schools, I used my art knowledge and skills to educate children and organize artistic events.







## Science of Yoga simple teaching

The millenary science of yoga can be used when meeting HIV / AIDS positive children and adults. It is a help to make them overcome stress,



anxiety and tiredness. I make yoga demonstrations and documentary presentations in universities and colleges.

I practiced yoga for more than ten years and I gave yoga presentations in schools in India, Sri Lanka, Tibet, Macedonia, Ukraine.

## Free hugs and intercultural exchange programs

Wherever it is possible, I am organizing Free hugs events. I have already organized Free hugs events in Paris, Barcelona, Cairo, etc.

I am also organizing food exchange programs, in which I cook for the persons who invite me in their places and who want to taste the delicious Indian food.



*Free Hugs in Madrid, Spain.*





## Future plans

This is not only my journey! When I started this all over the world journey I decided that others will follow me that we all will travel together in order to achieve a new way of thinking, new beliefs to make a new world.

I believe People are My God. This travel is dedicated to the People, to reach to people. During this travel I will meet twenty million people. After this travel I would like to connect the world through people. Now I am trying to reach to people and after the people I met during my travel will reach to us. That is why, when my journey will be over, my plans are to create a community in my region – Calcutta and Sundarbans. In this community, as I dream and wish it, we shall have:

**People House – Manushergar** With the help of my global family and my family in India I built a house, which I call People House. It is situated in Calcutta, it has four rooms and is open for all the people around the world who hosted me in their houses, fed me and gave me support to continue my journey. Also for those who are interested in my mission and want to contribute in any way. This house will be inaugurated in September 2013, on the occasion of Durga Puja.



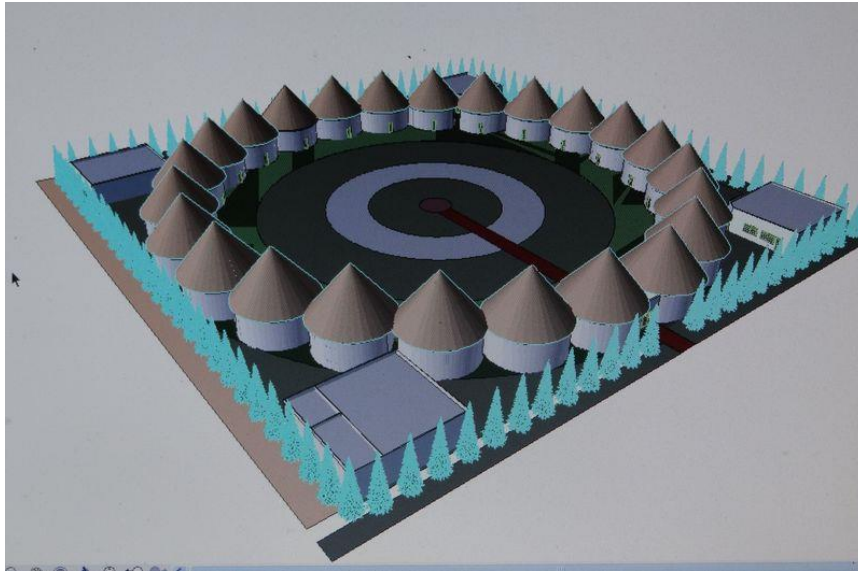
*People House (Manushergar) in Kolkata, India, June 2013.*







**Global Village** on 20 ac land and with 25 houses. The global village will be located far from the city, close to nature. We will create our own village with traditional way, straw and mud house, which will take us simple living but high thinking.



*Plan of the Global Village in Basanti Sundarbans.*

**Global Garden** In the middle of the village will be a sacred land called “Global Garden”. From every country I am sending one griev of soil for that land, so in our Global Garden there will be soil from 191 countries. That is my personal sentiment called “United World” for love, peace and happiness.





**Orphanage** Children are the best teacher in the world. So many orphan children need our care, our love, our open heart. So we are thinking to have an orphanage in our village.

**Old age home/retirement house** Knowledge is important in life and old people are great teachers. We have lot of things to learn from them before they leave this Earth. They need our care and we can take their knowledge in our life which can be useful in our life and make our world better.

**School, cultural exchange, environmental studies, farming, yoga** Civilizations cannot build without people. Without people one nation cannot be civilized. School is the simple system that gathers the knowledge about human life and gives us the best knowledge so that people and society can benefit. We think of a school where we can learn from each other, where we can learn in formal and non-formal manner, thus enhancing creativity and contributing for a better society. We are people and we want to live for and with people.

**HIV-positive people hospital** My mission is taking me to see the world, I am very impressed by HIV-positive children and young people. I could see the face and misery of thousands of people and know their stories. In this hospital we can give free medicines, yoga classes and organize different activities for the health care of HIV-positive people.

**Self-help group** of embroidering, craft and design, stitching. Women are saviors, they do a lot for our society with their creative work. With just a little support they can create their own world, stand beside men and support their entire family. Self-help group is one initiative for women, who will thus get some support and will do creative work for the society.

**Beggar rehabilitation center** We will make a beggar rehabilitation center where beggars can come and stay with us and do some creative work for the society. In this manner beggars will become useful to society and society will help them.

There will be no cast system, no difference rich or poor, no religion boundaries, the most important are People.





## Partners of my Around the World Bicycle Tour for HIV/AIDS Awareness and Seminars on Indian Culture

I am travelling with the help of people I meet.

Indian Embassies, Ambassadors and High Officials are helping me with visa, formalities, promotion and sometimes with hosting and inviting for dinner.

I am also supported by Indian communities all over the world and I wish to convey this message of gratitude for Indian communities for their support and cooperation.

I travelled in Europe where I found **CouchSurfing.org** network. I am thankful to all of my CS friends who helped me. I was hosted by them in their homes. We had cultural exchange programs and sharing thoughts and ideas.

I am supported by Indian and local companies during my travel. I am very thankful to **Arcelor Mittal, Shapoorji Pallonji & Co. Ltd, Landmark Group, Gulf Petrochem, EMBEE Group, Classic Fashion Apparel, Pidilite Industries, SBI, AIR India, Bank of Baroda** and others for their support for my mission.



I will be happy if other companies wish to offer support for my travel and mission.







## Travel Budget till South Pole Antarctica

June 2013 - July 2015

**Flights:** Mauritius to Mozambique (1), Senegal to Brazil (1), Argentina (Patagonia) to Antarctica (1) - 15'000(\$ ) dollars; include 50kg luggage with bicycle.

**Ships travel:** Yemen to Eritrea (1 ferry), Tanzania to Madagascar to Mauritius to Reunion to Mauritius include 3 islands Comoros and Mayotte on Indian Ocean (8 ferries) - 10'000(\$ ) dollar include 50 kg luggage and bicycle.

**Food and accommodation / month with medicine/cycle repair:** 1000 \$ (30\$/day) June 2013 to June / July 2015 till South Pole Antarctica - total expenses:  $1000 \times 25 = 25'000$  \$ (include cycle repair, medicines and vaccines).

**Total Expenses from June 2013 to June/ July 2015 Antarctica South Pole:** 50'000 (\$ ) dollars for 45 countries travel.

## Selling kilometers

I am selling kilometers of my travel to my friends and families all over the world. One third of my kilometers will be expenses of my travel and two third of kilometers I will dedicate for our



global village. I would like to invite all over the world friends and families who are giving support for our global village to become lifetime members of our society. I am thankful for all your great support for my global mission, but also for my global village and plans.



People are my God



## The story that made the world tour: “Kidnapped by Talibans, saved by cooking skills”

While in Afghanistan, I was kidnapped by Talibans and kept hostage for 24 long days. Due to my knowledge of cooking very tasty spicy food and to the good will of one of my kidnappers, who knew some English and helped me make the others understand the nature of my mission, which was not coming in contradictions with the Talibans cause, I was released. Journals from India to UK and USA till Japan were interested in this story, and journalists wrote about my mission and adventure.

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## Media coverage



## “Conquering the World on a Bicycle”

Being one of its kind, as the travel will cover 16 years, 191 countries and approximately 200 000 kilometers media and journalists always encourage and support my mission.

In every country I travel I give interviews for paper and online journals, radio and televisions regarding my Around the World Bicycle Tour for HIV / AIDS Awareness Program and Seminar on Indian Culture.

In India, people showed lots of enthusiasm regarding my program and journalists spoke about my adventure under titles like “The Crusader on Wheels” (Tribune India, Himachal), “Intrepid Traveller” (The Tamil Nadu Hindu), “Mission on Wheels” (The Madhura Hindu), “Conquering the World on a Bicycle” (The Chandigarh Tribune), “One Man’s Crusade on a Bicycle” (Kashmir Times), “Untiring campaigner” (Indian Express Newspaper), “Committed Crusader” (The Andhra Pradesh Hindu), etc.





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AROUND THE WORLD BI-CYCLE TOUR  
FOR AIDS AWARENESS  
AND PEACEFUL LIFE  
DATE OF JOURNEY: 27th MAY 2004  
NAME: SOMEN DEBNATH  
FROM: SUNDERBAN (KOLKATA)  
WEST BANGAL (INDIA)