

Righting the wrongs

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Chatline Hippy Salk Kristle Nathan is a social scientist besotted with development issues that need immediate attention, says P. Sujatha Varma

On a mission Nathan is eager to play a role at macro-level in development issues PHOTO: V. RAJU

The purpose of his life is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience.

Meet Hippy Salk Kristle Nathan, an engineer-turned development researcher, hopelessly obsessed with the idea of ushering in development in a manner that it percolates to the grass root level.

The social scientist has it all in his name, derived from great personalities from different walks of life – Hippy is a derivation of Hippocrates, the Greek physician of 5th century B.C. regarded as the Father of Medicine; Salk comes from Jonas Salk, an American medical researcher best known for his discovery and development of the first successful polio vaccine, Kristle was the name of a woman social activist from Vienna, Austria, who married Nath Pai (Nathan) of the Praja Socialist Party led by Jayprakash Narain.



“My father was a social reformer, a staunch supporter of an egalitarian society. He was against surnames that reflect caste. A blend of a few ‘great’ names perhaps seemed rational to him,” he says letting out a smile.

Not happy with his job as a software professional at Infosys Limited, Bangalore and then at Geometric Global, Mumbai, as “somewhere along the line I realised that I was more interested in people rather than machines,” he gave up the jobs. “I did not want to work in a place where profit was the only motive. How much money you make does not really matter. What matters is what you are doing to get that money and how you spend it,” he says in a matter-of-fact way.

Nathan then pursued an M. Tech in Thermal Engineering from IIT, Delhi and a Ph.D in Development Studies from Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR), Mumbai. “I was looking for a place that would use an engineer’s skills to work on developmental issues.”

To satiate his ever-growing hunger to serve, he got involved in civil society interventions through People’s Foundation for Scientific Socio-Economic Development (PeFSSSED, www.pefsssed.org) dealing with education, health and livelihood issues in urban slums and remote villages of Maharashtra Odisha and Uttar Pradesh.

Currently, he is a Post-Doctoral Associate at National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore and is associated with Energy and Environment Research Programme of School of Natural Sciences and Engineering at NIAS.

His research interests include economic measurement, energy, human development, disarmament, world peace, socio-political reform and sustainable use of resources. Some of his recent works have been published in national and international journals. He also writes in popular media and his article “Who is impeding Disarmament?” figures

in the current issue (Jan-March 2013 of Peace Magazine.

The topic of disarmament is close to his heart and he speaks with concern about the 'skewed' global priorities citing appalling statistics of annual world military expenditures. Pointing to the image of an inverted triangle called "Overspending on Weapons vs People", he says the United Nations mandated to raise awareness on disarmament for a peaceful world had clearly failed in the task.

"Problems should motivate us. More problems should mean more restlessness. Our fight should be against stereotypes. Any kind of social reform leads to lot of discomfort but notwithstanding obstacles, my ultimate target is to reverse that triangle."

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