5th FEB 2022: PRESS RELEASE – **THE BAREFOOT COLLEGE, TILONIA:**

ICONIC TILONIA-BAREFOOT COLLEGE COMPLETES 50 YEARS ON 5TH FEBRUARY (1972-2022)

After receiving a formal education in the Doon School (1956-61) and St Stephens College (1962-67) Bunker Roy in 1967 decided to become an unskilled labourer digging open wells for water for farmers in Ajmer District Rajasthan. During those 5 years (1967-1971) he was exposed to the most extraordinary traditional knowledge, practical skills and rural wisdom that very poor illiterate people had and that they were using to solve simple problems facing their daily lives. It inspired him to start a Barefoot College only for the poor following the life style and work style of Mahatma Gandhi. He managed to bring together a team of simple down to earth men and women from the villages around Tilonia to take minimum wages and follow gandhian values and principles-austerity, simplicity, collective decision making, transparency and public accountability for 50 years till this day.

Along with renewable technologies, Gandhian principles remain central to Barefoot College’s mission: All people in the college are equal, regardless of gender, caste, ethnicity, age and schooling. In practical terms, this means that the college has no hierarchy.

The Barefoot College did not consider illiteracy as a barrier to acquiring sophisticated skills to provide service to their own communities. The College encourages practical knowledge and skills rather than paper qualifications through learning by doing process of education.

Water Conservation: Learning from the elders of the community to collect rainwater than extract groundwater (a engineer’s solution) to date 70 Billion litres of water has been harvested through the creation of rainwater harvesting tanks, ponds, small dams, etc. reviving multiple traditional water sources supplying safe and clean drinking water in more than 1650 schools in hundreds of villages across 20 states in India

Empowerment of Women: Illiterate rural women workers won a historic case on minimum wages in the Supreme Court against the Government of Rajasthan in 1982. . A few years later, a rural women's mela (festival) was organised on October 4, 1985. For the first time rape became a big public issue. Illiterate rural women have been trained as barefoot health workers, barefoot midwives, barefoot hand pump mistries.

Barefoot Women Solar Engineers: Illiterate rural women from 17 Indian States and 96 countries around the world have been trained in 6 months to be solar engineers. They have more practical knowledge to fabricate and install solar systems than any graduate after 5 years in any University. The Barefoot Gandhian Model is now a global brand.

Education: Since the night schools started in 1975 over 90,000 boys and girls going to school for the first time have passed through these night schools. Some have opted to enter government schools and gone beyond. Thousands have got government jobs.

Livelihoods: Beginning with the first big exhibition and sale of its kind in 1975, the Tilonia Bazaar has come a long way. Registered as a nonprofit - Hatheli it has worked with 25,000 artisans from Rajasthan. Hand-woven textiles, recycled waste paper as stationary and puppets, leather and tanning, metal crafts, block printing and designing, provided livelihood for 25,000 thousand women

Environment: Barefoot College developed Rajasthan's first zero waste and plastic free village. The program has been successfully scaled to 4 villages and 1 panchayat.

Preventive Health: Started in the 70s with a modest dispensary and the dedicated team of a doctor and a social worker trained in TISS There are now barefoot dentists, barefoot health workers and midwives assisting the people to access health. Through regular eye camps, family planning camps and visits by doctors from all over Rajasthan they have treated well over 3,00,000 patients in these 50 years.

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### Contact: Sarittaa Hegde Roy 78997 42026 email: shr.barefootcollege50@swrctilonia.org

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