

# Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

RNI No.TNENG/2013/52428 | Volume 6 | Issue 10 | October 2018 | 12 Pages | For Free Circulation Only | www.msdstrust.org



**PUBLISHED BY: P.N.SUBRAMANIAN**  
on behalf of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani,  
391/1, Venkatachalapathi Nagar, Alapakkam,  
Chennai - 600 116 and printed by him at  
Express Press, Express Gardens, No.29,  
Second Main Road, Ambattur Industrial Estate,  
Chennai - 600 058. Phone : 044-42805365  
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## FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

*“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?” – Martin Luther King, Jr.*

One of the most important values we learn in our lives is how to give back to the society. That purpose in life is probably best summed up by William Shakespeare who said, “The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away.”

Our society is strengthened by volunteerism, and any society that supports and encourages volunteering is a society that cares and promotes the wellbeing of its citizens.

Volunteering gives you the satisfaction of playing a role in someone else’s life, helping people who may not be able to help themselves. Whether it is a fundraiser for the research to cure a disease that affects the whole world, or to help a local family who has fallen in a time of calamity, volunteers make it happen.

Volunteering encourages socializing, networking and friend making, and is a way of giving back to the society while developing important social skills, and gaining valuable work experience at the same time.

So, the next time you are considering whether or not you should volunteer, we urge you to ask these questions:

- What have I done in the past that I’ve enjoyed?
- What talents or skills can I offer?
- What do I want to do as a volunteer — and what would I rule out doing?
- What would I like to learn by volunteering?
- How much time can I commit?

—Marie Banu

# Listening generously

When you listen generously to people they can hear the truth in themselves, often for the first time.

Rachel Naomi Remen

quoteancy

I have been encountering many individuals who call themselves stressed. There is overwhelming at all levels—mental, emotional and they are seeking healing. I realized healing happens no sooner they encounter generous listening. A form of listening which allows the “speaker” to traverse their mindscape from past to present to future without having to be coherent. They can simply pour out all that “lies within” them and be authentic to themselves in the process. This in itself helps people come out of their stress. As they have not been able to listen to themselves they have piled on a lot of stuff that stands as stress!

A service of generous listening which has no motive other than of being of service, giving a gift of one’s presence, is truly a generosity that every person in the world is aching and longing for. I can experience deep connection when I “just” listen; when I sit with others in their truth. To listen without

even a need to understand is truly a gift to both the person telling the story and the person hearing it. Listening to understand is important, but there are some things that are beyond our understanding.

It is often through the quality of our listening and not the wisdom of our words that we are able to effect the most profound changes in the people around us. A loving silence often has far more power to heal and to connect than the most well intentioned words.

The word listen is made up of letters that makes the word silent. Isn’t that directional enough for us?

My sense is that one can listen generously when one steps out the personality and is there for the other person not to problem solve, not to offer solace, but to be a “board” onto which the other person can put the jigsaw pieces and in doing so can bring together the “whole picture”.

I am generously committed to listening generously!

*Yours Energetically*

*Ms. Bhuvaneshwari Ravi is trainer, facilitator and coach of the Positive Energy (PE) program. She is a spiritual seeker with a vision of transforming her own energy state from surviving to being. In this journey she has gathered deep insights and is continuously working towards creating a pathway for more seekers. With years of exposure to spiritual practices like yoga, reiki, and personal development interventions like coaching, she is working in the Organization Development and Leadership Development space.*

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## EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh  
Marie Banu

Design: Blink Foundation

# Moving forward

New entrants in any field always have to face a range of challenges, particularly the competition against existing stake holders and speculation from the community. While establishing oneself is a strenuous task, building credibility is equally daunting. When a community faces different people doing the same work, the tendency to judge and compare is inevitable. “We cannot get stuck. What matters is the ability to look beyond, move forward and realise the objectives one stands for,” informs Ms. S. P. Sivagami, Founder of Jansi Rani Rural Trust in Vellore, Tamil Nadu.

Sivagami comes from a farming family that values education and its role in social development. However, she discontinued schooling after class eight as the high school was far away and inaccessible. “This is the most common reason why many girls like me discontinued education. As a result I could not pursue my dream to join the police forces,” she says.

Sivagami’s parents had a different plan and she was married off at 17. As a young bride, she resolved to educate all her children without discriminating between sons and daughters. Well aware of women’s participation in household decision making, she began to save as much as she could for her children’s education. While she got to know about the SHGs in her neighbourhood, she found them to be a reliable option for women like her. Soon enough, she got in touch with the Thesiyar NGO that was managing the SHGs there. She initially decided to form an SHG and be a part of it, but with no one ready to lead, she decided to step into the shoes of a leader. Sivagami, along with other SHG leaders got the chance to participate in a training programme in Madurai. “I met many SHG leaders there and realised the potential this platform had to transform women into entrepreneurs/leaders, irrespective of their background. Financial independence for women like me makes a lot of difference,” she asserts.

In a chance interaction with drivers she had met in the training programme, Sivagami learnt the value of her driving skills. “The irony is that my skills would let me earn 700 rupees a month, but to get a driving license that would allow me to do so, I may have to spend 3000 rupees,” she laughs. Her experience in the SHG was overwhelming and in every stage she not only realised her personal growth, but also began to understand the needs dependant population in any community, particularly elders. “In the earlier days, I would walk to the villages to meet other women. As the network widened, I used a bicycle and then a two wheeler. Mobility helped me observe many things,” she says.



In 2007, Sivagami left the SHG and joined the HDN dairy farm as a Field Officer, overseeing the recruitment of old people there. After two years, in 2014, she quit and decided to work for the cause of the elderly. She launched Jansi Rani Rural Trust in 2014 to focus on issues that fell outside the purview of SHGs. She wanted to make things easier for the elderly and women and thus started many small scale programmes in 54 village panchayats in Vellore District.

Medical camps, pension for senior citizens and widows, distribution of stationeries for underprivileged children, application for Aadhar, training for SHG members and skill training programmes for women were successfully organised by the Trust. “When you work at a local level, scale does not matter. In fact, each programme resulting in a chain of intervention and successive programmes is the most gratifying part. We have earned people’s

trust and therefore, we will be able to work on other issues too,” says Marie, Sivagami’s colleague who interacts with stakeholders in the field.

Sivagami’s energy is inspiring and contagious. According to her, CSIM in one big reason behind this energy. “A senior field worker informed me about CSIM and recommended that I pursue the Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Programme. It was all too new for me. I could relate whatever they taught to my own context,” says Sivagami, who even today, regrets missing two classes at CSIM. The art of speaking to different people mesmerises her. “Its like magic. Many times you do things out of instinct or habit and later when you realise it is a great skill, you feel overwhelmed. You feel stronger. You feel more determined than before. That’s what CSIM did to me – helped me recognise myself. I see the value of my field experience and have started visualising my Trust’s future,” she says.

Sivagami’s next endeavour is to ensure timely food for the elderly who live alone in their homes. Her team is now trying to collaborate with local food outlets, who can prepare and deliver food to the elderly. Beginning with food, she intends to build a network of other services like supply of medicines so that life becomes easier for them.

—Shanmuga Priya.T

# Leader & Leadership Matters...

## 10. Responsibility in relationships : Sense of accountability

*“Don’t walk behind me; I may not lead, don’t walk in front of me; I may not follow, Just walk beside me, and be my friend “– Albert Camus*



**Meaning of Responsibility in relationships:**  
*The Leader takes responsibility for his/her relationships and their growth. (LOI, www.discoverself.com). Taking responsibility for the relationship is to stand accountable for all that the relationship brings and being able to respond with openness and acceptance. The opposite would be to be in denial, refuse and block the difficult, unpleasant and tough part the relationship presents.*

In position of Leadership, be it in family or in profession, relationships form the fulcrum of existence. While a Leader may be able to express their feelings and emotions; accept people as they are; additionally taking responsibility and being accountable for those relationships becomes critical. While there has been enough writing on people being responsible for themselves while in relationship, not much is dwelled on the taking responsibility for others and the relationship itself.

We chose Smt Anuradha Shivakumar, also fondly called as ‘Pinky’ to discuss more in depth about Responsibility in relationships. Pinky is a very loving, committed and sincere human being whose life and leadership style revolves around Responsibility, be it relationships or tasks. She is the Head of Life Education Program called EQUBE run by EFIL Educational Services, Bangalore. Four Masters to her credit – Forensic scientist, criminology, English literature and Public administration, she is also a certified counsellor. She is the senior faculty in imparting Life education programs to students from 5th to 10th grade, teacher development and training workshops. Popular for her caring and sharing nature at school, office and family, Pinky has many admirers and supporters for everything that she does. Pinky took to working with children as fish to water in the last decade.

**Pinky, what according to you does the attribute ‘taking Responsibility in relationships’ mean?**

“Every role has some kind of inbuilt expectations for that role. May be it is not overtly said, they are those legitimate expectations of that particular relationship. It is a part and parcel of being in the relationship. For me, responsibility in relationships would mean being there for that person in that relationship.

**Pinky, I have seen you for past decade in office, family and social circles catering with undying commitment to the needs of everyone. People have fondly admonished you too for taking care beyond expectations. At what age did you develop this quality and make it your personality?**

Pinky smiles and from her reminiscences emerge the stories, “I think it came due to me being a middle child. I think this is also a middle child syndrome. I have always felt that I have to be true to both – as a younger sister to my sister and as an elder sister to my brother. So probably when I was 15 or 16 is my earliest memory when my mom was unwell. Even though I was myself young, still I sort of felt that my mom needed support in cooking and housework. I started cooking and supported her physically, emotionally and been there for her. I took over a lot at that age itself.

She quickly adds, “Kalpana, there are many dimensions of taking responsibility; physical, mental and emotional. Physical is merely taking care through actions or tasks; mentally is supporting and understanding others; most important is emotionally, which means accept people with their emotions and distinct personalities. Accepting the basic personality of that person and being there for them is taking emotional responsibility.

**Most people have attributed taking care, standing by or responsibility equal to burdensome. How do you see this, Pinky? Is responsibility in relationships really a burden?**

“Hahaha, perhaps I am different, Kalpana. As a burden, I have never felt till now. At one level I see it in a very practical way. If some work has to be done, it has to be done and so let me not over analyze it, just do it. In some places I also see it as a faith that people have in me, that I will be there and they can depend on me to be there for them at any level. According to me, it’s a gift and a blessing to have people just depend on and say ‘she will do it and I don’t even have to doubt’. Sometimes maybe because of some physical limitations I may feel tired or stressed out but I have never felt a burden. I feel every person has their own way of showing love and affection to people. It has to be an integral part of that relationship. So probably I feel my way of showing love and affection for people is being there for them, helping them or doing things for them.”

**Interesting! If more than one person ask you things to be done physically and emotionally at the same time – how do you handle it? One place you will be responsible but in another you will not be, isn’t it?**

Pinky jumps to share, “Oh this actually happens to me every day and every time. So I guess it is a question of prioritizing. By now there are many people in my life to whom I can also share the way things are and 90% of the time they understand and cooperate when I say I will do it later for you or adjust timings a bit. I look for options always and not doing it, will be my very last choice which I usually do not exercise. In my mind I also have a hierarchy of what is most important and what are non-negotiables. The non-negotiable relationship for me is very close family and people whom I really love and I feel whatever be there, I want them in my life. Actually the closest people to me are the ones I feel, will understand whether I do or not. For example, if personally I don’t do something for my husband but choose to do for others, he will understand and he will always be the same. Nothing will change.”



**Pinky, Is the priority in your life people or context?**

“Priority for me is usually the issue and the context where I am needed. People also matter when they are unable to do it on their own or very old or my presence only will help them complete it. If the issue is similar in both cases, I will look at who needs me most in people. I always see the bigger picture in all my decisions to take the responsibility. The bigger picture or the vision cannot be compromised even when we are dealing with people in relationship. For example, I was very tired yesterday and my Uncle called me to go with him to meet his niece who is in the hospital. I had my own plans and I was wanting to rest too, being a Sunday. He only requested me and politely said, if I couldn’t go, he will go himself. I cannot allow an elderly person to go alone. Taking 3 hours out of my Sunday and going with him vs feeling bad after not going whichever is lesser, wins the score. Just do it! It’s ok.”

Pinky opines there are priorities and sacrifices. Sacrifice is definitely first self and things where it is not mandatory that she has to be there. If she has a social engagement vs something she has to help someone, she would definitely choose helping someone. “Many times in doing the physical part I have not been responsible emotionally or mentally. Sometimes in friend’s circle I think it is fine if I am not there but they have told me that they missed me and I give them moral support and courage in times of need. These days I acknowledge that my mere presence is also a support. But I don’t think I have really sacrificed something really which I wanted to do for something which I have done for others. The returns that I get as the love and affection more than makes up for the little change in plan. I also get a lot of peace of mind and a feeling that I have done the right thing and the relationship certainly stays.”

**Pinky, don’t you fear what if people take you for granted and they don’t give you the credit for taking responsibility?**

“I think taking for granted is a highly misunderstood term. I feel sometimes taken for granted also shows the closeness and depth of a relationship. When somebody

says I made a decision of including you it defines the essence of the relationship. So I have never felt like they are taking advantage of me. For example if Shivu, my husband, tells someone that they can come home for lunch or dinner and Pinky will cook, I have never felt that he hasn't asked me earlier. I have always felt that he is so close to me that he can say that about me. Probably he can't say that about anybody else.

Many times I have been in situations where I have been given no choice. I



have never said it is because of others that I have no choice. I have thought maybe it is because of my actions that people have taken me for granted.

I feel every human being have their own way. Not giving credit happens all the time. Sometimes an expensive gift or something fun will be credited more than the regular hard work. At those times, I learn that I need to also do something fun and something they will value along with regular support and help. Basically it doesn't really matter to me that others have not given me credit.

I am not saying I don't have expectations; I do want people to love me and be affectionate to me. But that has never been the main thing."

**Is this true only of close relationships only or what about in office as a leader how do you see taking for granted in**

### **relationships?**

"I have always felt that responsibility in a relationship is not different for different spaces. I have never differentiated between my professional and my personal work. I always feel relationship is a relationship; wherever we met, connected and engage. Be it my own son or children in school or my husband. Very consciously I do not let my actions be defined by the role.

If you as a colleague ask me something and if my elder sister ask me something, I will never differentiate. Even if I do differentiate, I feel very bad about it."

### **So, what are the core beliefs you have Pinky that makes it easy for you take responsibility in relationships?**

Pinky has very thought provoking beliefs like

- Every relationship comes in with built in expectations and if you are in that relationship, you have to do the needful for that.
- In every relationship, that is the person who just has to do it. And if it is me, it's ok.
- Many times it is just easier to do things and keep moving, rather than find reasons why someone else could have or should have and get caught in that.
- Life is all about prioritization and giving up something for something else, so why worry.

### **Where is the danger line drawn of making people dependent on you?**

"This is a question I have been asking to myself. I do question myself, is it their need or my need for them. But most of the time it has been their need. I think people should be more empowered.

With Shakti, my son I realized that my



need to be a mother should not become something which stops him from being who he can be. Probably I am able to draw a line and am aware when I cross it. Many things are drawn from past experiences. I approach it with empowerment more than dependency.

For example, in office, as a leader I do look for more of empowering in responsibility and see if it is in the part of my role too. I try to strike a balance. Yet, I do agree, I am more a doing person. Consciously I am not taking responsibility to retain people. People will remain with you only when they want to. If someone goes away and if they are important enough in my life for me I will do everything possible to get them back. It is not just doing things for people it's just making them realize that they are important to you and you will do everything for them."

### **In Essence, what would be your thoughts about taking Responsibility in relationships?**

- I believe that if a relationship has to be at its optimum, people need to be there for each other. That may be a utopic or ideal thing. If that is not happening, the second best is that you be there for them. So you are at peace.
- The Gen Y may believe it is

always first self and then others. They say even to be for others, we have to first take care of self. I have always felt it is first others and then self.

- Now I am realizing that it need not be one for the other. It can be both. And that would be the ideal situation. For that planning and options should be optimum.
- In any relationship how you start as you go on is very important. Be clear about what you are giving to that relationship; what you are getting from that relationship; don't over analyze and think only that much that is necessary.
- Downside of this could be - am I creating some kind of dependency? Am I short changing myself somewhere? Answer to self honestly
- Whatever beautiful interiors you do to a house the foundation may not be glamorous but that is what holds the building. Being there and taking care of the relationship may not be the most glamorous part of the relationship but that holds the relationship.

The mantra for any relationship is like Nike – JUST DO IT !

There is no shortcut to taking responsibility. There is no midway too. When there is no emotional sensitivity, Responsibility becomes a mere chore.

Let's explore in the next sequel, the hard bond of Responsibility in relationships needs silken Sensitivity to go deeper!!

—Dr.Kalpana Sampath

## Giving Freedom



As sheep found a hole in the fence and crept through it. He wandered far and could not find his way back. And then he realised that he was being followed by a wolf. He ran and ran, but the wolf kept chasing him, until the shepherd rescued him and carried him lovingly back to the fold.

But inspite of everyone's advice, the shepherd refused to nail up the hole in the fence.

### Explicit Learning

- If you love something set it free, and it will come back to you if it deserves your love.
- By putting fences we are likely to lose our relationship.
- The silken bonds of love are more enduring than walls and fences.

### Introspective Learning

- How do I build a fence around the person whom I love?
- Why do I end up putting fences around the person whom I love?
- What is the nature of 'Giving Freedom'?

# HEALTH AND NOURISHMENT, THE ANCIENT WAY



There's a whole lot of responsibility that rests on nutrition when it comes to a child's growth. However, in several emerging economies, proper nutrition is problematic owing to poverty, lack of education and lack of awareness.

"The rapidly changing global trends in the area of food consumption patterns, lifestyle and environment have a tremendous impact on the nutrition and health profiles of the communities," says Mohan, Founding trustee, Vaishnavi Charitable Trust.

Deepa the program manager, reflects on how malnourishment in India has been called a silent killer, even as the proportion of under-nourished children in India is one of the highest in the world. "This percentage amounts to between 60 and 70 percent of the total population," she says, pointing out to consequences by way of this: anaemia, stunting of growth, reduction of human potential and low immunity.

While there needs to be a way to provide a solution to the problem, Vaishnavi Charitable Trust's go-to solution is Ayurveda. Being one of the oldest healthcare systems in the world, Dr Sangeeta Sharma, Research Consultant for Vaishnavi trust explains how

Ayurveda categorizes 'Malnourishment' comes under 'Apatarpanajanya Vyadhi'.

"The management of this condition depends upon many factors like *Agni, Dosha, Dhatu, and srotas*. The main factor is *Agni* (digestive fire), if it is enhanced proper digestion, absorption, and assimilation occurs in the body. Ayurveda strongly believes in digestion rather than nutrition," she says.

Dr Sangeeta goes on to explain how one of the main principles of Ayurveda is *Swasthya Swasthya Rakshanam Aturasya Vikara Prashamanam*. "That means the first preference is to maintain the health of an individual and next is to cure the diseased individual," she says.

"It has been proposed that a simple solution lies in giving Ashwagandhadi Churna with Milk."

Dr Sangeeta explains how Ashwagandha (*Withania Somnifera Dunal*), along with appetizers and carminatives which enhance the *Agni* (digestive fire) like long pepper, black pepper, cardamom, dried ginger, cinnamon, clove with palm sugar is often credited as a rejuvenator, growth promoter, immune-modulator, increases haemoglobin, anti-depressant, anti bacterial, increases RBC and improvement in hair

**Chemically speaking, milk is a complex fluid in which more than 100 separate chemical compounds have been found.**

*"The rapidly changing global trends in the area of food consumption patterns, lifestyle and environment have a tremendous impact on the nutrition and health profiles of the communities."*

melanin. She then explains that milk is the best vehicle to get medicine absorbed by the body. "Out of the eight milk sources, cow's milk is considered as the best according to Ayurveda," says Dr Sangeeta, "Chemically speaking, milk is a complex fluid in which more than 100 separate chemical compounds have been found. Its major components are water, fat, lactose, casein, whey proteins, and minerals (or ash) in amounts varying with the milk of various species of animals."

However, for any given species, the range of values for the constituents of milk is fairly constant. For these purposes, the organization adopted the Jeevani Milk Scheme, guided by Dr PLTGirija, which saw several children being administered a diet of milk.

Vaishnavi Trust's project, conducted over a period of six weeks, left a huge impact. Deepa says that children saw vast improvement in its aftermath: "Teachers commented that these children were more alert in class, the children themselves admitted that they did not feel drowsy during the day, there was improved attendance in class as lesser number of children fell ill, and many reported improved ability to concentrate whether in class or at home." But that was not all. The results of the project also revealed an increase in performance, several girls reported a decrease in hair-fall, and an improvement in their menstrual cycles.

Similar results were witnessed in the Thirukoilure district, which Deepa says has about 285 students benefiting from the scheme. "About 20 to 30 children would have fever, cough, cold, stomach issues and would visit the government hospital on a daily basis," she says, "However, after the project there was a noticeable reduction in fever, cold and cough in the children."

Deepa adds, "Even when they were affected it lasted only for a few days and the potency of infection and symptoms were much lesser. Skin issues are rampant in hostels like these due to

hygiene conditions and the habits of the children themselves. Out of the 250 students, 180 students had skin issues. Now only 50 children have them and that's solely due their hygiene habits."

The key contributor to this improvement is the simple fact that Ayurveda focuses on the Etiopathogenesis (cause of the disease) of the disease and the subsequent elimination of these factors. "That is the reason why we have appointed Ayurveda physicians at every centre for the complete examination of the child," says Mohan, "They focus on teaching them *Dinacharya* (Daily proper regimen to be followed by an individual), *Ritucharya* (do's and don't's to be followed in every season), *Swasthavritta* (healthy and hygienic habits) and *Sadvritta* (ethical and moral development) which are the important aspects for a person to live healthy."

The Vaishnavi Charitable Trust has outlined its vision — that every child grows up learning and inculcating the principles of Ayurveda, which will bring a sense of wellbeing and can completely eradicate malnourishment not only for themselves but also future generations.

While the trust itself may only be four years old, it has already impacted 1,000 young lives and is currently working to support 560 children across six different locations. The Jeevani Milk Scheme continues to be its main project. "We have a panel of doctors with one doctor from each district. The next step would be teaching and training on simple principles of Ayurveda to the teachers and student community. We are also getting into formal documentation and facilitation of research works by Ayurveda doctors as well," says Deepa.

The next three years will see the trust identifying homes in other districts to scale up its work. Tirunelveli and Cuddalore, for instance have already been shortlisted for implementation of the Jeevani Milk Scheme. "The goal," Deepa says, "is to reach a minimum of 10 districts by 2019."



# SOCIAL IMPACT AND THE ARGUMENT AGAINST UNQUALIFIED 'GROWTH'

In connection with business and the economy, we hear a lot about 'growth'.

Economists argue that the economy has to grow year on year. Investors claim that businesses have to continually grow as the alternative is for them to stagnate and get overtaken in an increasingly competitive market. Even social enterprises are being pressed into 'growing their business' – usually in business terms such as increasing turnover, improving profits, increasing staff and, generally, expanding market share. It would appear that the winners in the pervading and traditional economy are the enterprises that are growing and, if you are not growing, you join the losers.

I want to challenge that idea when it is applied to 'social and community enterprises'. I shall argue that social economy organisations are different from mainstream businesses as their core 'business' is achieving an essentially social or community goal. Therefore, they should operate differently – making different decisions for different reasons – and ultimately judging their success or failure, not in terms of growth, but in terms of positive, qualitative social change.

I suppose what I want to say about 'growth' is not particularly new. Barack Obama has said...

Trade has been a cornerstone of our growth and global development. But we will not be able to sustain this growth if it favors the few and not the many. [Speech in Berlin, 24 July 2008.]

He was talking fundamentally about sustainability. Interestingly, this contrasts significantly with Benjamin Franklin one of the Founders of the USA, who several centuries previously, stated...

Without continual growth and progress, such words as improvement, achievement, and success have no meaning.

Indeed, the context was quite different in Franklin's time and the world was not hurtling towards climate change and potential environmental Armageddon. Thus, the historical context matters in how we consider concepts such as 'growth'.

In 2009 Tim Jackson wrote *Prosperity Without Growth: the transition to a sustainable economy*. The second edition, *Prosperity Without Growth: foundations for the economy of tomorrow* was published last year (2017). In it, Jackson sees enterprise as a 'form of social organisation' with work representing participation in society where money should be used for the 'social good' – reducing inequality and supporting ecological stability.

This appears to me to be very close to what the pioneers in the social enterprise



movement talked about. There has to be an alternative way of looking at the economy which is inextricably linked to notions around creating zero waste through recycling and working towards a more 'circular economy'.

I know of a number of social and community enterprises that responded to the urge to grow. They have tended to assess their success in increased turnover, improved surplus or profit, and in recruiting more staff. These are ways in which a traditional business measures their success and quantifies their achievements. But what of improving the quality of the social change that happens as a result of what they do? Is that to be sidelined in the drive for business success?

With community enterprises, in particular, growth can be difficult. They are community-based, often operating within a particular locality, and with no intention of growing through domination or expanding into other areas. They are often owned by the community to create community benefit on behalf of that very same community. They want to get better at what they do and make a difference to local people by working closely with local residents.

The Scottish Government published its Social Enterprise Strategy earlier this year. I was interested to see that it recognises the wide community-based nature of social enterprise in Scotland – often operating in financially perilous waters. To its credit, it does not bang on

about 'growth' and in terms of 'scaling up' social enterprises. It states...

In increasingly competitive and uncertain markets, scale can be a weakness as well as a strength. For social enterprises, it may become increasingly preferable to scale capacity and impact through partnership rather than pursuing an organisational growth strategy. Collaboration, franchising, and replication will all come into sharper focus.

The last sentence of this quote is crucial. It highlights the need for collaboration – implicitly in place of competition; and the role of looking to replicate practices in another place.

However, there lies a danger in both of these: collaboration is difficult to foster when funding and investment are usually distributed through highly competitive structures. Similarly, replication is problematic due to varying contexts – what works in one place will not necessarily work in another, or certainly not in the same way.

Within the social economy, I believe, we should be doing enterprise differently and one example of this is that collaboration should be encouraged to replace overt competition.

Admittedly, this is a controversial notion and difficult to achieve but it is central to working together for the common good.

Another area where we should be doing things differently in the disputed arena of 'social impact'.

Social and community enterprises

trade in exchanging goods and services. They do this to achieve a central aim of improving people's lives; not adversely harming the environment; in changing behaviours or influencing cultural norms for the betterment and well-being of all.

So how do they know whether or not they are successful?

The Social Audit Network (SAN) has been working in this area of impact and subsequent accountability for a long time. It believes that social enterprises should report on their social and community achievements on a regular basis. At the same time, social enterprises should check on their internal aspects or social enterprise credentials.

In summary, these credentials are: being good to their staff and volunteers; being accountable through appropriate governance; not making individuals wealthy at the expense of the wider society; 'washing their face' financially; being environmentally responsible, and helping the local economy along...

SAN also believes that social reports should not be used primarily for marketing and that they should be subjected to some form of audit that checks facts and interpretations made in these reports.

Some form of social accounting and audit (SAA) is required urgently by the social enterprise movement. SAA is an alternative way of doing things – recognising that working towards social change is a different aim, and cannot be measured in financial terms or in terms of business growth.

Social accounting is not about money. It is, crucially, about how a social or community enterprise can be accountable – and importantly – held to account for what it is trying to do and what it is trying to be, in social, environmental and cultural terms.

In conclusion, I have always believed that in the end, the future of social and community enterprise will come down to how accurately they gauge their success and how they report this differently, but not entirely different, from traditional business.

We have to not only create a new way of seeing the world's economy (as referenced in *Prosperity Without Growth*), by getting in place more appropriate mechanisms that suit an alternative way of doing business. That includes social funding, social management, social accounting, social capital, social enterprise planning and so on...

So, ditch unqualified growth and get busy at doing things differently. A possible New Year's resolution?

—Alan Kay

Social Audit Network (SAN)  
www.socialauditnetwork.org.uk

# BEYOND BARRIERS AND BOUNDARIES

“Art speaks where words fail to explain,” goes a quote. The magnitude of this truth hits you the minute you enter HeART BEAT Foundation’s gallery, where the works of some ingenious up-and-coming artists are put up for the viewer’s delight. Whether it is R. Udhayakumar’s abstract acrylic paintings, the skilled needlework of K. Narasimhalu, the feminine mystique art of Suvedha Ganesh or the textured, palette-knife art by S. Anand, each piece in this virtual gallery draws your attention towards its intricate details.

We got in touch with V.S. Ramana the Founder and Managing Trustee to understand the concept of this organization. A photographer and an artist himself, Mr. Ramana, along with his artistically inclined family set up this Trust in 2014. What is so different about this Art Foundation? It is exclusively comprised of artists with disabilities.

Currently consisting of five artists and still growing, HeART BEAT Foundation actively works towards showcasing works of art, gaining endorsement from society, seeking a fair price for the art to make the artists financially independent and additionally continuing the required therapy, education and such other aspects of the artist’s life. How does the foundation identify the artists?

Mr. Ramana says, “Our Foundation gets word of mouth references from individuals and NGOs. Our friend and Art Curator Lakshmi Venkataraman, a gallery owner and music critic herself, brought us to our first artist, Udhayakumar. In 2014, we made our debut show with Udhayakumar as our sole artist. Over 70 works of his were showcased, effecting a sale of his paintings worth two lakh rupees!”

It is amazing that Udhayakumar, paralyzed by the degenerative Spinal Muscular Atrophy, continues to produce this large volume of artwork, using the movement of his thumb and index finger alone. Although affected by SMA from a short 10 months since his birth, Udhayakumar’s artistic skills developed early in his childhood. Since the age of seven, he has been conducting solo exhibitions at the celebrated Lalit Kala Academy, Amethyst, Gallery Sri Parvathy and Ambassador Pallava, in Chennai. He is known to immerse himself in his works, not resting until he finishes any piece that he has begun. He is particularly fond of painting horses, as he views them as a symbol of power and energy. He is very vocal about his stance on various social issues through his art. “I want to express my solidarity with the Bhopal gas tragedy victims who are running from pillar to post for justice,” says Udhayakumar. A champion of the rights of the disabled, he also reminds us “People with disabilities need to be recognized for their talent rather than their disability.” Udhayakumar’s art has been praised by several celebrities, including noted film star and artist Mr. Sivakumar.

While one artist relies on the dexterity



of his two fingers alone, another makes do without the use of his arms altogether. K. Narasimhalu was brought into the care of the Andhra Mahila Sabha as an infant with cerebral palsy. He grew up learning to use his two feet instead, to do all the work that’s usually done using hands. He not only does his everyday activities such as eating, drinking, handling the phone, ironing clothes etc. with his feet, he creates beautiful paintings, embroidery works and greeting cards using various computer applications. A topper of his class in Class X and XII, Narasimhalu learnt each one of these crafts during his free time. He is an unstoppable force, as evident from the way he speedily skates around, perched upon his wheeled plank that looks not very different from a skateboard. In a short documentary film about him, when asked what inspires him to do so many different things, Narasimhalu states in a matter-of-fact tone, “I’m very wary of wasting time. Every free minute I get is spent in learning a new craft or in creating new

*Although affected by SMA from a short 10 months since his birth, Udhayakumar’s artistic skills developed early in his childhood*

art. I do not need any specific inspiration. I just make good use of my time.”

It takes Narasimhalu months on end to complete a single tapestry. “He is a unique artist in this needle craft segment,” says Mr. Ramana, “We strove to promote a 3x4 foot threadwork that took him 18 months of hard work, successfully selling it at a handsome price of thirty thousand rupees.”

Artist Suvedha Ganesh graduated from the Government College of Fine Arts, Chennai. She is a recipient of several awards, notably a National Award for her outstanding creativity from the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, New Delhi in 2010. Her art transcends her speech and hearing impairments, showcasing feminine gracefulness in nature.

S. Anand is an artist who holds degrees in Psychology, Painting and Multimedia design applications. Despite having been diagnosed with Congenital Arterio-Venous Malformation of Spinal Cord he has held numerous art shows, where his impressionistic style paintings using

different mediums such as oil, acrylic and water colours are showcased.

“100% proceeds of the sale from our events goes to the artist,” says Mr. Ramana, who believes that these artists need recognition and not pity. He observes, “There are many budding disabled artists who need just a little art-guidance. Our Foundation strives to support them through art-training so that they might shine.”

Talking about future plans for the Foundation, Mr. Ramana says, “We are looking to set up a permanent art centre where art training and art therapy can happen. Through this centre, we hope to educate youth in disability-related issues and to conduct motivational workshops for corporate staff based on the dreams, pursuits and works of our disabled artists. The artists’ ‘Never Say Die’ spirit will hopefully inspire corporates to volunteer at our foundation. Along with all this, we are also going to float an online gallery and e-commerce portal to make it easier for interested buyers to access our artists’ works. After all, our Trust has 80G certification and our donor receipts to buyers makes them eligible for tax rebates!”

So far, HeART BEAT Foundation has held 18 shows and raised 18 lakh rupees for five artists. A detailed account of each artist and a documentary film on them is available at [heartbeatfoundation.in](http://heartbeatfoundation.in). The website also serves as a great resource for interested parties to participate in the Foundation’s activities. “We only want to grow this artists’ community and get the deserving recognition for them,” says Mr. Ramana as he signs off.

—Archanaa Ramesh



# One dentist, two wheels, and a student's dream



*Dr Suwas is helping tribal kids in India cycle their way to a brighter future.*

She quit school, because she had to take care of her paralysed father. But the gift of a humble bicycle gave her a chance to return to her studies, and renew her dream of becoming a doctor.

"When I got my new bicycle, it felt really good. I was really happy. Earlier, it took a long time to reach school, because I had to walk. Bicycle saves me a lot of time," says Sumitra, a 10th grade pupil living in Bordi, a coastal village in western India.

Her benefactor Dr Suwas Darvekar understands only too well what it felt like not having the means to attend school. Brought up in a slum, Dr Suwas says he missed a lot of classes, because he could not afford the bus fare.

"The biggest issue was going from the house to the school," says Dr Suwas. "A lot of people in the slum helped me with the bus fee to reach school. And that is how I could complete my studies."

These days the Mumbai dentist and avid cyclist wants to repay the kindness he received as a boy. He is on a mission to help as many children finish school.

And one way to achieve this is by removing their biggest obstacle - physical distances. Many children drop out of school, because they have to walk as far as 10km a day, often barefeet, to attend class.

Dr Suwas says, "One of the biggest transforming factors in a kid's life is education...but how to get the students to the school was a challenge. People are hard-pressed for even a few rupees. They cannot afford the bus fee or the rickshaw fee."

He did not have to look further than his own home for the solution - a low-cost, environmentally friendly bicycle. Through the Sangeeta Darvekar Charitable Trust and donations from family, friends and supporters, Dr Suwas has empowered hundreds of tribal children in Palghar district with their own two-wheelers.

Says Asha Vartak, the principal of SPH School, "Dr Suwas told the children to come to school... Their attendance is 100 per cent." She adds, "Even a humble

cycle can teach us a lot. And we learned this through Dr (Suwas)."

Donor and volunteer Dr Dharmaji Shinde says, "If I can take one student, who was going to drop out from school, to college level, not only one child, one family is uplifted."

For Sumitra, her bicycle has brought her closer to building a better life for her family and herself.

"No one in my family has even been to school. That's why I want to study. So we don't have to live in poverty anymore," she says. "With my education, I could achieve something in life."

"Come what may, I won't leave school."

—A story by *Our Better World* –  
the digital storytelling initiative of the *Singapore International Foundation*  
([www.ourbetterworld.org](http://www.ourbetterworld.org))



# Differentiation & Innovation in Implementation

*In Startup50 2017: Incorporated in 2015, BigHaat is an Agricultural Inputs digital platform for farmers to procure wide choice of branded and quality inputs that ranges from seeds to agri implements. It is a disruptive supply chain technology platform not just for farmers but to all stakeholders in the agri inputs supply chain. This Ankur Capital-backed company serves 50,000+ farmers on its platform and for impacting 1 lakh+ ha acres with the right supply chain technology.*



Farmers can access a wide choice of branded and quality inputs in the BigHaat platform, through BigHaat extension team on fields, missed call, web, mobile, call center and WhatsApp. Door delivery of agri-inputs reduces the effort of visiting a retailer and saves money and time while improving productivity. BigHaat's main customers other than farmers include nurseries, poly-houses, and contract farming communities.

Advisory and knowledge base both through digital platform and through

call center ensures dissemination of right information to farmers for their empowerment. Several innovative products are being invented by many start-ups and other established companies, but awareness and accessibility is low and slower in the traditional distribution system. The digital platform improves access and helps farmers procure these products with the touch of a button, from wherever they are. The company has raised Rs 2.7 crore from Ankur Capital in 2016 and currently employs 25 people.

The company will also partner with various other service providers such as logistics, storage and buy-back platform to help farmers access quality integrated services under one platform. The platform not only connects buyers and suppliers for pre-sale and post-sale support services but also aims to provide seamless end to end user experience.

—Meera Srikant

*This article was first published in TheSmart CEO Magazine (www.thesmartceo.in)*

## Impact

- *Providing employment to rural youth by hiring them as field extension team or helping them to become entrepreneurs by joining them as channel partners.*
- *Farmers get higher germination with best quality of seeds*
- *Reducing overall input cost for farmers with access to right package of practices and products.*



## Centre for Social Initiative and Management

Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) is a unit of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani. It is a learning centre that promotes the concept of social entrepreneurship.

CSIM offers **training and consultancy to social enterprises** – for-profits and non-profits – to facilitate them to apply successful business practices and yet retain

their social mission. It also offers training and hand holding support to prospective social entrepreneurs and enable them to launch their social initiatives.

For more information, please visit our website [www.csim.in](http://www.csim.in)

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CSIM also facilitates **Social Accounting and Audit** for social enterprises, CSR projects, and NGOs through Social Audit Network, India (SAN India).

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# “The ultimate purpose of womanhood is to nurture - not just in one’s own life, but also the society and the earth.”

## Priyadarshini Rajkumar tells Marie Banu how she plans to use her recognition to bring about social change.

Priyadarshini Rajkumar is a trained Artist, Actor, Dancer and Social Worker. She was born in Chennai and pursued a Bachelor’s of Arts Degree in Painting at the College of Arts and Crafts Chennai. She completed MBA in Finance from University of Newcastle and has worked in the financial services in Australia and India. She is also a trained Bharatanrityam Dancer, a student of Padma Bhushan Dr Padma Subramaniam and has performed extensively in India and Abroad.

Priyadarshini is also the Secretary of Saraswathi Educational Cultural and Charitable Trust, which runs many social initiatives and charitable programmes in Tamil Nadu. The Trust also conducts the renowned Vasant Utsav - Annual Festival of dance - at Kapaleeswarar temple in Mylapore, Chennai during the month of May.

An ardent social worker and a social activist, Priyadarshini has been spearheading the cause of educating the homeless children passionately and been fundraising for this cause.

She is also involved in promoting the Transgender community.

On 1st Oct 2018, Priyadarshini Rajkumar was crowned Dazzle Mrs India World Classic 2018, in New Delhi and is looking to take this title to new heights through her social work and community service.

*In an exclusive interview, Priyadarshini Rajkumar tells Marie Banu how she plans to use her recognition to bring about social change.*

### Can you tell us about Saraswathi Educational Cultural and Charitable Trust?

Saraswathi Educational Cultural and Charitable Trust was founded in 1998 by Late Smt. Indira Garyali, my grandmother with an impetus to bring education to underprivileged children and those with special needs. Over the years, the Trust has conducted many activities under its core objectives and has grown from strength to strength to be recognized in India and abroad for affordable education, promotion of vedic heritage, Indian classical dance and music, and charitable assistance and endowments.

The Trust has collaborations with Equitas Development Initiative Trust and the Sai Jeya Trust to conduct charitable activities that help youth and families build a future for them. The Trust also runs the Madras Institute of Hotel Management and Catering Technology in collaboration with the

Sree Annamalaiyar Educational Trust providing education to many underprivileged students.

Currently, we are coordinating Bird’s Nest 365 project, in collaboration with an international NGO - Fox Glove Projects and Global Development Initiatives from Australia – and Equitas Development Initiatives Trust in India. The project aims to rehabilitate homeless pavement dwellers in simple housing and provide them the stability so that the families can have a permanent address, social security, and education for their children, besides sustainable livelihoods. We also provide vocational training for street children.

Another major project of the Trust is the ‘Vasant Utsav’ Festival of Dance, which is conducted at Kapaleeswarar temple in May every year. We invite classic dancers from across India to perform for the public at the temple premises. We believe that this programme will encourage more and more people to take up the arts.

There are many more such projects that the Trust is involved in and we mostly collaborate with other NGOs, Rotary Clubs, and Lions clubs.

### What motivated you to join the film industry?

I was always an artistic person and am fascinated by performing arts. Since my early days, I was enchanted by film and television and was an ardent theatre actor in school. I also did amateur theatre with theater groups connected with Alliance Francaise de Chennai and Max Mullar Bhavan. I learnt Bharatanrithyam from the great Guru Padmabhushan Dr Padma Subramaniam.

While in college, during the late 90’s, I chanced to meet eminent director Late Shri K. Balachandar who casted me in a small role in his epic serial ‘Premi’. This was my first exposure to professional acting and I have deep gratitude to him for introducing me to the film industry.

In 1998, I migrated to Australia where I lived for many years and got disconnected from the Arts. Upon my return to India in 2012, and after my daughter Keemaya’s birth, I started to look out for acting opportunities. I had the opportunity to work in *Remo*, *Accham Yenbadu Madamai adaa* and *Kavan*. The role in *Kavan* received some critical acclaim and brought me recognition in the film field.

I am now working on some artistic as well as commercial films, which are due for release in the next few months.

### What inspired you to participate in Mrs India World Classic 2018

### contest? Can you share your experience?

Being an actor, I had prepared a photo portfolio to obtain future acting jobs. I thoroughly enjoyed being photographed and thought to myself that modeling could also be an interesting hobby. I joined a course named Iris Glam conducted by Mrs Latha Krishnan mainly to learn how to walk on a runway as well as pose for pictures. However, I learnt a lot more in terms of personal branding, grooming and styling – all of which added to my personality. Whilst I was doing this course, auditions for Dazzle Mrs India World 2018 pageant came up and I was encouraged to participate. To my surprise, I was selected as a finalist and in a month’s time I flew to New Delhi to participate in the event that was held at The Umrao Resorts by Parisa Communication Pvt. Ltd. It seemed like the whole show was girl power, with the Show Director Mrs Tabassum Haq and the choreographer Mrs. Bhumika Bhandari being women, and the event held in support of breast cancer.

We received amazing training sessions from renowned pageant and grooming coaches Dr. Varun Katiyal and Miss Shaine Soni, life coaching from Mr Sanjeev Pandey, and Breast Cancer awareness session by Dr Kanika Sharma Sood.

It was a wonderful experience to meet women across India who came from all walks of life and to listen to their life stories and aspirations. The bonding and sorority we felt was amazing!

On 30 September, we had the Introduction and talent round and I was lucky to top amongst other talented women in my age group. On 1st October, Dazzle Mrs India 2018 finals were held and it commenced with a glorious ethnic round. Three contestants were shortlisted from each age group and were asked to answer one common question for the group. The question was: “A woman has three births in her

life, one as daughter, second as wife and third as mother. Of these, which is the most significant to you and why?”

My reply to the question was: “Motherhood is most significant in my life as I had a beautiful childhood, and my marriage came easily. But, I struggled to become a mother, and I was able to attain motherhood only at the age of 40. Therefore, I value this the most. Also, with motherhood I experienced unconditional love, a purity of connection, which I have never felt before. I realized that the ultimate purpose of womanhood is to nurture - not just in one’s own life, but also the society and the earth.

I feel so blessed to be crowned Dazzle Mrs India World Classic 2018. The winning title is given to contestants aged between 35 and 45 years and I feel proud to return to my hometown as a winner.

### How do you plan to use your recognition to bring about social change?

The whole reason I decided to contest the title of Mrs India is because the title gives one a voice in public, and a standing in society, which could be used to reach out to people and encourage them in social action.

I intend to connect with more NGOs to increase the breadth of our existing projects, visit schools, colleges and other organisations to enlighten the masses about our work, and to fundraise for our existing and new projects that are coordinated by our Trust.

I also have a desire to contest for the title of Mrs. World and other international titles so that I can reach out to more people across the globe.

