

Stories of people for whom humanity matters

Volume
5

UNSUNG BEACONS

Centre for Social Initiative and Management

UNSUNG BEACONS

Volume V

*Stories of people for
whom humanity matters*

*A compilation of articles featured in
Conversations Today – a tabloid on social issues*

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Table of Contents

Foreword

Editor's Note

I. Alumni Talk

1. Abhijit Bhide	12
2. Allvin Muthunayagam	17
3. Anilkumar Muniswamy	21
4. D.P.K. Babu	26
5. Krishnamurthy	30
6. Rashmi Vittal	34
7. Rathna	38
8. Sam	42
9. Sethuraman	47
10. Shaik Rahim	51
11. Shanmugham Pandurangan	55
12. Siri	60

II. Inspiring Conversations

1. Mr. Alan Kay	66
2. Dr Benny Benjamin	75
3. Mr. Faizel B. Abdul Cader	81
4. Mr. R A Israel Jebasingh IAS	86
5. Dr. G. Joseph Antony Samy	92
6. Dr. Lalitha Balakrishnan	97
7. Ms. Nickala Torkington	103
8. Actor Rohini	109

9. Dr S. Parasuraman	114
10. Mr. Ravi Sam	119
11. Dr. Shanthi Ranganathan	123
12. Dr. Vijayaraghavan	128

III. NGO Profile

1. Agastya Foundation	134
2. Arunodayam	140
3. BESSO	144
4. Bhagavatula Charitable Trust	149
5. BREADS	153
6. Covenant for Community Development	157
7. Centre for World Solidarity	162
8. Deaf Leaders	167
9. Don Bosco Anbu Illam	172
10. Girivanavasi Pragati Mandal	177
11. Indian Council for Child Welfare (ICCW)	181
12. Mukti	186
13. Nal vidhaigal	191
14. Puthirai	194
15. SEA	199
16. Thirumalai Charitable Trust	203
17. UDIS	208
18. Worth Trust	213

IV. Postive Energy

1. A Stitch in Time Saves Nine	224
2. Being a Leader	226

3. Empty, Yet Complete	230
5. Giving from Energy Abundance and receiving in the “inner game”	233
6. Grow in Gratitude	236
7. How do you measure your success at work?	239
8. Inner Abundance	241
9. Integration, Centeredness and Oneness	244
10. Releasing emotional blocks	248
11. Speech is Silver, Silence is Golden	251
12. Wholesomeness in Living	253

V. Trendsetters

1. Cancer Crusader	258
2. Encouraging Volunteerism	264
3. Energy Centre	268
4. Made in Bangalore	274
5. Mission Medicines	278
6. The Eye Opener	282



Foreword

Unsung Beacons is a unique publication brought out by CSIM each year. The stories featured in this book are about changemakers who have overcome several challenges in their journey of bringing about social change, and in their mission of promoting social entrepreneurship.

The article on D.P.K. Babu's Ashray Akruti—an NGO based in Hyderabad that provides rehabilitation, education and empowerment to persons with hearing impairment—is very inspirational. It is interesting to note that he recognised hearing impairment to be a social issue and thus worked towards it. This is a true example of how social entrepreneurs recognise the social problems and develop innovative and lasting solutions.

Many such life experiences have been presented in story form. From Ratna who offers training in Street Theatre for school and college students as well as NGOs, to Shanmugam who used sports as a medium to impart skills to under privileged children—all these personalities are ordinary people who have an extraordinary zeal to serve the underprivileged communities.

The section on Inspiring Conversations is noteworthy. There has been a careful selection of personalities and each of their interviews are thought-provoking.

Although there may be 277,000 NGOs in India, there are thousands who are still not brought into the limelight. This book has made a conscious effort to locate such organisations and share their work.

Unsung Beacons is pleasant to read and compels one to develop the attitude of giving. After reading this publication, I realize that if only each of us could make an effort to promote social citizenry, we could make the world a better place to live.

Dr. S. Parasuraman
Director
Tata Institute of Social Sciences
Mumbai



Editor's Note

I am happy to share the fifth edition of *Unsung Beacons*, which is a compilation of articles featured in *Conversations Today*.

Working on each issue of *Conversations Today*, a monthly tabloid on social issues, has been a great source of learning for our team. From selecting personalities and researching about them; to writing, editing, proofreading, et al—all these tasks have been handled with utmost care and dedication.

Visiting social work institutions for story gathering was exciting. I am certain that the social change agents featured here will inspire you to engage in social work/social entrepreneurship. Their success stories will teach us a lesson or two and more importantly about patience and perseverance.

I invite you to join us in the journey of promoting social consciousness.

Happy reading!

Marie Banu
**Chief Editor – Conversations Today/
Director - CSIM**

Alumni Talk

*Stories of social change
agents who have pursued
their Social Entrepreneurship course in
Centre for Social Initiative
and Management (CSIM)*



I WISH TO DO SOMETHING I CAN

Author Rashmi Bansal identifies three kinds of people in her book, 'I have a dream'. Some who think, some who feel, and the very few that think and feel. It is this last category of people who strive to do something to help society move forward, and share their concern for self and their brethren. Although she calls them social entrepreneurs, there are friends out there who are not social entrepreneurs, yet their role fits this description very aptly. One such person is our alumnus for today – Abhijit Bhide, Vice President, Fiberlink Communications, Bangalore.

Hailing from Pune, Abhijit did his Masters in Industrial Engineering from North Carolina State University, US. A career spanning more than 18 years in software did not affect his enthusiasm to do something for children and the status of education in the country. However, it was all sporadic. "I was dabbling with social development sector even while in the US. Volunteering and donations gave me the space and a sense of contribution for the betterment of society. But then, there was no

structured engagement with those in the field,” admits Abhijit.

There did come a time when Abhijit realized his ardent desire to do something substantial. “All of us have desires. We need some direction and foundation. My need for a mentor led me to extensive research on the internet. I was looking for someone who can channelize what I excelled at. This is how I landed at CSIM Bangalore,” he smiles.

Abhijit expresses that the Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Programme at CSIM enabled him to identify and work on areas—children and education—that he holds close to his heart. Abhijit’s association with CSIM has grown to be more constructive, without being annulled after the completion of the course.

He says, “There are three things that I have learnt from CSIM – foundational knowledge on how the sector worked & successful social entrepreneurship models that are exemplars in self sustainability. Secondly, the networking with like-minded people—those whom I could talk to, work or engage with, learn from and understand. This removed every mental barrier, encouraging me to think independently. All of us can’t be social entrepreneurs, but we can always do what we best can, with the time we allocate.”

“CSIM will help you do that with efficiency and effectiveness. Lastly, the firsthand experience in executing an idea during the internship. It made me feel fresh and capable of planning my engagement with this sector,” he adds.

Abhijit has been very categorical about how individuals relate to those who handle the resource sessions and the probable reasons that put off youngsters who are overwhelmed with the present state of affairs.

He gives us an analogy to make things clear. Once there was a teacher who explained to his students the difference between Mahatma Gandhiji's approach and other freedom fighters' approach, who chose an armed struggle as against non-violent strategies. All our freedom fighters were patriotic, and were ready to give their lives for the sake of country's independence. Those who chose an armed struggle expected a small number of people to give their 100 percent while Gandhiji expected 100 percent of the people to contribute a small amount of their involvement in the freedom struggle. So, 100 percent of the population who gave some of their time and involvement worked more effectively than the small number that contributed 100 percent of themselves for it.

“This story holds a lot of meaning for us,” he explains.

“The role models during our CSIM sessions were a great source of inspiration. They were extraordinary in what they chose to do. But, we cannot expect most to give up all they have for the sake of society's betterment. We do need inspirations, but the focus on emulating these role models drains out all our energies, giving little space to work on our strengths. It leaves us to struggle with scaling up or moving forward.

This is the trap many individuals and NGOs have fallen into. The better model is to inspire and direct each of us to do what we can, manage our constraints while contributing something in the social sector. This will bring in tremendous energy and scale, the accumulation of which can lead to positive changes in the society. I think if organizations can focus on harnessing this energy and create a sustainable model for all to give what time, effort and ideas they have, the social sector will go a long way.”

Abhijit strongly believes that whatever we try to do must be impactful, sustainable and consistent. “I cannot give up everything, but can certainly do what I can, from where I am.

Youth today want to do a lot for the society. The level of awareness on social problems is much more today than never before. Unfortunately, the portrayal of full time engagement as a necessity affects efforts at the micro level,” he laments. He believes time is, ultimately, a relative commodity. One can believe that there is no time or otherwise. His actions reflect these thought processes.

Abhijit believes that the time to give up private sector to do something for the society has not come for him. He therefore allocates time to use his skills for personal enrichment and satisfaction. “I have been teaching for 2 hours every Sunday for the last 4 years. Taking out time from a Sunday does not seem an obstacle any more, as I have committed myself to do impactful, sustainable and consistent teaching.”

Besides teaching, Abhijit has led many socially conscious projects at Fiberlink. The recent of all being the employment programme for physically challenged youngsters and/or from impoverished families. Without a usual technical interview, the deserving candidates are identified, brought in, trained on software testing and personality growth while being employed here. Beginning with just 3 such employees, Fiberlink today has 35 of them. “Although they are extremely poor or physically challenged and in most cases, both, they want to prove themselves. We try to give them one window of opportunity without judging them right at the start.”

He has created and implemented a Career Counseling model. The content is free, and available to anyone who wants to use it for the

benefit of children from disadvantaged communities. This model aims to make career counseling easy and possible for anyone with interest and passion. He has also formulated an online knowledge management portal for NGOs which is free and could be used to manage their data for day to day operations and archiving. It also provides ways to collaborate and share knowledge between different NGOs.

Abhijit is very actively involved with CSIM Bangalore. He addresses the students and also helps to evaluate their projects. “My happiness comes from consistency. If I commit half an hour a day, I do it all the way,” he asserts. He finally, shares his desire to engage in this sector full time and hopes that this will happen in the near future.

— **Shanmuga Priya.T**



Seeking Comfort in our Responsibility

Allvin Muthunayagam is an Engineering Graduate from PSG College Coimbatore and has been working with Tata Consultancy Services for 6 years now. This might drive us to conclusions about his weekdays and weekends, as we have always done for ‘IT employees’. But Allvin is different and appears as a boy next door. His interest in the development sector has been groomed by multifarious experiences that satisfied his sense of responsibility for the society.

Allvin, like most of us, had no prior knowledge of the development sector and the scope for individuals to contribute their time, talent and resources, other than the customary way of making donations. “My stints in this sector started during my college days. As a member of Youth Red Cross during the first year at College, I took part in organising blood donation camps and raised funds for orphanages, homes for the aged & mentally challenged through charity events and sports competitions,” he recounts nostalgically.

As a sophomore, Allvin had much more to come by his way. Being a part of the NSS Unit in college, he got an opportunity to work in the water resources management project in 5 villages in Coimbatore district. Alongside the numerous awareness programmes on water resources management, his team also organised training programmes for men in electrical works, electronics repair, plumbing and embroidery, mat making, and artefacts. The network of self-help-groups formed eventually helped the women take on small entrepreneurial activities. Allvin and his team initiated all this to ensure an alternative livelihood opportunity for the community members, which would in turn make them more capable of sustaining these projects. The State Government of Tamil Nadu recognised their work by awarding them with “Best NSS Unit of the State.” This is when Allvin realised how his service could create a positive impact in society.

With this overwhelming experience pushing him to do more, Allvin had to pause all his engagements in such programmes once he completed his graduation. “I had no clue about the social sector and its organised functioning. I was therefore unaware of how to get involved in social initiatives or programmes. With no prior knowledge, this drive to do something left me with an empty feeling,” says Allvin.

In February 2012, Allvin enrolled for the SEOP programme at CSIM Hyderabad. Learning about CSIM from a friend, he decided to explore this opportunity. He was soon convinced of his decision as he got exposed to the social sector, the different types of organisations, and the level of impact each managed to create. He also got a chance to interact with Social Entrepreneurs who had their unique ways of addressing social issues comprehensively and sustainably.

“The kind of exposure CSIM gave me was just incomparable to what I had gone through during the college days. I immediately began to volunteer for NGOs. I knew what little I could do and also the best possible ways to do them. I got back the connect!” says Allvin.

While doing the SEOP Programme, he learnt about Solid Waste Management in urban communities and Zero Waste Management followed by Sukuki Exnora in Hyderabad. Working with small communities, training them in segregating waste and preparing manure out of it is a concept he tries to promote even today. “I realised waste segregation could be an alternative source of income for rag pickers. Our lifestyle’s impact on the environment and our role in mitigating it by small changes in our attitude and behaviour towards our waste amused me,” exclaims Allvin.

His next stint was with BHUMI, in Rasoolpura, a slum in Hyderabad. Working for a programme that aimed at developing micro entrepreneurship in the slums, he first took a baseline to identify the common problems of the most prominent businesses in slums. Access to credit was the concern here as entrepreneurs ended up borrowing from money lenders at an exorbitant rate of 45 percent for a principal amount of 1000 rupees. Along with access to credit, heavy competition from the neighbourhood *kiranas* prevented them from scaling up their small enterprises. He developed a curriculum to train the micro entrepreneurs in coming together to scale. Networking with multiple stake holders, he also managed to create ‘Micro-Entrepreneurship Mela’, a platform for the micro-entrepreneurs and other institutions to connect with each other.

Allvin became part of a start-up venture in order to promote organic

farming and support organic farmers. Seven social entrepreneurs from different sectors came together to work on ways to eliminate the challenges on the supply side. Integrated Rural Development Framework was thus introduced to create a movement wherein farmers could use technology in farming, gradually improve in farm management, and demand aggregation. The extended network with field experts and agricultural universities promised to create new jobs in the rural areas. “Things in the farm sector move slowly. I could not afford to give up my full time job to work on this venture. I had to leave the team,” says Allvin.

Recently Allvin joined Computer Kindness Foundation (CKF), a Trust launched by his college mates. This Trust identifies needy children from poor communities and provides them mentorship and financial support to complete their education. Funds are mobilised through their friends and contacts in India and abroad. “This year we have partnered with 15 organizations and identified 85 needy students from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana and Andhra. We also collect used computers/laptops and donate them to the needy government schools. Along with our partners we have created libraries for two Government Schools. We hope to reach more needy students and reduce the school dropout rate in our country,” says Allvin voicing his ambitious vision.

With all these tasks managed during weekends, Allvin says, “One can always manage his or her responsibility towards the society in a manner that does not create any discomfort. All that matters is interest and inclination to contribute some time for a social cause. This can make a huge difference.”

— **Shanmuga Priya.T**

JOURNEY OF AN ENTREPRENEUR TO SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR



Birth of ideas is unpredictable and unavoidable. The potential of some ideas bring in such enthusiasm that concerned individuals will be ready to walk extra miles, no matter how long it might take, to operationalise that idea. How, when and why they go on with the idea is very subjective, depending on the individual's environment. In today's column, we come across Mr Anilkumar Muniswamy, one of the founding directors of SLN Technologies Private Limited.

After completing his Electronic Engineering in 1985, he worked for two companies till 1995. Then, established his new company called SLN Technologies, by partnering with his engineering classmate Subramanyam. "SLN is completely into technology, aiding the manufacture of rugged electronic modules for defence and aerospace. Although a small company with 100 people working for it, SLN was able to create its own space in providing solutions for the electronics industry. Thanks to the projects that came along in our journey," shares

Anilkumar. One of their flagship projects, manufacturing of blackbox for fighter aircrafts in the Indian Air Force, was recognised with a national award from the Government of India in 2008.

The resonance of the company's success in developing electronic control systems for India's first mission to moon, Chandrayan was very apparent during the conversation. Soon, they also entered production of control systems for radar. Today, the company boasts of having developed electronic modules for defence and aerospace industries. Alongside the growth of his company, Anilkumar also embarked on an interesting journey with the IPCA – Indian Printed Circuit Association.

In 2002, he pursued his International Masters in Practicing Management at IIM Bangalore. This, along with his Master in Management from McGill University at Montreal, Canada, leveraged his becoming the Vice President of IPCA in 2000. He was consecutively re-elected six times till the year 2006. "IPCA is a non profit entity that aims to promote Indian industry and also create more jobs in the market. Training and preparing students to find gainful employment gradually took mainstage, given its need in the market," explains Anilkumar, who was also instrumental in bringing investments into India. In 2006, he was elected as the President of IPCA, re-elected in 2008, pushing his record as President for 4 years.

His tenure of 10 long years at IPCA exposed him to the idea of training manpower for the Indian industry. "I realised the need for professional training because we saw fresh graduates not comprehending the language of the industry. They lacked the knowledge of markets and technically also, needed to moulded," shares Anilkumar, whose idea to start an International Expo in IPCA brought in fresh opportunities to network and develop. Primarily a trade promotion event, with

participants from different countries like US, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Europe, etc. further shaped his thoughts on the IATC. “Interactions with Mr David Bergman, Vice President of IPC, USA (a non profit in the realm of electronics industry for the last 50 years), at an event’s dinner in Japan drew me closer to what I had to do,” he says.

Soon, in 2007, IATC was formed with Anilkumar as the Founding President. IATC intended to fill the employability gap more blatant in fresh graduates. A humble target of training 25 candidates had to be preceded by a Training of Trainers programme. 20 candidates who successfully passed out reiterated that this low cost, affordable training made a big difference in their career ladders. The model at IATC was simple. Until 2007, anyone interested in electronics manufacturing industry had to go abroad, incurring a cost of more than 2,000 dollars. IATC worked to provide the same programme at the cost of 10,000 rupees. With assistance on designing this programme, provision of equipments and the initial seed capital coming from IPC, the 3 days programme successfully trained 20 trainees, announcing their potential to enter the industry and contributing from the first day. By 2011, more than 1000 students in India were trained by IATC. As the demand grew manifold, IPC decided to set up their own premises and hired more people to manage demand from the market. “Scaling is good, and must be done by those who can manage the resources and demand. IPC’s set up is now capable of training 200 candidates in a month, through network of individual trainers and franchise model.

By now, Anilkumar gained clarity about the role he can play in the training space for this sector. He became an Advisor on the Board of Electronic Sector Skills Council of India (a Government of India initiative), and

helped them develop a lot of training programmes. He tries to elaborate on his interest in training students, “Providing professional knowledge at affordable costs is definitely the need and is very critical in adding value to our work force. Fresh graduate take a minimum of 2 years to understand the industry and its scope. Small companies cannot afford this time and worse is the case when they have to lose the hard trained employees to large MNCs that pay more. On the other hand, there is also the concern of large companies paying less on the premise that candidates do not have adequate knowledge. Consequently, impatience in career growth compels them to hop between jobs. I am certain that professional training can address all these concerns.”

CSIM came into picture at just the right time. Anilkumar happened to know about CSIM from the advertisements and enrolled immediately. “These days, a lot of people try to do something they can for the underprivileged. I had adopted two schools and built two classrooms for a government school, way back in 1999. Such service oriented initiatives were sporadic, not organised at all. CSIM’s programmes help trainees in doing this more constructively and effectively. That means a lot to the needy population and our sense of satisfaction,” he says.

Anilkumar appreciates CSIM for the clarity it brings in one’s thinking. “They help us draw a visible line between for profit enterprises, not for profit organisations and social enterprises. A lot of question marks have been cleared and fresh clarity has come in. Innovation in products or services and bringing them at affordable prices is something any industry has to ponder with. More so for social enterprises so that the most needy are able to access these. Such innovations matter to the masses who have suffered from inability to afford the existing options,” shares Anilkumar who has his own plans to start a social enterprise

soon.

He adds that the notion of social enterprises has helped him see the potential of affordable products benefiting needy on one hand and also creating employment on the other. He believes that outsourcing such production can also create many entrepreneurs, empowering their families and communities. With all this understanding, he is more clear of what he wants to do. He wants to play an efficient role in marketing products like wooden toys and organic products from Chennapattana to foreign countries. Acknowledging that manufacturing is very strong, he laments their inability to market and thus the difficulty in scaling. So when does he start? “I am trying to assemble elements as a sustainable model and would need one more year to work out the business plan. But am sure, this social enterprise will kick off soon,” signs off Anilkumar.

Managing his company SLN and exploring other innards in his sector, Anilkumar has proved that social inclinations can be accommodated in one’s area of interest and expertise. Deriving his strength from his experience, he is all set to launch his social enterprise, at the age of 50. True, ideas are unpredictable and the experience they bring in is incredibly enriching!

— **Shanmuga Priya.T**



Raising Voice to the Ear

Behind the running of three successful centers for education, rehabilitation and skill-development for the hearing impaired in Hyderabad, is the highly qualified yet utterly unassuming Mr. D.P.K. Babu. An alumnus of the celebrated first batch of CSIM's certificate program on Social Entrepreneurship, Babu is a veteran whose contributions over the last 17 years in the field of hearing Impairment has been of enormous significance for hundreds of children and youth with this disability. In conversation with him, we find out what inspired him to choose this field.

He says, "My younger brother is hearing impaired. Growing up, I had the urge to help him be independent, but had no means to do so in his formative years. At the time, there were hardly any organizations that supported the rehabilitation of the hearing impaired. As soon as I graduated, I took up a few courses to learn as much as I could about

this kind of disability. By then, my brother was a grown man himself. I was barely able to teach him some functional sign-language, in English as well as Telugu. Although I do not blame the system for lack of institutional help, I did feel the pang to do something about it.”

With this angst to help children and youth who had similar challenges as his brother did, Babu started Ashray Akruti, an NGO based in Hyderabad that works towards rehabilitation, education and empowerment of persons with hearing impairment. The founding trustees of Ashray Akruti include several parents of hearing impaired children, some of whom are also engineers whose ideas and volunteerism has helped the organization reach out to the community in volume and through quality of services. At Ashray Akruti, over the last 17 years, more than 315 children and youth have been trained in sign-language, multimedia and animation, and have successfully been mainstreamed in the society. The organization encourages the community to begin interventions for children from their infancy onwards. Interventions include teaching sign-language, assistance for cochlear implants and hearing aids, and counseling.

“Hearing impairment, to a large extent is still being viewed as a medical issue rather than a social issue in India,” laments Babu, adding that, “Although WHO studies have identified far many more incidences and complications with respect to hearing impairment, it has not been accorded due priority at the national level as visual impairment. I wonder when we will start viewing a hearing aid just as casually as a pair of spectacles sans the social stigma and with total acceptance in society.”

Speaking of some of the challenges that are faced by institutions

today Babu says that there is no common forum to bring organizations together. As a country, he feels that India is still evolving new methods to prevent, treat and make socially acceptable, all kinds of disability. The media-portrayal of disability is skewered. While the blind are viewed with sympathy, the hearing impaired are made a laughing stock, imitated, and talked down to. “People tend to think that a deaf and mute person is probably unintelligent, whereas clearly it is not the case,” says Babu.

With such ignorance, it becomes difficult to change people’s mindsets. However, Ashray Akruiti works closely with parents of children and local communities to spread awareness and elicit empathy in order to overcome social taboos around the hearing impaired. The “rights-based approach” has been adopted in their every intervention. On a personal level, Babu’s family supports his every cause and most importantly, his brother always joins him in his endeavours. While discussing the merits of sign-language training, Babu says, “Sign language is most essential for communication with a hearing impaired person. Unlike American Sign-Language system, in India, different signs are used for different regional languages. Therefore, a Telugu-speaking person’s sign-language may be hard for a Tamil-speaking person to understand and vice-versa. Moreover, 70% of all disabled individuals hail from rural areas, where sign-language training is not even within their grasp. As much as the training in sign-language should reach out to the rural population, Babu is of the opinion that even the non-hearing impaired should try learning sign-language. “It is not very different from acquiring a hobby, such as music or a foreign language”, says he.

Interesting and thought-provoking as his views are, the interview comes to an end and D.P.K. Babu reminisces his association with

CSIM. Having attended several educational programs over the course of his journey, Babu finds a special attachment towards his relationship with CSIM. He says, “I joined the program in the very first batch. As a young entrepreneur, I imbibed every lesson that they taught us back then. CSIM has helped me to take off on the subject that I am most passionate about. For that, I’m very thankful.”

— **Archanaa R.**



Safe on the Road

The formative years in school informs children about basic traffic rules—look to your right and then left while crossing a road, cross the road only on zebra crossing, green signal means a ‘go’, etc. “We are also told that over speeding is not good. But, who values these rules?” laments Mr J Krishnamurthy, Founder, R-Safe Charitable Trust, Chennai.

For Krishnamurthy, road user safety is his passion. All his life, he has worked to make sure that road safety was not mis-prioritised by road users as well as the service providers from the government departments. Beginning with a degree in Engineering and a Post Graduate Diploma in Road Transport Management, Krishnamurthy retired as the Joint Director at the Institute of Road Transport in Chennai.

Having served in various capacities, Krishnamurthy was also keen in promoting awareness on road user safety. His experience as a Certified

Technical Assessor at National Accreditation Board of Laboratories allowed him to understand the complexity in technical details that were crucial to ensure road safety. Road safety has been a concern in all countries. However, the attention it has gauged is in varying degrees. In fact, it is shocking to know that only 28 countries in the world that account for 7 percent of the world's population, have comprehensive road safety laws on five key risk factors: drinking and driving; speeding; and failing to use motorcycle helmets, seat-belts, and child restraints.

Krishnamurthy feels that the UN Assembly declaring 2011-2020 as the Decade of Action for Road Safety is in itself an indication that the fatalities resulting from inadequate checks and measures in place. Globally, the number of road accidents stands at an alarming 1.24 million per year and in India, 231,000 people are killed in road traffic crashes every year. Presenting such figures and trends, the Global Status Report on Road Safety that was released in 2013 draws our attention to the criticality of reprioritizing road user safety in the planning of our cities.

While Chennai's roads are known to be the most dangerous amongst other cities in Tamil Nadu by the National Crime Records Bureau, Chennai along with seven other districts in the state holds the dubious record of accounting for 45 percent of road accidents and fatalities in the State. For Krishnamurthy, figures speak louder and he wanted to work for promoting awareness through different activities to multiple stakeholders so that attitudes of road users can be influenced.

After his retirement, he was certain that he would work on such services through a NGO. But, he had no knowledge base of NGOs, their functioning and sustainability. This was when he learnt about CSIM from

his sister who was running a de-addiction centre. “CSIM has been very instrumental in bringing me to establish my NGO —R-Safe Charitable Trust—in September 2014. The course provided me all appropriate information and guidance on establishing an NGO, its registration, mobilizing resources to ensure sustainability, and liaising with the present networks to be able to have a concrete impact,” he shares.

According to Krishnamurthy, CSIM also helped him realize the new meaning in serving the nation. “I was surprised to know the difference NGOs were making in different sectors and their success made me aim higher in terms of goals to be set for my trust”.

With his Trust being only three months old, he has already established contacts with schools and colleges in the city and has organised awareness programmes and other activity based programmes for students. “They are the next generation of road users. Shaping their attitude towards rules for road safety and helping them comprehend the difference can make a significant change,” he says.

Krishnamurthy feels more enthusiastic about his role in the Trust as all his services had been towards promoting road safety and the Trust gave him the most fitting representation to approach various stake holders.

R-Safe Charitable Trust has developed three modules that can be used for students of classes 6, 7 and 8. There are also separate modules used for high school and college students, attempting to impart knowledge with the sensitivity these matters call for.

“All we want to do is to make the younger generation aware even before they reconcile to the careless practices, with an even more dangerous mind set or indifference,” warns Krishnamurthy. To him, accidents

on the road are a ‘silent disaster’. An average of 150,000 killed in accidents per annum results in a loss of 75,000 crores of rupees for the government. The loss of property, hospitalization costs, compensation provided, legal matters that ensue and the amount of time spent on all these affairs not only lead to losses, but also affect the morale of the families involved and more disturbingly, projects the costs on inaction.

R-Safe Charitable Trust is one small, yet significant step in this direction.

— **Shanmuga Priya.T**

ORGANICALLY YOURS

Clichéd as it might sound, Rashmi Vittal’s social initiative is one with a difference. Most social initiatives aim to make a difference to the lives of people belonging to a certain social strata. Rashmi’s on the other hand, aims to change the lives of cotton farmers and with it, make a genuine difference to the health of infants.



Barely a year old, Rashmi’s start-up Little Green Kid, has already begun making quite an impact. It has a Facebook page with nearly a thousand likes and a website that’s just about ready to change the way mothers dress their babies. “When a child is born, the first material that it comes in contact with is cotton,” says Rashmi, recounting what inspired her to Little Green Kid, “The baby is wrapped in a cotton towel even before its mother holds it for the first time. I dream of the day where every baby is held for the first time in the purest of cotton — an organic cotton towel — free of chemicals; as pure as the baby itself.”

In a nutshell, that’s what Little Green Kid is all about; an embodiment of Rashmi’s efforts to ‘clean up’ our cotton. “During my work on organic cotton, I learnt that cotton — a single crop — uses 25% of the world’s pesticide,” she says, “Now, India let’s remember, has been great at textile production, for centuries. We export finished garments,

and leave the pesticide and toxic dyes in our soil and water.” Rashmi says that nearly 60% of a farmer’s cost is spent towards pesticide. And the only way to get around this environmental bottleneck, she feels, is to grow organic cotton. “It’s good for the soil, water; it’s good for the farmer and also great for the customer’s skin — especially babies.”

By her own admission, Rashmi did not consider the social edge to the exercise when she sowed the seeds of her idea back in 2006. It was, then, merely a business idea that was soon to take form and shape, the focus of the idea being enviro-friendly products for happy customers. “It wasn’t until 2010 that I came across organic cotton and found it promising, since it has great social impact and an environmental impact too,” she says. “It helps farmers live better lives, and is great for the customer and the environment.”

Today, Rashmi’s initiative, Little Green Kid, sets out to achieve just that and more. With a complete collection of products already out on display to great success, she now looks forward to another showcase in January next year, which she hopes will take the social brand to the next level. “Switching to an eco-friendly lifestyle is not easy,” she says, “There aren’t many eco-friendly products that can replace the stuff that we currently use.” So, that’s when Rashmi and her team brainstormed over launching products that were eco-friendly and functional, thus assuring patronage. “After some market research, we discovered that newborn babies are the ones who need organic cotton the most,” she says, “The skin of an infant is sensitive, and a number of children develop skin allergies thanks to chemicals used in cotton-making and dyeing.”

However, the MBA graduate from INSEAD (France) knew that effective marketing of a product like this would require massive campaigning.

“The lack of organic cotton could be put down to lack of awareness. So, we decided to work in this space and build a brand that spreads awareness about organic cotton, and thereby build steady demand for the product.” Along this journey to sustainable, eco-friendly and child-friendly cotton, Rashmi’s team received help from other social entrepreneurs, who advised her on the nitty-gritty’s of entrepreneurship itself. “When you set out with a good motive, it’s amazing how helpful people are,” she says with a smile. In an extension of her zeal to protect the environment, Little Green Kid’s page on Facebook also has a section of short stories for children, on conserving the environment.

An alumnus of CSIM, Rashmi has also successfully applied what she learned at the institute, out on the field. “I always had this impression that social enterprises were not-for-profit enterprises,” she admits, “This is interesting because I personally am clear about the need to build companies that are for profit-with-a-purpose.” But that’s when Dr Sudhakar Varanasi’s definition of social entrepreneurship inspired her to go out and make a difference. “He said, ‘an entrepreneur has passion while a social entrepreneur has compassion’. I completely agree with that definition because a passionate entrepreneur may be successful, but a compassionate entrepreneur will not try to be successful at the cost of other people or in this case, the environment. And that, to me, is very important.” Delving into social entrepreneurship has also re-emphasized the importance that Rashmi has always lent towards volunteering. A veteran volunteer herself — often in engaging in tree-planting and clothes collection drives — Rashmi has made it mandatory for her staff to volunteer in an NGO of their choice.

Today, the passionate traveller, painter and now, social entrepreneur, hopes that Little Green Kid will go places. Rashmi plans on talking

Unsung Beacons – Volume 5

to investors in late 2015, even as her soon-to-be launched website, www.littlegreenkid.com takes form and shape. Interested buyers can leave their queries on thelittlegreenkid@gmail.com until the website is up. “We hope to offer the next generation a clothing option that is eco-friendly and the best. That way, we hope to grow with our little customers,” she signs off.



FOLKLORE AND STREET THEATRE MADE CONTEMPORARY

Folklore in India has had a very unique following among the rural and urban population. Songs and dances suiting every occasion beginning from birth to death, although expected to lose their relevance in modern culture, continue to remain contemporary through the efforts of individuals like Ms ‘Kulandai’ Rathna, Co-Founder of Kathambam Kalaiyagam. Beginning as a folk singer from a village in Kumbakonam, she has come a long way in presenting the art form through street theatre, with relevant instances and messages.

Poverty restrained Ratna from studying beyond class 9. “My education was compromised to make both ends meet in the family. We had no choice then,” she says. School days in a village called Patteeswaram saw Rathna getting hooked to folk songs. “I liked the way they connected to people from all statures within the community,” says Rathna, who soon decided to engage herself in this art form. Post marriage, her husband gave her the space in his group called ‘Kathambam Kalaiyagam’ to

sing songs and manage the group.

“Our group performed in several villages, and in 1996 we migrated to Chennai in search of new opportunities. Ten of us put together a show for Jaya Television. It soon became difficult to work as the team began to disintegrate and we could not put up a new team in this city. We called it off,” recalls Rathna, who then pursued B.Lit in Tamil from Madras University.

It was during this time that Rathna decided to work in NGOs. Two training programmes in street theatre that she had gone through introduced her to the multifaceted issues in society, which people often failed to understand. “I realised the scope of street theatre, but with no resources I decided to work with NGOs to further understand the issues needing attention and awareness,” she shares. In a period of 10 years she had worked with 8 NGOs in the city. It was during her days at Pasumai that she came to know about CSIM. “A friend called Logammal told me about CSIM and encouraged me to start our organisation with practical guidance from CSIM.”

“I hail from a village and English still sounds alien to me. The best part of CSIM’s courses is that they are bilingual. I never felt left out at any point. Besides singing folk songs, I can also teach dance forms like *Kolattam*, *Paraiyattam*, *Karagattamm Kummi* and *Oyilattam*. Having learnt street theatre once again at CSIM, I became a trainer for this very organisation,” narrates Rathna proudly. “Kathambam Kalaiyagam was thus re-launched in 2006, with renewed zeal. Thanks to CSIM!”

Besides providing training in folk singing, dance forms, Ratna also trains schools, NGOs and colleges in street theatre. “CSIM is the first organisation that recognised me as a trainer in street theatre. I am now

known to many and people recognise me. This new identity has helped me work on new lines of thought in taking street theatre forward,” she adds.

Ratna feels that trainings such as these go a long way in surviving an art form. “With no complete knowledge of theatre, I would just portray a character. Now, I know every aspect of it— from script to casting and performance. If one wonders whether all this experience brings in enough resources to sustain, then it’s a mistake. “People think we are a drama team, nothing more or nothing less. Hence, nobody is inclined to help. They do not even realise that this is a profession to many,” dispels Rathna.

Ratna’s team manages to do 4 to 5 programmes in a month. Some of her friends offer support in kind, while few help her to find new opportunities.

Street theatre means a lot for Ratna. She believes that informing people of matters they are unaware of is very crucial in a democracy. “My experience at CSIM taught me the significance of using the right words in dialogue delivery and their adaptation to different groups of audiences. Most of all, I learnt what the magic props can do in a street play,” she elaborates.

Kathambam Kalaiyagam has performed on themes ranging from child rights to violence against women, sexual abuse of women and children, family, health & hygiene, and environmental sustainability among others. “What can you not portray here? Simple words, simple script can work magic in bringing out the message. Movies and television serials do a lot more with a wider reach they have an advantage of. But, they do not deem it a responsibility to promote awareness on social

issues, which we do. People like fast mode, want to see scenes from others' lives and thus prefer cinema. We are on the end of the spectrum. We want to educate our audiences. We may not become popular, yet we are happy to use street theatre as an instrument in educating the public," she asserts.

Ratna might be wary of opportunities for her group in the city. However, she is very confident that street theatre will continue to be used as a medium as long as social problems exist, with a need for wider dissemination of information.

Hard work and pointed observations have earned Ratna several awards and appreciation. She was given the title 'Puratchi Kuyil' by Vidiyal Munnani in 2013. Soon, she will also receive the award 'Vetri', which is given for artists by the Department of Journalism, Madras University. "Limited opportunities and yet a lot of work to do," signs off Ratna with her characteristic smile.

— **Shanmuga Priya.T**

SOCIAL OR NOT – ENTREPRENEURSHIP MUST BE BACKED BY APPROPRIATE USE OF TECHNOLOGY



The quantum of growth in the development sector and its growing capability to impact many lives has come through multiple phases. Apparently, it is now time for passionate minds to comprehend the significance of policies along with actions initiated on ground. How do we balance both? This is a question even Moses Sam Paul is trying to answer.

Sam is an Information Technology Graduate from Coimbatore. His days at PSG College exposed him to the notion of giving back to the society. “I started looking at things that could have a positive impact on the society,” shares Sam. He learnt about many non-profit organisations and their work when he served as his Department’s Placement Secretary.

Sam was apparently disappointed about the fact that money mobilized through different means was being spent on building infrastructure while the actual need was something else. “We used to conduct shows and raise money to donate to orphanages. They in turn ended up building a room or hall and named it after our Society. I did not like it! It was more blatant that these orphanages needed people, capacity building, and mentorship. Human capital was needed more than money,” he laments.

After completing his B.Tech, Sam moved to Hyderabad to work for TCS. Corporate environment enthused him to explore the possibilities of using technology to achieve social goals. It was during this time that Sam came across Rang De —a first of its kind online forum that provided a peer to peer micro lending platform. “Rang De connected people with disposable income with a lot many rural entrepreneurs who yearned for investments to prove themselves. This concept appealed to me. It was not mere charity. The rural entrepreneur’s self-respect and dignity was intact,” says Sam.

Sam learnt about CSIM from a guest talk given by the founders of Rang De—Mr. Ram and Ms. Smitha— at the RTBI, IIT Madras. Eventually, he also came to know that CSIM had its presence in Hyderabad and enrolled himself with the SEOP programme. “Four months at CSIM turned out to be the most interesting part of my life. I met a lot of people with similar interests here and every student had a story to share. Discussions on what each one of us had started off and what we longed to do drew us closer as a group and opened new in roads for exploration. Furthermore, we had entrepreneurs who came in for guest talks, adding value to our group discussions,” recalls Sam.

Intriguingly, micro finance industry saw a crisis around this time with the fall of SKS group. The government issued a notice saying that no micro finance institutions should operate until they came out with a comprehensive policy. Sam’s notion of social impact was totally affected. He realized that he may have to stumble upon public policy so that good social initiatives can be complemented by policy measures rather than being shelved due to one bad performer. He moved to Singapore to pursue his Masters in Public Policy from Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

All along, Sam's idea of entrepreneurship did not change at all. He continued to believe that it was the best way to change the society. Completely convinced about the potential of enterprises, he also started thinking of policies in this realm.

His project in the final year brought him to National Research Foundation of Singapore, where he was engaged in finding out ways and means to improve the funding landscape to sustain entrepreneurs. "This introduced me to the world of venture capital and helped me realize the value entrepreneurship can add to the economy on a large scale. I got hooked into the field of investments," says Sam, who then worked for a bouquet consulting firm in Singapore that helped start-ups to source their investments.

Sam's passion for entrepreneurship remained. He soon left the firm to cofound Terra Tech – a one stop technology solution for the long tail of transportation providers. He asserts the running a taxi service is not just technology based, it tries to empower the beneficiaries with technical capacity. Terra Tech designed a 7 inch android tablet for one of its clients in Chennai – Makkal Auto Service. This tablet is fixed in the vehicle, auto in this case. The operator of the auto service is given a booking management software to aid their tracking and booking service for customers. The tablet brought in a bag of advantages. One, it helped the operator track the vehicles. Secondly, the video capability allowed screening of advertisements, the revenue of which will soon be shared with the drivers. Thirdly and most of all, it reduced the dry run of auto drivers by 40 percent.

The tablet enhanced with a provision called the panic button for 'She Taxi Services' in Kerala. This service is completely administered for

women and by women. If a passenger is in danger or in any critical situation, he/she can press this panic button. Once clicked, the camera takes a picture and sends it to the operator, who has a database of 10 police stations in the vicinity. The coordinates of the location of ‘panic’ situation are then sent to the nearby police station along with an SMS seeking immediate attention and assistance.

Sam, admitting that the idea is a deterrent in itself, also asserts that the triple bottom line is met in all these cases. “Entrepreneurship that has a positive impact on the society is social entrepreneurship.” Terra Tech is more valued today. In fact, their business model was not viewed as a potential one when they came to the consultancy for assistance in raising funds. But Sam, was convinced about the potential of this idea, quit his job at the consultancy, and developed a business model for Terra Tech. Today, Terra Tech has grown with an impressive record of business and clients across the globe.

The future, as Sam clearly says, depends on their partners. “The lessons from CSIM have taken me really far. Entrepreneurship is a long journey. The course gave me hope that I was not alone. It was reassuring to see many more willing to go down that lane. The network we got to build in, has evolved to be a fall back mechanism. On the other hand, there is also a sense of responsibility inculcated in us. What do you say when people meet you after two years and ask what you are doing? I must be able to respond. It’s a kind of an alarm, you see,” shrugs Sam.

So where ahead from now? Sam thinks deeply and is contended to plan for the approaching year first. He would like to see the concept of panic button being implemented in every vehicle. “I know panic button is not fool proof, but this provides us with an option though. It will sensitise

and organize the unorganized sector,” says Sam who wishes to see the day when there would be no need use this panic button.

Talking of innovation, Terra Tech is now trying to use GPS to calculate the distance and fare. The team is trying to make this system foolproof even when there is data failure, by using pulse based calculation.

Alongside Terra Tech, Sam is also clear about where his contribution has to be. “Grey eminences in the fields of technology and policy making do not understand each other. I would like to be the bridge.” Sam is currently developing a website called ‘the crowd works’, where only bureaucrats can pose questions and anyone can respond. Bureaucrats have no access to sons of soil and the common people have no access to bureaucrats to record their concerns. This platform will be one step to connect policy makers and those who would be most impacted by these policies. With the website almost ready to roll out, let’s wait along with Sam for its success.

— **Shanumga Priya. T**

ALL FOR HOCKEY

Any student passionate about pursuing sports as a career option is often sidelined in academics. Although not a fact, this is the attitude that has tested the perseverance of many sportsmen in our country. The challenge of attitudinal stereotypes is much more intense when one strives to pursue games that are not 'so popular'. "I wanted to disprove these preset notions about sports persons," says Mr. Shanmugham



Pandurangan, former International Hockey Player currently working for Canara Bank in Bangalore.

His passion for the game came early on during class 5. Disturbed by the widespread belief that sportsmen cannot be educated, Shanmugham decided to pursue his passion for hockey and simultaneously work on his academics to excel in both. With no gadgets restricting children's physical play outs during his childhood, he continued to play everywhere possible – on the streets, in the school. A position in his school team was the first milestone for Shanmugham, who says "I just kept playing and the game got over me even before I could realize."

Juggling academics and sports was no easy task. Pursuing BE from an evening college was a very challenging period in his life. Recalling

how difficult those days were, he is reminiscent of all those memories. “I kept playing; first for the State team and then moved into the National team.”

All along, Shanmugham wanted to be educated and did not want to subscribe to the established stereotypes. However, he was frustrated with the politics in sports and the dynamics that restricted the reach of a game. When he almost made his mind to give up on hockey, he got an opportunity to become a Coach.

While in a stadium after a game, Shanmugham met a group of children with Mr. Vishal Talreja, Founder of Dream A Dream, an NGO that propagates the use of sports to help children learn better. “My coaching spree started with these kids. From here, I went on to be a coach for Dream A Dream and Dhanraj Ballal Hockey Academy for the next six years. The success of the programme inspired me. Hockey as a game excited me much more than before. Remarkable improvement in the academic performance of these kids further strengthened my resolve that games do not affect academics. I was happy to see Hockey setting the base for their future,” recalls Shanmugham.

Once the programme was called off, Shanmugham began to explore coaching seriously and soon started coaching teams at all levels. Having learnt that coaching was an art in itself, he credits the students who groomed him as a coach. “After all, hockey was not an easy sport to learn too,” he quips.

Having coached the state team, other professional leagues for more than 10 years now and also the Qatar national team, Shanmugham embarked on a whole new venture when he learnt about the Jude Felix Hockey Academy (JFHA). JFHA was the brainchild of Jude Felix, an Arjuna

Awardee, Olympian and former captain of the Indian hockey team. “I was in charge of running the programme here. This was a bigger challenge. The academy aimed to use sports as a medium to impart skills to under privileged children from the neighbouring communities. The first experiment with 180 kids at Saint Mary’s orphanage was very successful,” elaborates Shanmugham.

The academy was founded by a group of international and national hockey players, who were unified by their passion for the game. With support from philanthropists running out, the founders decided to register it as a Trust. With no prior knowledge of managing a non-profit entity, the team had to learn the hard way. With only 40 children in the beginning, they thought of managing the training programmes with equipment borrowed from different players. Soon, the need for a professional approach was strongly felt. “Our work was represented by the children’s performance. So, we were at it. Training these children was certainly like training any team at the national or international level. I began to look out for guidance to learn non-profit management.”

In 2013, Shanmugham and his colleague enrolled for the SEOP programme at CSIM Bangalore. “We did not even know about writing proposals or raising funds. It was at this time that CSIM exposed us to a range of things. The faculty, interactive video presentations, discussions on social initiatives across the globe motivated us. CSIM brought us in touch with living legends who have added value to our society. We saw our network created automatically and got our direction,” he says.

One critical learning for Shanmugham was to ensure proper functioning of an organization, whether for-profit or otherwise. Fund raising and

volunteer management, he says, have come in very handy at just the right juncture for the academy.

JFHA has now grown to impact hockey circles. Its journey from 2008 was apparently noticed due to its high standards in coaching or organizing tournaments. “Our professional approach worked much in our favour. We were able to show that sports is a miracle healer. We were happy that we were able to give back to the game that has brought us all this way,” he recalls.

Despite the standards set, JFHA is now faced with the challenge of retaining its volunteers, for not all volunteers are players. The academy wishes to see many kids play the sport. Although they are not expected to stick to the game, the children do. “Hockey’s popularity has to start from long and short term perspective plans. There is nothing wrong with Cricket garnering this kind of attention. A lot of ground work has gone in, complemented by the structures created to promote the sport. Hockey needs such impetus,” emphasises Shanmugham who feels that money does not do everything.

Lamenting the absence of sports facilities in government schools and the non-implementation of sports policies, he feels that professional approach to all games can change their visibility and image.

— **Shanmuga Priya. T**



Reaching out

Reports have repeatedly revealed that the state and its machinery do not take all the requisite efforts to protect and promote child rights. There are children everywhere, needing care and protection. One such category is the runaway children, most of whom are found on the streets or living on the platforms/railway stations.

“52 percent of the street children are not literate and 92 percent of them are friends with drug addicts. With majority of them unemployed, it is only likely that they manage their drug expenses by stealing. This is roughly the life that children living on the streets are pushed into. There have been a number of programmes and projects intended to rehabilitate these children and reduce the number of children landing on the streets. Needbase India does precisely this,” says Mr. Shaik Rahim, Founder Director, Need Base India, Bangalore.

Bangalore is one of the most prominent transit and destination point for child trafficking in the Southern Region. Evidently, the number of children (especially girls) who go missing in and around Bangalore is

on the rise. Against this backdrop, it becomes imperative to rescue and rehabilitate the children when they are on the streets or other places. Rahim has grown observing children around the railway platforms, having nothing to do and getting addicted to the carefree life. “My father was working with the Railways and we were living at the Railway Staff Quarters. Every time I had to step out of my home to go to school or anywhere else, I had to cross the railway station. My passion to work for these children started from here,” shares Rahim.

A Post Graduate in Commerce, Rahim decided to explore the option of working with organizations that worked with street and runaway children. “I worked for Sathi, an NGO that focused on children living around railway stations. I joined as an accountant, and later on learning my interests they promoted me as Programme Officer,” he recollects. There were about 100 to 150 children who took to railway platforms every month. With the interventions being more strategic and spread out, the number of older children living on the streets and railway platforms reduced remarkably. These children who were into begging and addicted to drugs finally gave up street life. This is when Rahim decided to work with many more vulnerable children, like children from the slums and missing/runaway children.

Bangalore is home to more than 1.1 lakh street children. Rehabilitating and retaining them in safe and secure environments is a daunting task. Rahim chose to handle the challenges by establishing Need Base India – a foundation for child care and development, in 2009. “It was during this time I started interacting with corporate houses to raise funds for Need Base India. When I consulted Utopia, I met Ms. Rizwana, who connected me to Mr. P.N.Subramanian. He not only introduced me to CSIM Bangalore, but also sponsored my course here,” reminisces Rahim.

For Rahim, CSIM provided an opportunity to understand the world of NGO management with all the nuances. A number of friends from the IT sector who came forward to share their social thoughts also helped him understand different models that were in play in the development sector. On an experimental basis, he started the School Motivation Camp in 2013 to readmit drop outs and out of school children in government schools. These camps were designed and structured under his leadership. “We decided to learn the best possible way to readmit drop-out children; prevent children run away from their homes; and get them to be interested in studies. 25 such children were identified and brought to Urban Deprived Children,” he elaborates.

The camp was designed with modules for four weeks. In the first week, the children were oriented about street life and its consequences, with special references to behavioral aspects through moral stories. The next three weeks concentrated on: creating interest in education, understanding society and family, and personality development. After the camp, it was observed that the tendency for children to runaway had declined.

The children are then enrolled in bridge courses that prepare them for mainstream schooling. Thereafter, the rehabilitation of the children is worked out on a case-to-case basis. Wherever the families could be traced, the children were reunited. In other instances, the children were admitted at hostels run by the Government. A rigid follow up by Need Base India helps them intervene if the children faces any problem at school.

CSIM students are now involved in evaluating these camps, which have completed two rounds. The evaluation has also brought them in touch

with Pratham and the staff were trained in Mysore to use their study and evaluation kits in Kannada. Currently there are two projects that Rahim is focusing upon– Rainbow Home for Girls and Urban Deprived Children (UDC) Centre for Boys, both in Bangalore city. The centres are now home to 65 girls and 12 boys. More than 45 girls have been admitted at hostels run by the Department of Social Welfare. “We do not keep the number of children in our homes as an indicator of our reach. All we aim to achieve is education for all children, no matter where the child stays. Recently, one child who was a rescued child labourer was given on foster care to a family through the Child Welfare Committee in Bangalore.

Rahim has been the member of Bangalore Child Welfare Committee for the last three years. Acknowledging that the Committee in Bangalore has been more active than in other districts of the state, he also opines that there is no need to amend the Juvenile Justice Act in its present form. “I think we must revamp the whole network to implement the current provisions in the Act,” he says.

— **Shanmuga Priya.T**



In the name of his mother

Disability is a sector that is not able to see consistent and large scale interventions that integrated preventive and curative approaches. The challenges are all the more daunting when we have to address concerns pertaining to every type of disability. Given this, initiatives by many non profit organisations have managed to pay attention to one of the types and have also grown to be pioneers in their field. The scale of their reach and impact does have lessons for their contemporaries.

Among the different types of disability, hearing impairment is something that had received less attention and there is less awareness about the same when compared to others. Mr Sethuraman, Co-founder of Meenakshi Venkatraman Foundation has tried to reverse this tide.

Sethuraman is a Chemical Engineer by profession who also co-founded a company and headed it for 35 years. 9 years back, he got associated with Deaf Enabled Foundation that managed a vocational school for

children with partial and full hearing impairment. “I grew intimate with their cause because my mother lost her hearing after her delivery. I began to research about the issue and the possible ways in which this can be mitigated at an early stage. Every time I travelled abroad, I spent time to observe the scenario there,” shares Sethuraman. The one and only University for the Deaf in Washington inspired him, also raising a volley of questions about the situation in his home country.

All his research and observation helped him realise that in developed countries, screening of new born babies for hearing defects was mandatory, while it was not so in India. If the screening indicated impairment, suitable interventions were taken at a very early stage. This was overlooked in India, where 6 out of every 1000 children are born with hearing impairment, both partial and full. As there was no screening done in the first few days of birth, detection is also pushed to be late. Unfortunately, late detection results in late treatment and this is when children are ready to go to school. With no further hope, these kids are sent to special schools.

Hearing loss can be conductive or due to sensory neural loss. While the former requires a minor surgery the latter can be addressed with hearing aids or implants. Complete loss of hearing in both the ears can also be treated with cochlear implants. The earlier this is done, the better. Sethuraman insists that these implants must be done by the age of 1 which means the diagnosis must be done at the time of birth. As the surgery gets delayed, children will have to juggle with post-surgery effects, making it very strenuous for them to learn speech and language.

Sethuraman was deeply disturbed by the scheme of affairs that the children with hearing impairment faced. “It all requires just 7 to 8

seconds per ear to complete the Oto Acoustic Emission Test which is carried out within 48 hours of birth. If a child fails the test, it is repeated after a month. Failure again leads to an elaborate diagnostic procedure called the DERA test that reveals the extent and type of hearing loss.”

As these tests were administered only in select private hospitals, it was out of reach for the vast majority who had no options but to access the government hospitals which were not equipped with this screening facility. Sethuraman, thus decided to import machines from abroad and began working on making this test mandatory to all new born babies in the Government Hospital at Secunderabad. He also employed a full time audiologist and a speech pathologist to oversee the processes. College interns were engaged in carrying out the tests while part time audiologists were hired to do the screening in villages around the hospital. Slowly, he scaled the activities to run hearing test for all age groups to create awareness and advocate for these tests in all hospitals.

Andhra Pradesh has 8,000 children taking to hearing aids every year, which could be thwarted if the children were subjected to early detection.

Children who acquire jaundice after birth, born pre-term, incubated for more than 3 days, whose mothers had infections during pregnancy, and also children in ICU are susceptible to loss of hearing. Unfortunately, a child’s response to movements and actions is mistaken for hearing. Sethuraman also informs us that in joint families, elders were constantly observing the children and were able to detect hearing loss much quickly. He remarks that nuclear families are actually losing out on this precious hand holding from the elders.

The camps organised also revealed facts that laid further emphasis on the need to make screening mandatory at birth itself. Partial loss of

hearing amongst school children made them less attentive or withdrawn and senior citizens suffered hearing loss as they reached 70 years of age. The success of these camps has encouraged the foundation to plan more such camps targeting those who are affected by noise induced pollution, like the traffic policemen, auto rickshaw drivers, industry workers, etc.

Lamenting on the lack of awareness even among officials in the Health Department, Sethuraman recounts that the course on audiology and speech pathology is not very popular. Lack of popularity on this course is also one reason why doctors are not adequately equipped to handle audio or speech pathology or select the right hearing aid for a child or adult.

About a year and a half old, the foundation recently made an awareness movie that has been screened to around 6000 families. Drawn to the cause, Sethuraman gave up his full-time business and is now completely engaged in spreading the work of Meenakshi Venkatraman Foundation, named after his mother.

Learning about CSIM in Hyderabad from his son-in-law and inspired by the stories in Conversations Today, he decided to do the SEOP programme last year. “The course happened at just the right time for me. NGO management became comprehensible. On completion, I felt more obliged to recommend many more like-minded individuals to take this course,” recalls Sethuraman who was inspired by the Aravind Eye Care’s case study. He also gifted those books to friends like him who wanted to make a mark in this field.

Sethuraman is now more articulate about his dream. “CSIM has helped me realise the potential of my idea.” He wishes to establish a campus exclusively for the treatment of people with all kinds of hearing related

problems and also manufacture cheaper hearing aids with abreast technology. Drawing his strength from his mother, whose lip reading never allowed onlookers realise her disability and empathy towards other differently abled people, he hopes to see Meenakshi Venkatraman Foundation pioneering the efforts in treating hearing impairment on a large scale.

— **Shanmuga Priya. T**



JUST for a CHANGE

Most of us have gone through NSS days and some would have also been in scouts and guides teams during school and college days. A sense of social responsibility inculcated during these days may or may not find the direction needed to evolve constructively. But, Siri's engagement in simple activities has helped her identify what she had wanted to do, at just the right age.

Siri is a typical Hyderabad girl, who did her Bachelor's Degree in Commerce (Honours) from Loyola Academy. It was during her college days that she started visiting orphanages along with her friends. "Orphanages have managed to raise money to sustain themselves. There was food, infrastructure, medical help, etc. But, they all lacked one thing in common—'man power'. In one of the orphanages I visited, the ratio of caretakers to inhabitants was 1:50. Consequently, the personal touch was missing and the inmates yearned for someone who can spend quality time with them," explains Siri.

She adds saying: “We had no money. All we could offer was human resource. We were 2000 students in our college and one group of students can’t do it alone every day. So, we started motivating others to also chip in. The team grew bigger day by day. Each one of us spent an hour at one of the orphanages in our college’s neighbourhood every day. This made a world of difference to the children living here. Most of the times, they just wanted to play with us.”

Siri and team did not realize that such work would require a formal set up, until they began to seek support on behalf of these orphanages from well-wishers and community members. “When we tried to raise funds, the first question we had to face was if we belonged to a registered organisation. We all belonged to 18 to 20 years of age, and had embarked on this journey with an urge to do something meaningful for the society. We comprehended that development in itself is a huge sector to work for, and that it has got a lot to benefit the needy,” she says.

Siri, along with her 6 other friends thus founded ‘Just Change’ in 2009, and registered it under the Indian Societies Act. The NGO’s mission was ‘Child empowerment through youth involvement’ and the founders utilized this identity to sensitise youth on giving back to the society.

Just change grew more active over the days, with many students signing in to visit the orphanages. It was during the same year that Siri learnt about CSIM in Hyderabad and decided to pursue the Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Programme (SEOP). “I came to know about CSIM during my fundraising days. Now that our activities were organized in a formal set up, I thought it was important for us to formalize all the procedures. I therefore joined the CSIM course to seek professional guidance. At that point in time, I was also working for a start-up company. Therefore, CSIM’s weekend course worked best for me. The pattern and structure

of the course was very apt for beginners in the social sector. The trainers knew the innards of this sector, and were well informed. That encouraged new comers like me,” says Siri, who wishes to credit the year 2009 as the most productive year in her life.

Siri is in touch with all her friends at CSIM. She feels that the interaction with the 30 participants in her batch, each coming from varied backgrounds, was most enriching. Appreciating the continuous hand holding provided by CSIM, she seemingly shares, “Any day, when I feel I have lost direction and need some guidance, CSIM would be the first place I would step into– for both moral support as well as professional guidance.”

Siri understands that development sector needs more patience, because one’s imagination of development does not often match the reality on ground. “What we witness could be starker than what we all would have ever known. CSIM helps participants understand these perspectives during the training period,” she adds.

But, Just Change was becoming less intensive now. After graduation, the founders wanted to pursue different things. “I became more curious about rural India after completing CSIM’s course and got qualified for the ICICI fellowship in 2010, which is a two year long experiential learning programme where candidates are placed with organisations in rural areas. I worked with Gram Vikas in Orissa, documenting their water and sanitation projects in the first year of my fellowship. In the second year, I worked with Ajeevika Bureau in Rajasthan where I was engaged in the programme for migrant workers in Kerwada,” she says.

The fact that Just Change is not as functional as before does not disturb

Siri. She admits that they had started it all up with no long term plans in mind. The intention was primarily to utilize the time and human resources at hand, which she feels they did justice to. “Just Change was a beginning to the desire of going back in our way. That required no capital. Only time and human resources, which we had in plenty. So, it was bound to be short term,” she asserts.

Nevertheless, Siri owes those days for inspiring her future discourse. She proudly recollects the Youth Assembly in Hyderabad where Just Change won the Best Project Award. She considers it as their biggest achievement. With new interests in rural India, Siri has no regrets for her decisions.

It is not unknown that 70% of India is still rural. The students were able to identify needs in a distance of just 1 km from the city of Hyderabad. As one goes farther from the comfort of cities, we get to meet the ocean of needs. Although she was able to put her perspectives in place, she wanted to experience first-hand about rural India. She feels that fellowship happened at just the right time.

Siri now works for Pratham NGO in Hyderabad, and heads the programme ‘Open School of Education’. She goes on to elaborate that this programme intends to give a platform for girls and women to complete secondary schooling, also acknowledging that it was way different to educate a regular student and drop out from the same class.

Apparently, Siri’s fellowship changed her perspective on development completely. “When you go from a city, you think you are going to give something to rural people. But, I was proven wrong. I learnt a lot. I

lived in villages with basic amenities. I have grown humbler and I have grown as a person,” she concludes.

Siri is true! Development in India needs more such initiatives to sensitise the general public and many more such youngsters who can carve a new road for all of us to follow.

— **Shanmuga Priya.T**

Inspiring Conversations



“There is a strong tradition of India of volunteering and helping others within particular communities.”

Alan has more than 30 years of experience in community development and social enterprise support in the UK and overseas. His background is in overseas development and he has lived and worked in East Africa and South East Asia attached to a variety of different organisations including HelpAge International, Action Aid and VSO. Since returning to Scotland in 1988 he has mainly worked with community-owned enterprises and social enterprises. He believes in empowering people so that they can get involved in economic activity to create sustainable communities.

Over the years he has developed links with a wide range of social

economy organisations and carried out research, planning, training/facilitation and evaluations. Alan is an Associate lecturer at Glasgow Caledonian University and assisted them to establish a Diploma and MSc in Social Enterprise. He is also a Director of CBS Network, is the Treasurer for the Community Development Journal and is a Member of the Institute for Economic Development. Alan's formal qualifications include a BSc (University of Aberdeen) and a MA in Rural Development (University of East Anglia).

Alan has worked with social accounting and audit for many years and helped to found the Social Audit Network. He co-authored the 2005 Social Accounting and Audit Manuals and more recently wrote the New Guide to Social Accounting and audit.

In an exclusive interview Alan Kay shares with Marie Banu the global scenario of Social Accounting and Audit and its need for social work organisations.

What inspired you to launch Social Audit Network, UK?

I have been involved in Social Accounting and Audit since 1989. I was much working with community businesses. We wanted to get a method where organisations themselves took charge of their own monitoring and evaluation. To make that cost effective, we developed a system for organizations to measure financial accountability as well social accountability. In order to give it integrity, it was important that they had an audit at the end of the social accounts. So, my colleague John Pierce and I developed a system in 1990s. At that time there was not much of interest in social impact, same way as it is now. But, a number of people were interested in it and we started meeting them on regular basis to share ideas. In 2002, we decided to form a company and call it

Social Audit Network Limited. It attracted a lot of interest within UK and outside UK as well. It has a wide membership and our main office is in Liverpool and we have a board of directors who meet on a regular basis.

We try and do a number of things. One is, we support a lot of Social Accounting and Audit and try to promote it with organizations who want to emulate good practices within their own organisations. We try and focus on social enterprises, non-government organisations, and voluntary organisations. We also have interests from the corporates in using the process to assess their Corporate Social Responsibility.

Can you share your experiences working with Social Enterprises in the UK?

Since 1998 I have been working with social and community enterprises. My original background is on overseas development, particularly community development. I got involved in community economic development which is where people in the local areas not only provide services to benefit the wider community, but also take charge of the economic activity. They do this by setting up companies and train and use the surplus to benefit the wider community. This was before the expression social enterprise had really arrived. Since then, there has been a vast increase in social enterprises.

There is no clear definition for Social Enterprises. This is due to some organisations and some people's political interests and it is therefore regarded as a broad term. But, this has its advantages as there are a large number of social enterprises, but the downside of that it is no one is actually clear what a social enterprise is.

We are pragmatic with whom we work with and we work with a wide range of organizations in UK. Generally speaking, we work with organisations who provide some sort of community benefit in areas where they are located.

Your thoughts about the way in which social enterprises in India and abroad operate?

I have only been to India on visits. During these visits I come across a number of social enterprises. Sometimes, they are non-governmental organisations (NGOs) moving toward running businesses for the benefit of their beneficiaries. In my understanding, India has a long tradition of NGOs, and organisations that are located in the civic society.

There is a strong tradition of India of volunteering and helping others within particular communities. I think that progression in India is for those organisations to move much more into trying to develop sustainable income. I have this with a number of organisations and I think that the idea of social enterprise is really beginning to take up in India. It possibly needs more political as well as financial support.

We have been working with CSIM for a number of years in the area of Social Accounting and Audit. Just looking at the work they do, it is very much more geared towards assisting individuals and organisations to set up a social enterprise. I think that certainly in Europe that is the way things are heading at the moment, and I suspect that it is heading in that direction in India as well.

Do you think an NGO or a Social Enterprise writing their social accounts would facilitate them to gain venture capital or obtain

funding from donor organisations?

I think donors and people who want to contribute to benefit the society are always interested in hearing the story about what organisations are doing in order to achieve social or community development. Up until recently, a fairly informal basis, the reputation of the organization holds its way in the funders making decisions.

We think that it should be in a much more formal basis. An organization as a matter of its normal working practice should develop a system where it systematically accounts for its social, environmental, and local economic performance as well as its impact on its people. That kind of formality, and add to that the integrity that comes out from an audit process gives funders and investors a lot of confidence in the organization which they are funding. They are always interested to see what kind of impact the money that they are using is having on the wider community. So I think that inevitably, Social Accounting and Audit, in some form of the other is going to be increasingly important.

Besides UK and India, which other countries adopt the Social Accounting and Audit?

There has been a lot interest from different countries. An increasing interest in any kind of system can be used by organisations creating social benefit. We have had people who were interested from Middle East, old parts of Europe, India, Nepal, South East Asia, Australia and South Africa.

Turning interest into is in some ways been quite tricky. Although people are looking into what we are doing, actually, putting it forward is a system that needs to be adopted in the country. There are only a

few countries that have actually done that. In Germany, it has been significant enough to leads to courses, training sessions, workshops and pilot programmes. Also, in Sweden and to a degree in Spain.

In Nepal they are particularly interested in social accounting from the point of view of accountability to government. There has been a number of workshops and trial programmes in Nepal. There is one country which has recently taken it very much to heart and that is South Korea. A participant from South Korea who attended our training programme in Hampton went back and set up SAN, Korea. He introduced all the systems and it has become important with social enterprises. My understanding is that it is widely applied, not just known about in Korea. There has been interest in South Africa and Australia over the years.

There is also running parallel, with the interest in social accounting and audit, an interest in Social Return on Investment. People are slightly confused if SAA is similar to SROI, should they do one thing or the other, and how they are different.

At SAN, we have developed a manual, which we call it ‘A Guide to Social Accounting and Audit’, updated in 2011. It is selling quite well across the world. It takes people through the process and we think that it no getting away from the fact that going through the SAA, we got to do certain things. One is to be very clear on what you are trying to do and whom you are working with. Secondly, to collect information to see what you are achieving, or you say that you are achieving. Bring it together to some kind of account. It need not have to be written mostly. Subject that to some kind of external audit and that process is going to survive, whether or not the terminology SAA will survive. But, I think

that there is no getting away and the organisations is going to do it in some form or the other. It is only right that they should as their main business is to create social change.

Can you tell us about your partnership with CSIM?

We first started getting involved with India some 10 years ago. My colleague John Pearce (who sadly died three years ago) started coming to India and talking about community enterprise and social accounting and interest. He was part of CBS network based in Scotland. There was a certain level of interests from organisations, especially those who were involved in Fair Trade. He ran a number of workshops, and one of the participants was from CSIM.

It later evolved that CSIM was a very good partner for CBS network in India. Following on from that, my colleague Patrick Boase who visited CSIM on a number of occasions and wrote an application to a funding body in the UK called Lloyds TSB Bank, which has CSR funds attached to a large bank. We managed to get 3 year funding to develop San, India. Our logical partner was CSIM. SAN, India is a project of CSIM.

About six years ago, I came along with Patrick Boase and drew up an agreement with SAN, UK and CSIM that we would act in partnership and that SAN, India would be our sister organization.

The relationship over the past 6 years has been varied. Sometimes, it has been closed, particularly around coming out on visits and running courses together, sharing ideas and so on. Other times, it has not been so close, as SAN, India is developing its own systems.

I think that at the moment, SAN, India is going through resurgence and

an increase in interest with a number of bodies in India. That has led to a much closer relationship and I am out here at the moment to support a couple of workshops and also to talk to SAN, India about what the future might hold for them. Particularly, to provide advise them on the new guide on SAA.

Our general relationship with SAN, India has been extremely positive.

What do you think are the values that are essential for a Social Auditor?

I think that it goes beyond values. They need a certain knowledge about what social accounting is all about and more importantly where it is trying to lead and what it is trying to reinforce within organisations. But, the values are very much the same as any auditor. They should have integrity and act fairly; should be able to multi-function as the auditor needs not only chair social audit panel meetings with an organization, but also manage such meetings which involves quite a number of people in a room.

They also got write the notes for the meetings at the same time and report back in a clear and concise way to the organization on the changes that are required in the draft social accounts before the panel can award the social audit statement. They should have the confidence to deliver these processes and it is not an easy thing to do.

In some panel meetings I have experienced positive moments. I have heard one of the staff express that he feels it a privilege to spend a whole day each year with external people coming in and looking at the intricacies of an organization, how it functions, and giving advise on it.

These are the spin off benefits from having the audit panel process and it brings a lot of ideas and perception around the table and to the table.

You are presently grooming a set of Social Auditors. What is your advise for them?

It is quite a long process to be a social auditor. I think that it is quite a privileged position to have. We usually value things that are harder to get. In India, you need to become a Social Accountant first before you become a Social Auditor. After writing the social accounts, you should attend a bit of more training, attend two panel meetings, be mentored for the third panel meeting, and chair a meeting along with a mentor.

My main advise is to stick with it and see how far you can get. I am hopeful that it would be a new batch of Social Auditors in India with the role of offering their services for a wide range of organisations. I suspect that quite a lot of people handling corporate social responsibility would come to SAN, India asking to audit their reports.



“We have made great strides in health, but not reached the millennium development goals.”

A renowned pediatrician, Dr. Benny Benjamin has over 35 years of experience in the medical care of infants and children. He has achieved his graduate and post graduate degrees from prestigious universities both in India and abroad. He completed his M.D in Pediatrics from Christian Medical College, Vellore which is the most esteemed medical school in India and further went on to do his M.R.C.P and F.R.C.P from Edinburgh, U.K. He has received numerous accolades for this work and won awards such as the ‘Mary Israel Prize’ in Medicine, the ‘Thomas Dina Prize’ in Physiology, the ‘T.C.F. Silver Jubilee Gold Medal’ in the Pediatric Prize Examination, the ‘Capt. Jaisingh Jadhav Memorial Award’ for Best Student in M.D Pediatrics and the ‘Mrs. Mariaviakulam David Memorial Medal’ for Best Outgoing Medical Student.

He has worked in various hospitals around the world such as the Assir Central Hospital in Saudi Arabia, Aberdeen Maternity Hospital and West Cumberland Hospital in the U.K., Christian Medical College Hospital, India, etc. He has teaching experience in universities such as King Saud University in Saudi Arabia, Aberdeen University Medical School in the U.K., Christian Medical College in India, etc.

Dr. Benjamin has made presentations on his clinical research interests at international conferences and has several papers to his credit in local and international medical journals. With a passion for medicine and deep compassion for children, Dr. Benjamin stands out as an outstanding pediatrician in the medical field.

In an exclusive interview, Dr. Benny Benjamin shares with Marie Banu his thoughts about Childcare in India.

Being a silent philanthropist, what are the social causes that you support?

I am not into social pediatrics, and work in the private sector. I do not serve the poor directly, but just contribute to organisations who do so. It is an easy way for me to do something without burning my hands.

I would like to contribute to organisations that I believe are doing a good job and have people whom I know working in those NGOs so that I know that the funds are being utilized properly. I have been contributing to organisations that work with children. Well known organisations may be flush with funds from India and abroad, but if I believe in their work I would still contribute to them as well as to local lesser known groups.

Although my interest lies in the welfare of children, being a senior citizen myself, I do contribute to Helpage as well.

What are your thoughts about Childcare in India?

During my undergraduate medical and post-graduate pediatric studies, I grew up in a service-oriented environment. I got my initial pediatric grounding and philosophy from there and these were honed over years and decades of working in various settings and environments around the world. I worked in Mission Hospital situations for a while and then went abroad.

I returned to settle in India some 19 years ago, and I joined the private sector. I view childcare in India from that prism and I have a bit of international perspective also on that. Ideally, the government should provide essentials like nutrition and healthcare for the people. But, due to various constraints, there are lacunae. So there is a private health care co-existing with and complementing the government sector in providing healthcare facilities for children. Though I am part of it, I am of also a critique of the private health sector as it seems to becoming ever more expensive and unaffordable for common folk. Parents may seek private medical care for their kids rather than Government health centres because of the perception that they may be getting better care. There are also health institutions in the private sector doing a great job, such as Mission Hospitals or service-oriented community hospitals that offer good childcare at reasonable costs.

India accounts for 20 percent of child mortality worldwide and a shocking 48 percent of Indian children under the age of 5 are chronically malnourished. What do you think is the major reason?

I do agree with you. The problems of malnutrition and child mortality are interlinked. It is estimated that almost 50 percent of child mortality (below 5 years) is related to malnutrition. The reasons could be many, but poverty is a major factor. Inequity, lack of access to food are other contributory factors. We need basic grains, pulses, vegetables and fruits to have a healthy diet. There is the paradox of food rotting in godowns, but not available to the people. Although there is public distribution system there is a lot of leakage and corruption. Therefore access to variety of foods by the poorer segments is poor.

As a leading pediatrician what is your advice to come out of this?

The government should strive to improve its attempts to provide health care services to the poor in a form that is easily accessible, available and affordable. We have a network of public health centres, integrated child development services, and the National Rural Health Mission that help towards better nutrition and healthcare, leading to reduced childhood mortality.

As far as mortality figures are concerned, the country has made considerable progress in reducing the infant and under-5 mortality rates in health, but have some way to go in reaching the millennium development goals of the WHO. There are regional differences with some of the southern states such as Kerala and Tamilnadu performing better than others.

I think the private sector can also contribute. We should certainly appreciate the efforts of organisations in the private sector, like hospitals, which are helping in this area.

Has the pre-natal, post-natal and neo-natal care services in the govt. hospitals improved in India? How and why?

The government has done a lot to improve neonatal services over the years. This has helped to bring down the neonatal mortality rate and provide better institutional deliveries. For example, the ‘Janani Suraksha Yojana’ scheme has improved hospital based deliveries. Through this scheme, hospital based services are offered to the mother and child and a sum of 500 rupees is paid to them.

Government Insurance schemes for the poor enables them access free healthcare at government as well as in private hospitals. The government reimburses the private hospitals directly for the treatment they offer to the poor towards any critical illness.

The National Rural Health Mission has contributed by starting newborn stabilisation units in each district. In Tamil Nadu, there were several efforts initiated about a decade ago to improve neonatal care services. A lot of improvement is there, but we need to go further to reach the MDG figures!

At what age can a parent identify their child to have lesbian/gay/Bisexual/TG symptoms? Your advice for parents who have children with such symptoms?

This is an issue which has been hibernating in my subconscious till your question made me sit up and start thinking more about it. The early symptoms of homosexual orientation can be noticed even at the age of 4 or 5 years of age when we look at the way the child behaves, the kind of play activities, and the roles the child like to play. This becomes more set when the child enters older school age. The parents

can become aware of this when they notice the child's behavior during later childhood, around 14 or 15 years of age or may be unnoticed till there is a coming out on the part of the child/adolescent and the parents are made aware

It is like handedness. A child can be initially left handed or right handed or ambidextrous, but settles down to one pattern. Similarly, sexual orientation may go through various phases before it is set in stone.

In a very religious society like India, the views about sex and sexuality tend to be conservative and 'old-fashioned'. Heterosexual orientation is accepted as the norm, whereas homosexual orientation is thought of as deviant behavior. Things are changing now, as people are getting exposed to the world through travel, media and easy access to information.

I am liberal in my outlook. I feel that once a person reaches adult age, we must respect his/her individuality and opinions even though it may be different from one's own line of thinking. I will advise the parent not to excommunicate the child but to listen to and understand the child or risk losing the child forever. Spend time discussing the issue and make him/her come around to your point of view. Inform the child of consequences that he or she may face in society in pursuing such a lifestyle. You may need to seek professional help and counseling to resolve conflicts which may arise.



“We have to compete with a lot of commercialized educational institutions, and do a fine balancing act to provide quality education for all.”

Mohamed Sathak Trust was established in 1973 at Kilakarai in Ramanathapuram District of Tamil Nadu, with a mission to provide quality education to children from socially and economically backward section of the society. Shri. Faizel B. Abdul Cader, Trustee of Mohammed Sathak Trust and Director of Mohammed Sathak A. J. College of Engineering, is a young visionary with many ideas for the advancement of the Trust in providing equitable education for all.

In an exclusive interview. Shri. Faizel B. Abdul Cader shares with Marie Banu the activities of Mohammed Sathak Trust.

Can you please tell us about Mohamed Sathak Trust and its activities?

Shri. S.M. Ahamed Jalaluddin is the Founder of Mohammed Sathak Trust. He hailed from a business community in Kilakarai. His father Janab Mohamed Sathak Thambi was a noble and great Philanthropist. He served as the Chairman of Kilakarai Town Panchayat and was instrumental in launching numerous welfare schemes at Kilakarai. He also donated his personal funds for village infrastructure, such as laying of roads, sanitation facilities, and health centres.

Mohammed Sathak Trust was established in 1973 and initially offered scholarships for poor students. In 1980, Mohamed Sathak Polytechnic College, the last government aided polytechnic in Tamil Nadu, was started. Incidentally, the polytechnic does a lot of work related to NGOs and Self-help groups. We have a community polytechnic where we empower the youth as well as the women from rural communities.

In 1984, Mohammed Sathak Engineering College—the first Self Financing Engineering College in India—was launched in Kilakarai. Today, there are 18 Educational Institutions (9 in Chennai, 6 in Kilakarai & 3 in Ramnad) that are governed by our Trust.

Our colleges have enabled many rural students pursue engineering and many of them are now working in different parts of the world. We have to compete with a lot of commercialized educational institutions. We have to do a fine balancing act to provide a quality education for all.

Mohammed Sathak Trust took lead in providing training in alternate livelihoods for fishermen who were displaced due to the Gulf of Mannar project (Sethu Samudram). We have formed a SHG called Syed

Hammeda All Women Development, and provide micro finance to self-help-group members. So far, we have disbursed around 5 crore rupees.

There has been a decline in engineering admission over the last few years. What do you think is the reason?

I feel that this is because of the mismatch between supply and demand. We have many engineering colleges, but not adequate placement opportunities. This is due to recession in the US, as many of the companies were dependent on its economy. Also, there are very few quality educational institutions and the systems are a little different in India. For example, in US or other countries, you can study engineering in credit system. Some parents are reluctant to spend for engineering degrees as the fee is expensive when compared to Arts and Science degrees.

This is only a temporary setback which will hopefully improve. A lot of students are now interested to pursue Civil Engineering and Mechanical Engineering, because of the support offered by Central and State Governments to manufacturing and infrastructure industries.

What are the scholarships available for your students?

We started courses in Marine Engineering, Aeronautical Engineering and Architecture during the 80's at in Kilakarai. These were new streams in engineering and many students were offered scholarships in order to encourage them to pursue these courses.

We offer scholarships and fee concessions to deserving students in all our colleges. Students with merit in sports are offered free education in our technical colleges. We also help needy students' source scholarships

from National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation (NMDFC), an initiative of the Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India. In 2013, we organized a National Level Conference along with the NMDFC, where various schemes that are available for minority students were discussed.

What are the social work activities coordinated by your institutions?

Our colleges organises blood donation camps regularly. Students of Mohamed Sathak A. J. College of Engineering conduct computer literacy classes for villagers living near Siruseri.

Mohamed Sathak College of Arts and Science offers Master's Programme in Social Work. Some of our students are interning for CSR projects. We are now in the process of launching a Rotaract club.

Does your colleges encourage entrepreneurship amongst students?

Considering the challenging trend in seeking placements, we encourage our students to be entrepreneurs in their own right. Last year, we launched the Entrepreneurship Development Cell (EDC) at Mohammed Sathak A. J. College of Engineering. In fact, we are one of the few colleges in the State of Tamil Nadu whose EDC has been established through Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India.

We regularly organize workshops on entrepreneurship to motivate our students to become entrepreneurs. We have recently conducted entrepreneurship competitions amongst students and are networking with banks to provide financial support for their projects.

What is your advise for parents who want their children to pursue engineering?

I find some parents to be very ambitious. They are not able to understand their child's interest and capabilities.

But, the trend is now reversing. Today, Arts and Science degrees have more scope and many students are opting for these courses. Success is possible in every field! Engineering or medicine is not the end of the world.



“It is no longer a time wherein whatever the teachers say, students accept. One has to become a student and talk in their language.”

Mr. R.A. Israel Jebasingh IAS was born in Chennai, and completed schooling in Don Bosco Higher Secondary School, Perambur. Graduating from Sri Venkateswara College of Engineering in the stream of Mechanical Engineering, he entered into the profession of teaching, serving as Lecturer in Sri Ram Engineering College.

In the year 2000, he wrote the Civil Service Examinations and got selected for Indian Railway Traffic Service (IRTS). In 2004, he appeared for Civil Service Examination yet again and got selected for Indian Administrative Service (All India Rank 59). During his tenure working under several capacities, he has the merit of rolling out the prestigious

PURA project of Dr.A.P.J.Abdul Kalam, heading rural infrastructure SREI Sahaj e-Village Limited. He has also served as CEO of Cethar Energy Limited.

He has been felicitated as “Effective SDO of India” by National Academy of Administration in 2007 and 2008.As the Director of Officers IAS Academy in Chennai, he coaches civil service aspirants.

In an exclusive interview, Israel Jebasingh IAS shares with Marie Banu his tips for civil servant aspirants.

About your childhood, family and education?

My father was a Judicial Magistrate and my mother was a school teacher. I have an elder brother and a younger sister. My wife is a home maker and we have two sons.

As a student, I was average in academics, but interested in sports. I represented my school basketball team at the State Level.

I wanted to pursue Civil Services while at school and my father motivated me.I did my graduation in engineering at Venkateswara College and worked as a lecturer while preparing for my Civil Service examination.

In 2000, I scored all India Rank 294 and was selected for Indian Railway Traffic Service. I realized that to clear theCivil Service Examination, one need not have to be ‘academically intelligent’. When I entered Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration in Mussoorie,I learnt that almost 90 percent of the candidates who made to Indian Administrative Service(IAS) were average students from middle class or lower middle class background, and from rural areas without much knowledge of English.

I attempted Civil Service Examination yet again, and this time cleared it with All India 59th Rank qualifying for IAS. My experience taught me that this examination was not meant for academic gold medalists alone.

My parents were very happy when I cleared the examination. It was their dream!

During your tenure as Sub Divisional Officer in West Bengal, you had launched tribal programmes in naxal affected areas. Please tell us more about this?

In West Bengal I was posted in a place called Midnapur, a naxal affected area bordering Jharkhand. We aimed at rehabilitating the naxals and at the same time worked towards making tribals not falling prey to naxals. The naxals gave the impression to the poor that the government were not taking care of them, hence they were offering support. The tribals reciprocated by giving them food and feeding information. We started filling up this vacuum.

We launched a programme ‘Apna dhwarae prashas’, meaning administration at the door step. I used to go along with my entire team of officers—Sub Divisional Police Officer, Sub Divisional Land Reforms Officer, and Sub Divisional Medical Officer—and camp at the village. The tribals started believing in the administration and were happy to receive their community certificate and ration card at their door step.

The government offered reimbursement for medical expenses, but the tribals could not afford to buy the medicines. Being a junior officer, I could not change the government policy, but networked with the local

medical shops and requested them to provide medicines to the tribals and claim reimbursement from the government later.

Can you talk about the development programmes in West Bengal and in Tamil Nadu in general?

Tamil Nadu is 20 years ahead of West Bengal. Tamil Nadu is one of the most developed states in our country and can't be compared with states like West Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, or Rajasthan.

For example, MNREGA is a big programme in these states as there are not much industries. This is not the scenario in Tamil Nadu.

Can you share your experience meeting Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam and your engagement in the PURA project?

I was implementing Dr. Abdul Kalam's PURA project under public private partnership. Under IAS, we have the opportunity of having lunch or dinner with the President of India. He gave us a lecture on the PURA project and told that if one of us implemented the PURA programme in a district, then his time would have been worth spending.

When I moved to Chennai due to my mother's illness, I had the opportunity to work for PURA programme. PURA is the project of Professor Indhiresan who believed that whatever amenities are available in the urban areas, the same should be made accessible to the rural community. Dr. Abdul Kalam was fascinated by this thought and started propagating it amongst Members of Parliament and administration.

I was involved at the conception stage and the pilot phase was

implemented in five states — Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa. This project was aimed at providing basic amenities like: access to good health services, clean drinking water, rural mall catering to requirements like fertilisers, etc. The project also aimed at economic viability where industries would invest and people could offer their quality services at a nominal rate. This led to reverse migration!

What is your guidance for teachers?

It is no longer a time wherein whatever the teachers say, students accept. One has to become a student and talk in their language. You need to know what their expectation is. We can't sit on an ivory tower and start lecturing. Live in their style! Teaching is a continuous process. It does not begin and end in class. We need to be friendly with our students.

I have students clarifying their doubts through whatsapp. It has become a discussion forum. A student should look at a teacher as his role model. Periodic tests and constructive feedback is the success mantra for clearing competitive examinations.

What is your advice for those who aspire to pursue IAS?

My simple advice is: “Don't think that the Civil Service Examination is meant for intelligent persons.” If that was the case, I would not have cleared! You need to work sincerely for one year. Study consistently for 8 hours a day, and read the base books — government budget documents, NCERT books, government of India publications that are available online, India year book, etc.— that are available for rural poor students in their local library.

From Officers IAS Academy, 7 students have cleared the IAS examination this year. They have worked hard and appeared for periodic

tests in our Academy which made them succeed.

For qualifying in Civil Service Examination, you need to read with clarity. Instead of reading ten books, read one book ten times. Let that book be a government publication. Understand the question asked, and give the right answer instead of vomiting what you know.



“What is essential is attitudinal change!”

Rev. Dr. G. Joseph Antony Samy, SJ is the Principal of **Loyola College in Chennai**. He holds a **PhD in History** and a Theology degree with an overall teaching experience of over 20 years. He is also the Director of Jesuit Madurai Province Archives, based at Kodaikanal.

Dr. Joseph Antony Samy SJ has published articles in six books, and has participated and presented papers in several National and International Conferences. His doctoral thesis is on “women of Tamil Nadu gleaned through the missionary records”.

In an exclusive interview Dr. Joseph Antony Samy shares with Marie Banu his passion for education.

Can you tell us about your childhood?

I hail from Nagarigathan, a village in Ramnad District which is near

Oriyur where St. John Britto was beheaded because he stood for truth. My father was a farmer and an honest man. He was one among the four Panchayat members in our village and I have seen him suffer because he stood for truth. My mother is a dutiful housewife and a disciplined lady. She is hardworking and used to go along with my father to work in the field. Being the eldest son; I used to take care of my sister while my mother was away.

I helped my father to plough the field and after school I gathered fodder for our cattle. I used to collect water from a pond that was 300 yards away, and prepare rice and keep the oven ready for my mother to cook dinner soon after she returned from the field.

Late evening, I played games like kabadi and nila vilayatu and joined my peers for a swim at a lake which was 264 acres wide. I would spend hours gazing at the stars and would return home only around 10 pm.

Until ninth standard, I studied in a government school that was five kilometers away from home. I went by walk carrying my lunch pack. I then shifted to a school at Oriyur and studied until eleventh standard. I was very much influenced by Saint John Britto.

How important is sports for holistic development?

I will start by talking about our Government as this value should be passed on from the top. In every ward, there should be a place for walking and playing so that the public can enjoy good health. In Chennai, I would expect several hundreds of parks and playgrounds with all facilities. We do have parks in our city, but amenities need to be improvised.

I feel that everyone should spend time to exercise. Parents should take

their children for a walk and share their day's experience with them. Physical exercise is very important for the health of an individual. When parents teach, their children learn.

What are the values that you believe is most important for an individual?

I believe in discipline and punctuality, because I respect others and believe that everyone should care and respect one another. I have introduced a system where the staff arrive ahead of time and start the class on time. More than 99 percent of our staff are positively responding to this system which indicates that right leadership can influence good behavior.

We have planned to launch a system where students or staff, riding a two wheeler, will be allowed into the college only if they wear a helmet. I believe that one should adhere to the norms laid out by the government. The future of the nation is here! Control by using technology would not be as effective as systems that would help Individuals develop inner strength and character.

I learnt all these values in the Society of Jesus.

About the caste system. Your thoughts?

In my opinion caste system only divides the society and oppresses the poorest of the poor. People who work towards liberation of their caste should instead lobby with the government to provide a category NC – “No Caste”. This would lead to no certificate issued from birth to death revealing the caste of an individual.

As a remedial measure, we should strengthen the Panchayat Raj

system where the marginalized people are identified and empowered. The village Panchayat should nominate a group to identify deserving children based on their need and such children should be given priority for education.

Religion is contaminated and has become a de-humanizing factor because of caste. Some argue that by removing the caste system, few communities will get affected. They may not benefit from scholarship or reservations. What is essential for a human being is attitudinal change! If our neighboring state does not have a caste system, why not Tamil Nadu? We have religious structures to show that there is God. Therefore religion is important and cannot be bypassed. But, is there a tangible structure for caste to prove its roots?

It may probably take 10 or 15 years for one to realise what I am saying. If appropriate actions are not taken now, the caste discrimination and related issues will continue forever causing more misery for the marginalized.

About the launch of School of Commerce and Economics by our Hon’ble President of India?

There is great demand for commerce related subjects and Loyola College is known for its quality education. We receive thousands of applications every year for hundreds of seats. Due to the increasing demand we felt that we should have an exclusive School of Commerce and Economics.

It took more than two years to construct the building as we did not have sufficient funds. Our alumni mobilized 3.5 crore rupees. We could construct only 44 class rooms against the need of 100 class rooms and

hostel facilities for thousands of students.

Our alumni also took the effort to invite the President of India to launch the School of Commerce and Economics on 20th December, 2013. The President of India being the first citizen is a symbol of our nation. Dr. Pranab Mukherjee is an educationist and a great leader. During inauguration he appreciated Jesuits contribution to education and it was an encouraging moment for our staff and students to commit ourselves to quality education.

Our honorable President shared his concern that none of the Universities in our country rank within the top 500 Universities across the globe. I take it as a challenge for Loyola College to achieve that position as our symbol of respect to fulfill the wishes of our honorable President.

Loyola College is capable of educating 25,000 children. For this, our Government should provide us with infrastructure and scientific instruments to enhance reach and research. We receive more than 30,000 applications every year, but the system allows us to admit less than 3000 students. We may have the poorest of the poor students studying, but we have the best of teachers.

Education should continue to be treated as service sector and not a business sector. Loyola College continues to be a beacon at that. Let your light shine!



“It is nice to be interested in sports, because you work towards winning and it gives you a lot of focus.”

Dr. Lalitha Balakrishnan has been a topper in Rosary Matriculation School and Outstanding Student of Ethiraj College. She has been a Sports Presenter on Rainbow FM and has participated in Television shows. She has been chosen by the US Dept of State to visit the USA in Mar 2011 as an Exchange Grantee under the prestigious IVLP - International Visitor Leadership Program

Dr Lalitha has a passion to excel in whatever she does. She is interested in reading, crossword, and music, besides being an avid quizzer. She is fond of Hindi movies and prides in stating that she has never missed a cricket match at the Chepauk stadium.

Dr. Lalitha Balakrishnan is presently the Principal of M.O.P. Vaishnav

College for Women, an arts and science college in Chennai. The College is affiliated with the University of Madras and is a self-financing institution offering 14 undergraduate, six postgraduate courses, and Ph.D. programme in commerce.

MOP Vaishnav College for women has been reaccredited at A grade by NAAC- CGPA 3.51 /4. It was established in 1992 by the dedicated efforts of Shri. M.O.Parthasarathy Iyengar and the charity established by him. The college also has the distinction of being one of the youngest colleges in the country to have been granted autonomy by the UGC and Madras University.

In an exclusive interview, Dr. Lalitha Balakrishnan, Principal, MOP Vaishnav College for Women shares with Marie Banu how sports shapes one's character.

In just two decades, you have created your own niche amongst the city colleges. What is the secret for this success?

When we talk about college and its growth, we should definitely talk about Dr. Nirmala Prasad. She had a vision for the college, built it up over the years, nourished it, brought it to where it is today and placed it on a pinnacle. Definitely, she not only dreamt about the immediate future, but also for a very long time to come. In that way she has paved the foundation and what MOP is today is more than 100 percent due to her.

Of course, we had a very encouraging and patronizing management who not only paid heed to her good suggestion and wisdom, but also encouraged her to dream bigger. We have been fortunate in these areas.

Can you share with us about your childhood? Your interest in sports?

I went to Rosary Matriculation School in Chennai. We were given a wide exposure in all areas. Sports day was compulsory, and so was drills. More than the compulsion, we enjoyed being part of it. We had the House system that most schools have, and we had the score boards running. Everything was done in a professional and systematic way.

I owe a lot of what I am to my school, and am very proud to be a Rosarian that way. There, people used to come from all walks of life to talk to us, and there were sportsmen too.

I developed interest in cricket after listening to the commentary, reading the newspapers, and writing letters to the editor on what happened on some days in the field. I also developed interest in tennis, as my brother used to play this sport and I used to join him to the tennis court. After I grew up and got married, my son followed Formula 1 racing. So, that also came into my agenda.

MOP College gives a lot of importance to sports and have won several accolades. What are your views about how sports shapes one's personality?

It is nice to be interested in sports, because you work towards winning and it gives you a lot of focus. At the same time, everyone cannot be a winner. So, when you lose, you learn to lose gracefully. You learn to function as a team. As a loner, you can succeed in many ways, but when you are able to take your team along with you, that is the best that can happen anywhere!

Sports shapes one's character – to adjust, to be with the team, to sacrifice one's individual interest in the interest of the team. It is a great level head in that aspect.

The youth of today and their interest in virtual games. Your thoughts?

The youth of today are playing with people who are not there. The excitement of running or shouting in the field is okay as you need not have to do that in a claustrophobic atmosphere - in your drawing room shouting at each other – because you have vented all your feelings in the outfield.

There are certain things that children of today are losing out on. Even when I brought up my son, in the mid 80's and early 90's, there was some playing on the ground. Now, you find that very less as even in Pre-Kg a child goes for tuitions, and the mother wanting to watch television allows her child to play on the computer.

Today, I think the art of outdoor games is totally dying down.

MOP encourages enrollment of special children in certain undergraduate courses. This is a challenging decision taken by your management. Can you please tell us more about this?

Each one is gifted and talented in a particular way. So, instead of saying that something is not right in you; you rather encourage something that is good in you. That is a very nice attitude to adopt and that way we have been encouraging children with special needs. **About the culture and discipline of your college. What are the special sessions that you conduct for your students?**

The beginning school and finishing school, is not only to earn a degree. It is about having a right attitude towards life. Tomorrow, if you are going to settle down in your life, as a career woman or as a housewife, or both— you need to know certain things apart from having the right qualification and aptitude. One needs to know how to get along with people, how to make marriage workable and successful, how to behave in a party, and how to conduct oneself in a meeting. All these nitty-gritties are being taught in our college.

The parents are definitely giving us a good feedback and express that they are happy to have their wards study in our college. We do not have any parent complaining that we have packed many modules outside the curriculum.

Although MOP appears to be an affluent college from the outside, you do have children from the backward communities studying here. Can you tell us about the scholarship support offered to them?

We have a lot of students who are economically backward and insist of joining our college. Thanks to our management, we are able to provide such candidates with scholarships. We offer full fee waiver for at least one semester and we do not make it seem as though we have done the students a favour. We in turn make them work for about 100 to 150 hours in any of our College departments, like library, or office admin, or PR, so that they feel that they have earned a part of the money to fulfill the fees.

What are the community initiatives that are being coordinated by your college?

We have adopted five schools and three of them in and around Thirutani.

They are in a disadvantaged zone as they are in the suburbs and not in the city. When our students visit them, they are able to talk to them, share the latest happening, and even entertain them. They feel very happy and our students have told me that on subsequent visits these rural students did the guard of honor and welcomed them cheerfully.

This year, the outreach programme is being organized in 5 schools and we have hand-picked 50 children who are most deserving for this purpose. We offer breakfast five days a week, as the mid day meal is provided by the state. This is called ‘Project Aahar’.

We feel that breakfast is a very important meal. If you miss that, it tells on your health and concentration power.



“There is no such thing as failure: we learn by doing and so achieve social change incrementally.”

Nickala Torkington has spent the last 12 years developing infrastructure, organisations and enterprises where Social Entrepreneurs can thrive. A Social Entrepreneur herself, she has designed, resourced and operationally delivered a range of enterprises in North West England, including the first social enterprise health spa and a wellbeing centre, as part of the pioneering Blackburne Housing Group.

Nickala has coached, trained and supported over 500 social entrepreneurs and change makers across a broad range of sectors from idea generation through to resourcing start up, as well as developing established social enterprises to scale up and replicate.

Her current role as Partnership Support Manager at UnLtd, involves engaging with both the Higher Education and Further Education sectors in the UK and internationally, to capacity build institutions, unlock potential and build ecosystems of support and resources for social entrepreneurs. The groundbreaking programme delivering this is called ‘SEE Change’ – Social Entrepreneurship in Education. UnLtd are the leading provider of support to social entrepreneurs in the UK and offers the largest such network in the world.

UnLtd resources over 1,000 people each year, through its core work and partnership programmes. By way of example: UnLtd supports a diverse network of delivery partners alongside their core work, spanning universities, colleges, housing associations, corporates, healthcare specialists and community infrastructure agencies.

In an exclusive interview with Marie Banu, Nickala Torkington shares her views about social entrepreneurship.

You have more than two decades of experience in social entrepreneurship. Who according to you is a social entrepreneur?

The passion of a person who wants to change the world for the better creates a social entrepreneur; also one who has an entrepreneurial solution to a social issue. It could also be somebody who is from the philanthropic spectrum. What binds them together are the values and ethics, the passion, and the ability to act and build a network to effect social change to happen.

There are many social change agents across the globe. Any inspiring social change ideas that you have come across?

There are loads of them! Once, there was a man, David Hines, whose

daughter was murdered. It was an inspiring and harrowing experience which he shared with me.

After the incident, he was shocked by the way he was treated by the police; the way in which his family was trying to manage with their lives as they did not get support that they needed; the way in which his daughter was characterized; and by the memory of his lost child. He started an agency ‘North East Victims Association’ that would support victims of murder and manslaughter. He was very much a campaigner and an activist at heart.

He launched numerous ventures to create and deliver a social mission. He organizes annual conferences and brings together families to vent, relax and feel warm amidst people who have gone through similar tragedy.

There was also a policy change element which he wanted to achieve. As a result of the work he has done, he has now created a new layer of policing called ‘Family Liaison Officer’ which now exists.

That is what social entrepreneurs do! They start with one project, and expand further. The North East Victims Association was the first starting point.

There was a lady called Gill Green, a health professional, who established Storm Training Community Interest Community (CIC). She was once a nurse and developed research into suicide prevention. She delivers various training programs for the public sector, health professionals, police, for people who may misunderstand issues of health, and on suicide prevention.

With a range of services and five to six staff, she has been delivering

trainings during the last four years in seven different countries and her annual turnover has grown to around £125,000.00 this year.

What was your trigger to engage in social entrepreneurship?

I did my degree in product and furniture design and manufacture and went to work as a designer. After some years of work I got bored. I wanted to do something different! Wanting to earn a good living is important to me and having a meaningful job to bring social change is much more important.

I was 22 years old then. I started as an administrator at UnLtd. There was a Director for the North of England and myself when it first developed in 2002, now there are over 70 staff. I later got posted as a direct deliverer of services and now have a more strategic role as a Partnership Support Manager building our ecosystem of support for Social Entrepreneurs in the UK and overseas.

I always had an interest in getting things done and not taking a ‘No’ for an answer; or seeing a need and sorting it out. Whether it was for a group of university students or for people in a community—I fell into it like most social entrepreneurs do.

A proudest moment in your career?

One of my proudest moments was bringing together a group of 12 social entrepreneurs from UK on a learning journey to India. Eight years ago we came to learn from the good practices in India.

Social entrepreneurship, certainly, isn’t a new phenomenon in this country as there are outstanding social entrepreneurs and change makers here. We brought 12 of our fledgling social entrepreneurs to

learn from the likes of Pratham, Child Line India, and Barefoot College in Rajasthan.

That first journey with Michael Norton, the Founding Trustee of UnLtd UK, along with the Indira Gandhi Foundation, British Council led to a consultation. Out of it, UnLtd India was born and I had great experiences.

Can you tell us some key points to be a successful social entrepreneur?

Don't be put off if you are not having the impact as you expected.

Achieving a social goal takes many routes and takes many years. So, try and be patient with yourself.

Build fantastic networks to help you learn how the rest are doing.

Don't give up! Think it through and find a way.

There is no such thing as failure. It is learning by doing and achieving social change incrementally.

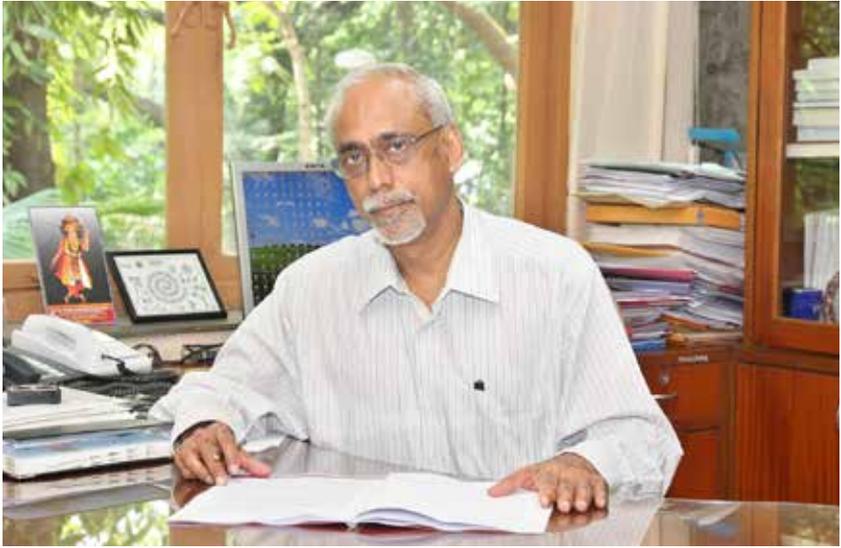
What are your views about social enterprises in India and abroad?

From what I have seen in India, it has been mostly on the philanthropic model. I have not seen enough of them though, In UK, people look for inspiration and practice. People take some time to understand the business model.

Examples in Thailand of large scale social enterprises being set up by large institutions seeking to make a profit, ethically. Strong social missions exhibited but less of a focus on the agency of drive of 'the person', which UnLtd has a significant focus on. Inevitably these are less entrepreneurial as they become larger scale.

Your experience mentoring social entrepreneurs in the UK?

Social entrepreneurs come from all walks of life. Someone new to this sector could find it confusing and hard to gain a clear understanding of concepts and / or practice.. We provide our own personal experience mixed with a range of coaching and mentoring techniques. Most of all, helping people understand themselves and their own motivations and believe in themselves is always at the heart of what we do.



“We do not prepare our students for CSR. We prepare them for working with the government and continue working with NGOs.”

Dr. S. Parasuraman has over 25 years of experience as a teacher, trainer, activist, administrator and development worker. He holds a Master’s Degree in Anthropology from the University of Poona, Pune and a Ph.D. in Demography from the University of Mumbai, Mumbai. He has also been conferred Doctor of Literature (Honoris Causa) by the Assam University.

He has held key positions in international organisations: as Asia Regional Policy Coordinator, ActionAid Asia; Senior Advisor to the Commission, and Team Leader of the Secretariat; World Commission on Dams; and as Programme Director, Oxfam GB, India Programme. Currently, he is Director, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.

Dr. Parasuraman has been associated with the Narmada Movement from 1987 and was a member of the Indian Prime Minister's Committee to review the Tehri Hydroelectric Project.

He was awarded the Bharat Shreshta Acharya Award 2012 by MIT, Pune and has over 50 publications in the form of articles in international and national journals, books and research reports.

In an exclusive interview Dr. Parasuraman shares with Marie Banu the programmes coordinated at Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS).

During your Directorship at TISS you have introduced a number of courses. Can you tell us more about this?

TISS Mumbai is a great opportunity. It is a great place which is autonomous, government funded, and is not subjected to control by neither the government nor any Trust. So, it is up to one's imagination and ability to see how best you can up position TISS.

It is in that context that I came in as a Director where I was asked to clean up the place. With the participation of the faculty, we started looking at how best we can improve our academic programmes and that is how we got into fundamentally re-structuring the teaching programmes.

We positioned ourselves in terms of schools and centres, with schools having its own disciplinary orientation. We started some inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary programmes and admit around 1000 students for the Masters Programme every year.

With the society favouring medicine, engineering and management,

there is a decline in the number of students choosing social sciences. We wanted to make social sciences interesting for children and hence developed a five-year integrated programme whereby children would learn all social sciences in the first year and eventually can get enough credits for two social science disciplines. They also study: mathematics (in the first and second year); how theory developed in biological, chemical, and physical sciences; research methodology; and logic philosophy.

At TISS, we wanted to create young scholars who are very strong theoretically and also analytically—which is what our social science disciplines lack. So, through our integrated programme, children will be good in the subject as well as be good analysts. They will have greater options to move on where they want to go.

We have been offering this course from our three campuses and are also encouraging others to take this curriculum and implement it. The idea is to promote social sciences in a big way.

With the recent amendment to the Companies Act, do you think there would be more career prospects for Social Science professionals in the CSR programmes?

CSR itself is not a big deal actually. There is so much that one can do with the government. When you compare with the amount of money which the Rural Development Ministry spends, CSR is only a small percentage of it. The Government of India spends some 300,000 crores of rupees and the State Government spends almost equally. The social sector is very big and what the corporates have been asked to spend is a very small amount—both public and private sector put together may

arrive at some 10,000 crores.

We do not prepare our students for CSR. We prepare them for working with the government and continue working with NGOs. Of course, working with industries, is another option.

One of CSIM Alumnus was the first transgender to complete her Doctorate at TISS. What were the efforts taken to mainstream the third gender?

In 2006 we came out with a new vision document where we said that any form of discrimination in the basis of caste, religion, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation would not be tolerated. Once we took that position, then the community used it in the Supreme Court. They asked: ‘when there are mainstream university users, how can you discriminate?’

Can you tell us about the rural fellowship programme offered by TISS?

We wanted to somehow motivate our graduates to go to rural areas and work in difficult situations. We started with a fellowship from Tata Trust and found funds from various sources. Every year, we offer fellowships to around 30 TISS graduates who work in Kashmir, North East, and even in some Maoists affected areas.

We started a fellowship programme along with UNICEF called ‘Development Facilitators’ where 120 facilitators were created. We were also asked to train Prime Minister’s Rural Development Fellows, and have trained about 300 young people working in conflict areas.

Can you tell us about any interesting projects that your Social

Entrepreneurship students have launched? What is your advise for social entrepreneurs?

There is an enormous opportunity for social entrepreneurs. Poor people are not without resources. The entire sector of micro credit revolves around them. It is not the issue of whether they have access to resources, but how you can make these resources create wealth for the poor people themselves.

This is the reason why we started the Masters Programme in Social Entrepreneurship. We even have a specialization in the Masters Programme in Social Work which is ‘Innovations in Entrepreneurship and Livelihoods’.

Social Entrepreneurship is the only programme where we do not offer campus placement. The students are supposed to develop a social venture proposal which is evaluated. Eventually, they get a seed capital to start their enterprise.

Some of our students have launched innovative ventures—like reaching dental care to rural people, and creating bio gas out of waste. We have an agreement with DBS bank wherein they fund innovative projects.

Being part of several disaster management committees and researches, do you think that India competent to handle future disasters?

India is competent to handle anything and have enormous capacity. But, whether we are willing to be competitive and are wanting to manage is a big issue. We had handled Cyclone Thane very well. It all depends on what we want to do with ourselves. Wherever we have the political and administrative willingness, we do it well.



“People do not realize the value of what we give them. Anything given for free is not realized and not accepted the way it should be.”

Mr. Ravi Sam is a leading Industrialist in Coimbatore and a Philanthropist. He is a commerce graduate and holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Textile Technology from University of Manchester Institute of Science & Technology.

He hails from an Industrial Family and is the Director of Adwaith Lakshmi Industries Ltd; Adwaith Textiles Ltd; Titan Paints and Chemicals Ltd; Lakshmi Ring Travellers (Coimbatore) Ltd; and Parry Agro Industries Ltd.

Mr. Ravi Sam is the Founder Trustee of Siruthuli, the movement for preservation of water bodies in Coimbatore which is a famed Public movement of the State. He runs Sree Annapoorneswari Temple and a Veda Patashala which has a Gurukulam style of Vedic teaching for

students belonging to the age group of 7 to 15. He is an active Trustee of the Sruthi Seva Trust at Aanaikatti; and is the Founder Trustee and Correspondent of Sri Gopal Naidu School and Correspondent of Adwaith G.N.S Matriculation School.

He has been personally involved in renovation of various temples across the country through South India Art and Heritage Conservation Trust. He is the Chairperson of the Academic Wing of Academy of Archaeology and Ancient Sciences of India which is a part of the REACH (Rural Education and Conservation of Heritage) foundation.

Mr. Ravi Sam is presently the Chairman of CII Tamil Nadu State Council and Green Rameshwaram. He is a member of various associations like CODISSIA, FICCI, SIMA, SITRA, TEXPROCIL, and Textile Institute. He is also a member of the city technical advisory group (CTAG) of JNNURM scheme for the Coimbatore Corporation.

In an exclusive interview, Mr. Ravi Sam shares his thoughts about CSR and social issues that needs to be focused upon.

About the Companies Act 2013. How do you think it would be feasible to engage local NGOs in the CSR programmes?

It all depends on the industries concerned. Most of them have their ongoing CSR programmes aligned to their objectives. All the managements, if they are an aware management and have considerable amount of CSR strength, already have an exposure to what is social responsibility. There are a wide range of classifications in the social sector which can be addressed by NGOs as well as those that they can't address. Healthcare, sanitation, education, and environment issues would be the major areas that would be focused upon by Corporates.

I am sure that many corporates do not have their own projects or areas that interests them very much and for such organisations it would be good for NGOs to tell them what it is. Accountability on the NGO part is very important today.

This would be the first year of the Companies Act 2013 being implemented, so we need to see how it goes. A lot of corrections will have to happen. It all differs from company to company.

It is now mandatory to form a CSR committee to evaluate the programmes before the board meeting. This will enable the company to know the funds spent for their CSR activities each year.

I would say that the biggest beneficiary would be the educational institutions that corporates have as most of their CSR funds would go into that.

There are organisations, mostly bigger corporates, who would like to implement programmes in their own vicinity. Because, they can have onus on it and at the end of the day they would be able to get something back in return.

What are the social issues that you feel should be focused upon?

We should ideally look at environment and sanitation issues. Reclamation of water bodies can be looked at seriously.

There are a lot of activities happening in the area of education. In Tamil Nadu, there are government run educational institutions and we know that they could do better. Many corporates are helping in upgrading the facilities of these institutions. I know companies in Coimbatore who have adopted 8 to 10 government schools to bring it to a certain level

so that these students are exposed to the level of a normal matriculation school student in terms of access to labs, etc.

Except in the lowest socio-economic strata in Tamil Nadu, if there is a school that is mediocre and is run by the Municipal Corporation, very few parents would want to send their children here. They would rather send their child to a school where they would have to pay the school fees, and buy uniforms and books.

People do not realize the value of what we give them. Anything given for free is not realized and not accepted the way it should be.

About Veda Patashala attached to the Sree Annapoorneswari Temple. What was the inspiration to launch this?

It is basically to keep the tradition going. All of the students hail from poor economic backgrounds. 80 percent of them are single parent children, with a parent working as a domestic help or cook. The family's acceptance in the society is very low. But, once the child has studied Veda, the acceptability goes up. The boy has the capacity to earn an income even before completing the period of Vedic studies. When he goes home for summer, he accompanies the local priest. By chanting slokas which he had studied in the first two years he is able to earn a minimum of 1000 rupees a day.

We have stipends offered to students to encourage the child complete the Vedic studies. The funds are transferred to his bank account and he has a savings of 40,000 to 50,000 rupees when he completes his education.

Through REACH Trust you have renovated several temples across India. Has your involvement been because of religious or social commitment?

It is more on terms of protecting the monument in which I am really very interested. The monument should not lose its originality, style, and period. If it is a monument and we could revive it back to a place of worship, then sustainability happens.

The government has not clearly defined where we can work on. Giving our money to HRCE or any other organization to restore the temples, destroys the existing architecture of that monument. It would be better to leave it as it is. There are no systems on how to take care of the monument.

There are many monuments in Tamil Nadu which are uncared for. I was wanting to talk to the Erstwhile Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu about asking corporates to work on a directory on every art object – movable and unmovable – and precious jewelry which is available in our State.

About the sculptures which were taken to Australia and America and which has been retrieved recently, we had to depend upon documents that were available with the French society in Pondicherry which were all made during pre-independence. The French had the foresight to photograph all the sculptures and this is the only record we have till now.



“It would be ideal to have a win-win situation where both genders are walking side by side.”

Rohini is an Indian actress, lyricist, screenwriter, voice actor and director. She has mainly acted in south Indian, notably Malayalam and Tamil films. Having started her acting career at five, she has about 130 south Indian films to her credit. She received National Award of Special mention and Andhra Pradesh State Award for Best Female Actor in the year 1996 for the film *Sthree*.

Being an activist for AIDS awareness, Rohini has also directed short films for M.G.R. Medical University and Tamil Nadu Aids Control Society. In 2008, Rohini had directed a 50-minute documentary *Silent Hues* about film industry’s child artists, she being one herself. Her acting skills were recognized and she was given the Kalaimamani award recently.

In an exclusive interview Rohini shares with Marie Banu her thoughts

about women—yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

What are your thoughts about women— yesterday, today, and tomorrow?

Yesterday it was really bad. Today, it is slightly better. I cannot say this with total conviction, because today I read about a woman who was raped by constables in the police station premises. I do not know what ‘better’ actually means now. We have two girls who were raped and hanged as they were dalits.

If you look at the way in which women have progressed financially—yes, they have become financially independent, and are able to support their family. They are also able to stand up for themselves. But, this is not the ideal situation though. It would be ideal to have a win-win situation where both genders are walking side by side. ‘I don’t follow you; you don’t follow me. If I am following you, I am protecting you; if I am followed, I am leading you.’

Having done a documentary on the life of child artists, what are your views about children who participate in television reality shows?

It is totally different when compared to children taking part in reality shows. Because, child actors are involved in this profession solely for financial reasons and totally miss out on their education. They are put into a unnatural situation where they have to laugh, cry, and endure a strenuous schedule like any adult actor. The child does not understand what he/she goes through. Undue attention from peers make them feel different. They are deprived of the natural way of growing up.

A child participating in the reality show attends a regular school. He/

she is happy to participate in the competitions, but is pressurized by the parents very much. The kind of emotional upheaval the child goes through is not at all recommended. I don't think the child should be put through such stress.

Your started your career as a Child Artist. What was your inspiration to join the film industry?

I didn't enter on my own. It was my father who was interested. In the beginning, I liked to bunk school. But, when I met my school friends after shoot hours, I realized that I did not know anything and felt backward. There was a gap of three years in my career, when I was between 11 and 13 years of age. I was too old to play a child character and too young to play an adult character. That's when I actually went to school. I was admitted straight away in 5th standard and did not know how to even write the alphabets in one line. But, when I started learning, I was encouraged by my teachers. I was a fast learner and was very happy to go to school. I did not want to discontinue, but had to.

You have done a short film on AIDS awareness. Can you tell us more about this?

I started a company and wanted to do advertisements and corporate films. It was then I got the opportunity to work closely with TANSACS and CAPACS. I gave them some story boards, and they wanted me to direct the film. One particular short film titled 'Amma' got wide recognition, as it was very emotional and touched the audience.

Which of the social issues are you passionate about?

Anything to do with environment really moves me a lot and troubles

me. I think that is my calling and I would like to do something for that. We are inspired by people who have taken the initiative to rejuvenate the water bodies (like lakes, tanks and ponds) in Salem, Madurai, and Coimbatore to provide adequate supply of drinking water.

We have already started doing some ground work. We plan to replicate this effort in and around Chennai. First of all, we would like to appeal to the government to take up this issue seriously and act fast. We also want to partner with the government wherein my part would be in creating awareness and mobilizing support from citizens who reside around the water bodies.

We want like-minded people to collaborate with us. I welcome students and NGOs to collaborate with my team.



“Alcohol is not the only way to have fun. If you have a choice, say no to alcohol.”

Padmashri Dr. Shanthi Ranganathan is the Founder, Director of TTK Hospital, a non profit, pioneer voluntary organization involved for more than three decades in the holistic treatment and rehabilitation of persons addicted to alcohol and drugs.

Dr. Ranganathan is the recipient of the Padmashree Award in 1992 from the Government of India and the United Nations Vienna Civil Society Award in 1999, which was presented to her by the United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan.

In an exclusive interview with Marie Banu and Latha Suresh, Dr. Shanti Ranganathan shares her views on alcoholism and how it can be treated.

You have been working in the area of alcoholic addiction treatment and rehabilitation for over 34 years. What are the issues caused due to alcoholism?

Poverty is the major issue caused by alcoholism. Violence, suicide amongst women, health issues, and accidents are others.

What steps have you taken to reduce alcoholism in our state?

In any community when use of alcohol reduces, alcoholism also reduces. Along with this the negative consequences related alcohol use such as health problems, accidents etc also reduce.

While total prohibition is an option, most Indian states rely heavily on the revenue generated from sale of alcohol to meet the expenditure of the state Government. A NIMHANS study showed how the Government spent a lot more on alcohol related problems when compared to the revenue generated from sale of alcohol. In this situation until the state Governments implement prohibition, there are other measures that can be taken to reduce negative impact of alcohol use.

In the first place the number of alcohol selling shops can be restricted and the hours of operation can be reduced. The Government can make a decision not to increase the production of alcohol over the years and limit the quantity produced.

The cost of sale of alcohol definitely influences the quantity of consumption. Therefore with the TASMAL having monopoly over the sales, the Government can increase the cost of alcohol which will influence the consumption levels. Out of every 10 people who drink alcohol, two people will become alcoholics. Alcoholics cannot reduce or restrict their drinking. This increase in price will not help influence

the already dependent alcoholic population. For the alcoholic giving up totally is the only option. But increase in cost will influence all the other people who drink.

Have you taken any steps to sensitise the corporates on social drinking and its limits?

We had a major project with International Labour Organization where we helped industries to formulate a policy with regard to alcohol. This policy helped increase awareness about alcohol among the employees, provided guidelines to supervisors to identify problem alcohol use which influences work performance. The Hindu wrote a policy and Mr. Ramajayam released it. Hindustan Motors at Thiruvallur also evolved a policy, amongst several others. This policy states that if any employee comes to work under the influence of alcohol, they should not be allowed to enter office.

The policy focuses upon drinking, its impact in work space and amongst employees, and the action that needs to be taken. Organisations also coordinated a promotion programme encouraging alcoholics to seek help for de-addiction and even offered to pay the treatment charges.

We organize awareness programmes for companies; and training for managers and supervisors to identify alcoholics and teach them how to deal with such employees.

With the employee, we do not discuss about his drinking, but instead talk on the negative effects it has on his work. For instance, the symptom could be: coming late for work and leave early; availing leave on Friday, complaining of persistent headaches; frequenting the toilet; unable to keep awake during night shifts; reduced efficiency; missed deadlines;

and fighting with colleagues.

With influx of migration for corporate employment, more women consume alcohol than before? Your comments?

The number of women seeking treatment for de-addiction has not tremendously increased. They have not become addicts because of social pressure and their responsibility towards their children.

The number of women social drinkers and small drinkers have increased, but women alcoholics who need help are very few. That is a big relief!

Unlike western countries, there aren't any women centric centres in India to treat alcoholics. It has not become an issue for us as yet to be worried about.

In what way is treating addiction in India different from other countries? Do you use tele-counseling for treatment?

In India, we take into consideration our culture and norms and our treatment procedure has gone through a lot of modifications and changes.

Tele-counseling is not a mainstream activity as yet! We use it only for follow up. Each of our counsellors are provided with a mobile phone. When a patient is unable to come in person, he calls the counselor to seek guidance.

At our institution, the first criteria to admit a person for treatment is family support. We insist the patient to be accompanied by one of their family members-spouse/parent/relative. We also extend the counseling programme to the family members. If a patient does not have a family to support, we try to create the family, like his uncle or aunt who can be

contacted to help him.

What is your advise for the youth of today?

There are many healthy ways in which one can have fun. Alcohol is not the only way! If you have a choice, say no to alcohol. Even if you take alcohol, be a responsible drinker. Do not drive under the influence of alcohol, and do not consume alcohol on a regular basis. Never have more than two drinks at a time. There are many ways in which you can stay as a responsible drinker. Have meals before drinking alcohol.



“The amendment to the Companies Act is certainly an advantage as the companies are compelled to contribute to the social sector.”

Madras School of Social Work (MSSW), established in 1952, located in Chennai, South India, is an Autonomous Institution, NAAC accredited and affiliated to University of Madras.

MSSW was founded by Mrs. Mary Clubwala Jadhav under the auspices of Madras State Branch of the Indian Conference of Social Work (renamed the Indian Council of Social Welfare) and the Guild of Service (central). The school is run under the aegis of the Society for Social Education and Research (SSER). Madras School of Social Work is a member of the Association of Schools of Social Work in India and the Asia - Pacific Association of Social Work Education. The School is also affiliated to the International Association of Schools of Social

Work and is rated 3rd Best Social Work College in India and First in South India.

In an exclusive interview, Dr. V.A. Vijayaragavan, Principal of MSSW, shares with Marie Banu his thoughts on Companies Act 2013 and how this could benefit NGOs.

What motivated you to study social work?

I studied in PSG College of Arts and Science. When I graduated, social work was a noted programme in my college. There, the social work students were outgoing and not campus-confined. Having associated myself with NSS activities, I was naturally inclined to study social work. The department itself was friendly and vibrant. I got attracted because of that. There were also one or two professionally trained social workers who were known to me and they served as my role models.

About teaching social work and your association with MSSW?

I've been into teaching since 1983. I started my career as an Assistant Professor in 1983 at Department of Social Work, Bishop Heber College, Tiruchirappalli. I moved to Madras School of Social work in 1986 and thereafter continued with MSSW as a faculty, and in different administrative capacities.

Do you have a lot of students from abroad who study at MSSW?

Yes. We ensure that we have a mixed group. Only when there's an eclectic bunch of students across countries, can education of social work really happen. Previously, social problems were local. After globalization, it has become global. For example, across the world, the youth are connected through social media. A number of problems

occur, because of this. They either get lost, or addicted, or isolated. So an Indian child faces the same problem that a child across the globe, faces. So when there are globalized problems, we need to have a cross-cultural learning environment.

Having trained social workers, what are their placement prospects?

Students opt for social work because these courses are employment-oriented. Students who choose Human Resource Management as their Specialization get an opportunity to work in organisations as HR / Training / Recruitment/ Industrial relations / CSR executives, and rise to high levels and earn well.

The fact still remains that people who study community Development / Medical and Psychiatric Social Work or any other social work related specializations work quite hard. This disparity in growth is due to each one's skill-set.

Our MA in Human Resources is a Management programme, where students study business and finance in addition to social work.

The Companies Act 2013 has made CSR mandatory for corporates having a networth of INR 500 or more. This gives an edge for CSR projects, unlike NGOs, as funds are not a constraint. Is CSR therefore a threat for NGOs?

They are not exactly threats. In a way it is a deprivation of space for NGOs. Previously, there was a philanthropic attitude amongst industrial houses. That way, small NGOs were in a position to benefit, and carry that benefit to the grass-root level.

Even before the amendment was introduced in the Companies Act,

industrial houses started reducing contributions to NGOs. In fact, they started consolidated work in the name of their own foundations, like Microsoft's Bill Gates Foundation, Ford Foundation, Infosys Foundation, etc. So, the inflow to NGOs were reduced.

The amendment to the Companies Act is certainly an advantage as the companies are compelled to contribute to the social sector. When they are compelled to contribute, not all of them have foundations and are aware of the grass root level needs of these communities in which they are situated or the administrative expertise to work with the communities. So, they look towards NGOs, who work on the field, for support.

Indian NGOs are already starved of funds. Salaries and privileges to its employees are poor. So, NGOs will now start looking for funds from international funding agencies. This again is a problem today, because funds from foreign countries are being regulated.

If networking is done through employer federations, field level activity is carried out by the NGO in areas where the corporates is interested in, NGOs stand to gain.

When you say that financial statements need to be audited by chartered accountants, why can't social work institutions be run by qualified social workers?

If you take foreign countries, there are norms which state that to be a professional social worker; you need to be an accredited person. Unfortunately, that prerequisite doesn't exist in India. We need to form a council, wherein a person who completes social work should enrol, and only then be allowed to practice. But this idea has not taken off

because we are unable to distinguish what is professional social work and what is not.

Almost all NGOs are small organisations, with a limited number of employees. So, that being the case, the founder of the organisation will be at the scene on a daily basis, and would like to have the administration under his or her direct supervision.

The big issue is to do with the nature, size or capacity of the NGO. So, bigger organisations like CRY, World Vision or Childline are bringing in professional social workers, because they require people with knowledge about running the organisation and executing the project.

Social work needs to be systematized. Accountability is needed, but sadly, it isn't happening today. In the near future we can expect this to happen and I hope that Social Work will gain a status like any other profession.

Changemakers



Young Little Adults

Punya's day starts at 6 am. Her parents are marginal farmers in a village at Virajpet Taluk in Madikere District. After attending to her daily chores at home, she packs her lunch and walks to her school which is located 3 kilometers away. The school starts at 9:30 am and she reaches much ahead of her fellow students.

In a while, her friends stroll in, some greeting her with a smile, and few asking if she would have time to clarify their doubts. She paused, looked at them and smiled.

Punya, 12, studies at the Government Higher Primary School in Virajpet, a village in Madikere (Coorg) District. She is a Young Instructor Leader trained by Agastya International Foundation.

Agastya International Foundation is an Indian education trust and a non-profit organization, founded in 1999, by Shri Ramji Raghavan and Shri Mahavir Kumar in Bangalore, India. It runs hands-on science education

programs in rural and peri-urban regions across 12 Indian states and is one of the largest science education programs catering to economically disadvantaged children and teachers.

Agastya has launched Science Centres and Mobile Science Labs in rural India to enhance learning amongst underprivileged children and unlock the creative potential of India's rural population. Agastya has a variety of innovative methods and channels including a Creativity Lab located on a 172-acre campus in Kuppam, 80 Mobile Science Labs and 35 Science Centres.

Agastya has implemented programs for over 5 million children (50 percent girls) and 150,000 teachers, from vulnerable and economically disadvantaged communities. By making practical, hands-on science education accessible to rural government schools, Agastya aims to transform and stimulate the thinking of underprivileged children and teachers.

While I waited for the teachers to arrive, a few children came towards me.

Lakshmi, 10, held my hand and asked (in Kannada), "Where are you from? Whom do you want to meet?"

"I have come to meet your Head Master to talk about the Mobile Science Lab programme. I am waiting for my friends from Agastya International Foundation to arrive," I replied.

She chuckled. Managing a smile, I felt pleased that I could convey the message in Kannada.

Ravi, 9, was curious to learn why I had a camera, and what the book

like gizmo was. “Are you going to take our pictures? I want one with my friends. Shall I call them?” He asked spontaneously.

I voraciously clicked pictures of the children. In less than five minutes, I had more than 40 children around me, each with their own set of friends, posing for pictures.

A loud bell rang, and in a moment the children assembled for prayers.

Subramanya and his colleague Raghavendra arrived. Subramanya works as the Area In-Charge of Agastya and coordinates the activities at Madikere District; and Raghavendra is In-charge of the Science Centre at the Virajpet Chickpet Junior College and oversees the Mobile Science Lab programmes. Both are full time employees of Agastya and work in coordination with the Government schools at Madikere district. They also form Science Clubs and train young children to teach and demonstrate science experiments to their fellow students.

We entered the School Head Master’s room. Shri. Muthappa greeted us and after exchanging pleasantries, we began the conversation.

“We have 176 students studying in this school. The efforts made by Agastya International Foundation, along with our school lessons, has helped the children improve their knowledge in science. Our children now participate in science fairs. We also have a Science Club in our school and allow the children to visit the Science Centre at the Virajpet Chickpet Junior College and Science Centre which is nearby. Besides, the Mobile Science Lab also visits our school thrice a year,” he said.

I requested him to allow us interact with the Science Club students, and he instantly agreed.

The Science Club had nine students; two Young Instructors. As we entered, I noticed the students discussing their science project with Mrs. Pushpa Nachiappa, their mentor.

They rose spontaneously to greet us. Muthappa introduced us to the students and asked them: “What are you learning today?”

“We are preparing for the science competition,” replied Babu.

“Can one of you explain how the heart functions?” I asked.

Punya, the Young Leader Instructor, narrated the functions of the heart in detail and with confidence. “I like to teach my fellow students. Heart, earth and sun are among my favourite topics. I feel that I am treated with respect after I became the Young Instructor,” said Punya.

While she spoke, the rest grew restless.

“It is not feasible to establish Science Centres in each of the Government schools, hence we initiated the Science Clubs. Our team that handles the Mobile Science Lab trains interested students to become Young Leader Instructors. This not only motivates the children, but also instills confidence in them,” said Subramanya.

The Mobile Science Lab at Virajpet visits 60 schools in the taluk, with three visits scheduled per school in a year. Two instructors and a driver coordinate these visits. They teach children science experiments and involve them during the demonstration classes. “Most of the government schools do not have Science Labs equipped to conduct experiments as per the school lesson plan. We address this gap,” said Raghavendra.

After spending some time with the enthusiastic children and evoking

simple questions to each of them, we bid adieu.

We then visited the Science Centre at Virajpet Chickpet Junior College which was a few kilometers away. Mrs. Poornima was teaching Physics to around 60 students studying in class 9. I interacted with the children, and requested them to join me at the Science Centre, which was situated next to their classroom.

The children grew excited and some forcefully pushed their way through, as they wanted to get their hands first on their favourite experiment.

Poornima said, “Our children enjoy going to the Science Centre. They prefer to spend their free time here. There are around 400 experiments and the lab instructor explains each of the experiments very clearly. In fact, I too learn along with the children, as I did not have the opportunity to practically engage in most of these experiments when I studied.”

While I was going through the experiments displayed in the Science Centre, Ravi explained how a square-wheeled bicycle worked.

We thanked Poornima and the children and left the school campus in a hustle as we were getting late for our next school visit.

A bright yellow colored Tempo Traveler was parked in the Devapura Government School campus and the children were gathered in a large hall. I tiptoed slowly not wanting to distract their attention.

Pandu, Instructor, was demonstrating the experiment on light and both children as well as their teachers actively participated.

“How many types of lenses are there?” He asked.

The chorus response was too loud for my ears.

As the day drew to a close, I thanked the Agastya team and returned to my place of stay. While driving through the winding roads of Madikere I remembered my school teachers. Teaching is indeed the noblest profession!

Agastya's gift of providing rural children with access to science education has certainly made an impact in the lives of these innocent children, thereby enabling them to carve a positive future for themselves and their families.

If you wish to be part of Agastya's efforts, please write to agastyadmin@gmail.com or visit their Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/Agastya.Foundation>.

— **Marie Banu**



NO TO LABOUR, YES TO EDUCATION

It all began back in 1992 at a metal factory at Korukkupet. When Virgil D’Sami’s team at Arunodhaya heard that the factory had begun employing children for cheap labour, they decided to step in and step things right. In a sense, that was the beginning of what would later go on to become two decades of unrelenting service to society, in the eradication of a social evil that plagued India in the 1990s and the early part of the last decade: child labour. “We noticed that young children were made to engage in hard, rigorous labour at these factories,” says Virgil, executive director of Arunodhaya Centre for Street and Working Children. “We resolved from then on,” she continues, “to tackle child labour, raise awareness, and eradicate it from our society.”

What followed was a sustained campaign at a grass-root level, to tackle the issue from the bottom-up. No sooner did the NGO focus on the steel factory at Korukkupet, it also trained its attention to weeding out instances of child labour in another industrial locality, Tiruvottiur. In

a short span of time, the focus quickly broadened to raise awareness on the number of children employed as domestic help in several households across the city. “That’s how we zeroed in on Kodambakkam,” Virgil recounts, “We visited the slums in the locality, met families of children who were hired as domestic help, and spoke to them about the importance of children’s education as a means to a better future.” Through these efforts, the motto: ‘Say no child labour, say yes to children’s education’ echoed through Arunodhaya’s campaign against child labour.

Through these instances of intervention, the NGO has successfully managed to create child-labour-free zones in the localities that bear its footprint. Primarily, the initiative itself has helped move children from the industry to the schools. But Arunodhaya has also gone the extra mile, to facilitate the transition. “We began setting up child labour centres across the city, to help children prepare for schooling,” says Virgil, “There’s obviously a bit of catching up to do. Some of these children we rescued had studied only up till Class 1, while some others just till Class 8. So, we ideated the introduction of bridge courses in these centres, to help re-introduce these children to a normal, academic, school life.” These efforts apart, Virgil believes that schools today, need to go the extra mile in caring for such children. “When we first began our efforts in Korukkupet, the school there was far from what schools ought to look like. Cattle roamed there in the evenings, and the classrooms were unkept. The teachers who joined that school were all up for a transfer, so they didn’t seem to care enough.”

Sensitizing society about the importance of rehabilitation of these children was paramount. But Virgil believes the process can and must begin at home. “So, we decided to empower the women of the

household,” she says, “Helping them secure employment, training them to engage in income-generating activity was definitely part of our plan towards empowerment and employment of women.” As a result of this aim, self-help groups were established, in the hope that employment this way would eliminate the need for the child to seek employment. However, the challenges were many.

“When we began raising awareness about child labour, the first big hurdle we encountered was the family of the child,” says Virgil, “We were usually questioned over whether education would guarantee a government job, and asked how the family would survive without a working hand. We tried our best to put those doubts to rest. The other challenge was the employer. There would always be a direct or indirect attempt to re-employ the child as labour in these factories. The employer would either forcefully take the child back into the factory, or would brainwash their parents into believing that we were out to prevent their children from being employed and providing for the family.” The campaign against child labour, evidently, had a long way to go. This called for collective action. There began a formative process of setting up Women’s Sangams and Children Sangams — bodies that would act against child labour within their respective communities. “Today, the work we’ve done speaks for itself through such Sangams,” says Virgil, elaborating how these bodies have gone about achieving a great deal in enforcing child-labour-free zones.

Arunodhaya’s work is far from over. Today, two big challenges continue to exist. One of these is the vast presence of children as in-house, resident domestic help. The other is the sustenance of children’s education post-rescue. “Not many cases of children as resident domestic help comes to our notice,” says Virgil, “These cases are almost always invisible until

we heard of a case of domestic violence against such kids.” The other issue, pertaining to sustenance of education, Virgil believes can only be tackled when the parents are serious about continuance of an education. “What usually happens is, in the case of eviction from a certain locality, these children and their families move localities. Hence, continuing in the same school becomes a bit of a problem. That’s usually when a child runs the risk of reverting to becoming child labour.” But she believes that all that’s left is an attitude change. “Once attitudes change, I can definitely see a future where child labour in India, is non-existent.”



Awaiting a Miracle

It was a quiet Sunday afternoon, until Latha and I reached BESSO Home at Hosur. The laughter and cheer of the children were music to our ears.

Sam took us around the premise and led us to a large hall where over 100 children were assembled. Sam is a Post Graduate in Social Work and worked as a Lecturer in St Xavier's College at Thirunelveli until 1990. Watching an abandoned child eat the leftovers from a banana leaf discarded by a hotel, urged Sam to provide succor for such children. He quit his work and founded Bethel Education Social Service Organisation (BESSO) in 1991. With his personal funds, he launched a school for underprivileged children in Denkanikottai, and provided hostel facilities as well. He simultaneously started paid tuition centres to financially support the school's needs, and later established BESSO home to accommodate orphaned, and abandoned children.

I waiting patiently until the children settled down to begin the conversation.

“What did you do this morning,” I looked at one of the children and asked casually.

“We prayed,” responded Gnanasundaran, one of the boys who have been living at BESSO for over 5 years.

“What did you pray for?” I probed.

“For rice, dal, oil, and sugar,” he softly said.

I hid my surprise and looked at Sam who was by my side. “The children begin the day with a prayer. We pray for donors to visit us and donate rations. For instance, we need 14 kilos of rice for tomorrow’s meal,” said Sam with a smile.

Having visited several homes in the past, most of them having rations stocked in advance, I grew anxious.

Sensing my worry, Sam added saying: “I am sure we will get the provisions that we need before end of today. Since the time we launched BESSO home, we have been having enough food to provide our children. Donors from the neighbourhood as well as from nearby villages sponsor breakfast and lunch expenses from time to time. It is only that we do not have enough donors to support us throughout the year.”

The children grew restless as we spoke and tried to distract us. To put them at ease we played some games and began to chatter again.

“How many of you like to live here?” I asked directly.

All the children raised their hands instantly.

“If there is a better school in the neighbourhood, will you go there?” I asked again.

“No. We won’t,” replied the children in chorus.

“Then, tell me what is so good here?” I inquired.

“We have food to eat; place to stay; a sleeping mat, and friends to play. Besides, our teachers take good care of us,” said Glory, one of the older girls.

Sam said beaming with pride, “Until I joined CSIM, I was managing BESSO with the donations that came from individuals and companies from time to time. I now realize that we should have a sustainable income to have a secure tomorrow. I therefore plan to provide skill training for children over 14 years of age and engage them productively by launching a vocational training unit. Although I do believe that good deeds never fail, I have been taught by CSIM how to carry forward this noble deed.”

As lunch time neared, we stepped out to spend time with the visitors who were waiting to meet the children. Most of the children at BESSO are orphaned, while a few have single parents.

Munratna, a single mother, was waiting to meet her children Sudha and Sudhakar whom she had admitted at BESSO some seven years ago. After a brief while, I joined her to listen to her story.

“I live at Denkanikottai. My husband is an alcoholic and used to abuse me. I therefore got separated and began to live with my mother. I could

not take care of my children as I worked as a coolie and was away the whole day. Thus, I admitted them in BESSO,” said Munratna.

“I visit my children every month, and spend time with them. I learn that my husband too visits our children occasionally. Apparently, my mother-in-law has come to meet her grandchildren today and we just met after a very long time. I am happy that my children are taken good care by BESSO. They know how to read and write, and besides our mother tongue Kannada, they are conversant in Tamil, Telugu, and English too,” she signed off.

After clicking pictures of children in the playground and distributing chocolates I continued to converse with Sam.

“In 1991, we first launched BESSO in a rented premise at Denkanikottai. For over ten years, we kept moving from one place to another as our landlord did not permit us to continue for more than a year. It was a huge challenge for us to keep shifting our residence year after year. In 2000, we had visitors from Seventh Day Adventist Church. One of their members offered us a one-time donation, and we used it to purchase 40 cents of land and construct this building,” said Sam.

BESSO has separate buildings to house the boys and girls and have a large play area. The older children help the younger ones by washing their clothes and providing succor when they feel home sick. “The children maintain their own rooms and also assist in cleaning the premise. One of our students is now pursuing engineering in Chennai and we fund her education costs totally,” added Sam.

BESSO coordinates health awareness camps in nearby villages and also organizes sensitization programmes on parenting and values. “We did

not have enough funds to organize camps in 2013, but will certainly plan some this year. We have counselor visit families and encourage reconciliation. We have also reunited several children with their families,” said Sam.

The lunch bell rang and the children rushed to the dining hall. They all queued and awaited eagerly to have their plate filled with chicken biryani and raita and the room was packed with flavor.

“Today’s lunch is being sponsored by one of our donors. Hence, it is chicken biryani. The journey of BESSO has been rough, and challenges do remain. But, I am not deterred at all. Miracles have happened, and will happen,” Sam signed off confidently.

As the children enjoyed their meal, I wondered along with Sam if a miracle would certainly happen for BESSO so that these children would get to have a good meal every day.

— **Marie Banu**



Rural Re-Inventions

Call it a bias of sorts, but the fact remains that poverty in an urban tapestry receives a great deal of attention. The rural poor are many a time, forgotten and ignored. That could simply be because of the greater amount of media focus on cities, when compared to villages. The same reason why academic disciplines like developmental studies, rural development and skill-development have become the need of the hour, in the continuing attempt to ensure holistic development of the country. It is here, that an NGO like the Bhagavatula Charitable Trust (BCT) comes in. The nearly four-decade-old trust has, for the greater part of its existence, made its mission synonymous with the progress of rural Vishakapatnam.

“When I’m asked ‘why villages’, I often ask, ‘why not?’” says Sri Ram Murty, Secretary, BCT, taking us through BCT’s journey since 1976.

That was the year his father, Dr B V Parameswara Rao, founded the trust, paving the way for rural development of the rural hamlets around Vizag. Continuing his father's mission, Sri Ram is today, secretary of BCT — a responsibility he has assumed only since 2009. “There are several challenges that our villages are faced with, today. A number of these challenges have to do with agriculture,” he says, speaking at length about how crucial awareness and education of proper agricultural practices are, in rural development. In fact, it is in this area that a large chunk of BCT's work comes to the fore, as Sri Ram himself believes, that existing agricultural practices — existing subsidies included — are far from ideal. “A farmer isn't aware of what kind of soil is suited to a certain kind of fertilizer. We tend to assume they know. But the fact still remains, that they don't,” he says.

Speaking of BCT's current mission towards better awareness in agricultural practices, Sri Ram says that subsidies in agriculture are also out of sync with what farmers really need. “There's a large subsidy for urea, but nothing for Potash,” he explains, “Farmers tend to thus use more urea and less potash and that leads to the growth of tender leaves, which in turn become an ideal target for pests.” And scenarios like these are just one of many reasons why he believes agriculture today, requires a major makeover in the overall effort towards holistic rural development. However, it's not merely agriculture that BCT has involved itself with. Healthcare, education and skill-development are three other areas of a four-pronged approach towards the accomplishment of BCT's mission.

“A number of children in the villages hadn't completed their education. The boys were made to work and the girls stopped going to school when they attained puberty,” Sri Ram explains. Changing this, required

innovation. And innovation came in the form of BCT's first-of-its-kind Residential Model High School. Through this system, children in villages were encouraged to continue education by way of non-conventional methods of academic instruction. All this, in the attempt to get over the passive blackboard-styled teaching, which slowly began giving way to interactive teaching, distribution of notes at the school and creation of subject-specific classrooms — teaching methodology that had not been heard of in villages.

Another area that BCT has made rapid strides in is women empowerment. A number of opportunities have been extended to women in villages, in employment-generating areas like screen printing, papad-making and animal husbandry, to name a few. In fact, Sri Ram believes that women empowerment alongside skill-development, agriculture and education continue to remain the key focus areas for BCT. However, he believes that agriculture and the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) systems in this field could be a potential game-changer. “Today, as far as agriculture is concerned, there’s a helpline for farmers to call in case they need help or assistance,” he explains, “But that’s just not enough. The government has to be pro-active enough to reach out to these farmers, instead of expecting the farmers to reach out to them.” This, he feels can be achieved only through media that allows for awareness, education and communication to reach the farmer, and thereby help in the development of their trade.

As far as the future is concerned, Sri Ram feels that BCT can achieve a whole lot more, but on a macro-level. “As we stand today, we are doing good work, but at a grass-root level. The challenge for tomorrow lies in getting all this on a macro level and a larger platform.” Perhaps

in doing so, the trust itself will be able to finally achieve its vision of creating change in Vishakapatnam's villages, in addition to bringing about holistic development in the quality of life within each of these villages. However, for now, a bottom-up approach keeps BCT's work in good stead, even as its four-pronged approach to improving agriculture, education, women empowerment and skill-development could well make it a real agent of change.



Power To The Child

The Salesians of Don Bosco have for long, played a key role in taking Don Bosco's guiding philosophy of service for society, across the world. Through the course of the work that the group does, caring for children has been a top priority. But today's times call for a more intense campaign for child rights and the empowerment of children in exercising these rights. And through the Bangalore Rural Education and Development Society (BREADS), a group of Salesians in Karnataka have managed to achieve just that. "In a nutshell, it's all about empowering children," says Fr Joy Nedumparambil, Executive Director of BREADS Bangalore. "Through our visits across Karnataka, we've managed to identify several key issues that impact the lives of underprivileged kids in the State," he says, "Through empowerment initiatives we've tried to tackle these issues head-on." That's when Project CREAM came to be.

An abbreviation for Child Rights Education and Action and Movement, CREAM is a strategy that aims at social development. Its target audience includes young at risk and children afflicted with HIV. Through social development schemes, BREADS aims at developing the skills of children to make them industry-ready, and thereby secure jobs in BPOs and hospitality among other industries. “A key approach to making this work lay in making children understand that they should participate in their own development and thereby work towards self-empowerment,” Fr Joy says. In the course of doing so, he explains, such children also become aware of their rights. Another pivotal function that Project CREAM aims to achieve is to assess existing violations of child rights, and work towards rehabilitation in these areas. “This project has the potential to reach out to nearly 75,000 children across the State,” says Fr Joy. Among its objectives is eradication of social evils like child marriage and child labour, which BREADS considers a priority in the execution of Project CREAM.

A four-pronged approach is used to achieve these objectives. “The children are first trained in understanding their rights, and knowing right from wrong. We then encourage the formation of clubs, which become watchdogs of child rights, aiming to protect the rights of these children in a collective manner,” says Fr Joy explaining the four-pronged approach that Project CREAM adopts. The other two features include ‘action’ and ‘campaign’, which are as important as the first two steps and could be potential game-changers in the success of Project CREAM. “Action involves getting the children themselves to act up against cases of violation of child rights. In fact, each school has Child Rights Trust Regional Network,” says Fr Joy, “It’s an extension of our initial strategy to empower children in protecting their rights.”

The last step, of course, lies in extensive campaigning against social evils like child marriage and child labour, which Fr Joy says led to the establishment of the Karnataka State Network of Child Rights, across the State of Karnataka.

For an initiative that isn't even two years old (BREADS began Project CREAM in Karnataka in November 2012), BREADS has come a long way. In managing to trickle down all the way to the smallest of government schools in Karnataka, it has also managed to reach out to thousands of children in the furtherance of its mission of self-empowerment. "Nearly 90 percent of these children that we refer to, study in government schools," says Fr Joy, "And that itself is ample proof that we need to tackle government institutions and take our message to those places, first."

Just a couple of months ago, BREADS Bangalore organised a two-day training workshop for the staff of Project CREAM. The workshop aimed at brainstorming where Project CREAM could be taken to, in its next phase and what were the challenges that lay ahead. In identifying these key areas, the initiative could see itself enhance its working model and perhaps become better equipped in its mission of self-empowerment. The training programme included a talk by Nagasimha Rao, RTE Task Force, on how to be more child-friendly while continuing to remain assertive. His talk also focussed on diplomacy measures when dealing with community stakeholders. The workshop aimed at enhancing interpersonal communication skills among the staff of Project CREAM so as to allow for better communication with the children. This of course, is keeping in line with Fr Joy's vision for where the project will go from here. "Our mission is to spread the message of empowerment and to create awareness pertaining to child rights," he says, "So,

even after the project ends or our work here is done, the message of empowerment should continue. The stakeholders in the welfare of a child ought to take it upon themselves to continue looking into the best interests of a child and thereby spreading the message of empowerment among themselves.” In a sense, this enhanced empowerment is what Project CREAM initially started out to achieve, among children. In empowering the future directors of empowerment among children, there’s no denying that the investment in empowerment has certainly reaped rich dividends.



From community groups to rural producers associations

I cannot help but get excited whenever I visit Madurai, in Tamil Nadu, because I will be meeting people like Muthu Velaudham. Muthu, as he is known popularly, is in his forties and has a massive ball of energy with passion and ideas. When he was in his early twenties he drove around on a motorbike with (name) as his pillion passenger, who is a key functionary of Pradhan, a reputed NGO.

Muthu grew up living on the farm and making a living out of agriculture. Extended family work ethics and implementing contracts came naturally, he says. “I left home when I was 18. Ever since, I am running about doing things with community.” Not a day goes without him doing a minimum of 200 kilometers of driving around. Covenant for Community Development - CCD - is the result of such massive hard work!

CCD’s work in the last 12 years is legendary for its particular approach

in working with communities. Good aspects of culture and faith is well integrated as it works well resonating positively with the community at large. From the arid lands of Ramnad district CCD has spread across India during the last decade. CCD has engaged in post-disaster rehabilitation, savings, coir making, and herbal markets thereby setting a trail blazing and pioneering record.

A massive community savings programme was handed over to the government, but the mobilisation of the community, solidarity, mutual support, community participation and ownership remains solid and comes in handy as CCD is embarking on path breaking models of producer organizations. These models are run, managed, and provide livelihood for hundreds as much as creates jobs from Herbal factory that adds value to Briquettes made from waste; and Mango pulp factory that brings foreign equity to overcome massive debts. The sheer variety of experiences is a valuable treasure trove for anyone to benefit from.

I had the honour to recently travel and visit all the three units, talking, sharing, questioning and learning from communities and others.

At Sevayur, there is a community run school that educates children from villages up to class 5. The school is surrounded by a forest of wood land, and will stun and make you wonder how this is possible in an otherwise dry, flat, and dry flat lands.

“It took us a decade to make this indigenous forest possible. There are many species of birds and hundreds of local species of trees, shrubs and medical plants. There are more than 200 bird species sighted here including long range migratory ones,” says Muthu.

The water that this dry wooded area traps and saves have helped villages

in nearly 5 kms radius to drill and find fresh water. The village children roam around without fear and with much smiles—an experience that is unique! Rabbits sprint and jump while you hear the howl of fox and Peacocks singing freely. Annually, over 100 colleges and schools visit the newly made forest to see the herbal museum too.

Here is an example where nature triumphs and the poorest soil is converted into a veritable habitat for various fauna and flora, not forgetting that the wood lot soaks in the carbon and provides you the critical water that gives life and livelihood across wider areas.

With the visionary ideas of Muthu and the community, CCD were the pioneers in medicinal health, plant collection, processing and marketing. Muthu says that while the demand is more than 30,000 tons, CCD supplies around 600 tons each year.

The processing plant piled up with fruits, twigs, dried flowers and powdered plant material sends a whiff of medicinal perfume that is overpowering in an enduring way.

Seva, meaning, a place of service, is known as the herbal hub. Muthu confirms that there are many others—NGOs community and business—who have followed CCDs work in the Medicinal plant front, but no one has reached to the extent of diversification.

If you are popping a medicinal pill from Dabur or Himalaya, remember, there is a possibility that it came from the hardy hand of a village women in drought prone Ramnad where her mother could have been a victim of drought induced hunger. But, there is no more such a problem when the family is part of CCD programme. Companies have now provided further processing machines to CCD to add value to the

Herbal medicinal plant.

Sustainable values have been ingrained into the enterprise to achieve self-reliance. These include: conserving local resources that are raw material, adopting conservation practices, interacting with the markets, initiating efforts to meet new demands, innovating product presentation and marketing, identifying emerging problems, and addressing them before hand.

Nowhere is the above statement expressed so unequivocally and manifested so truly than in the business of making small bricks from waste for energy. The business of making energy efficient Briquettes in a former dairy shed in at Pullothu in Madurai District has details about the cows that were tended here once. It now runs a very compact and unusual machine which is operated by the community members who are trained to undertake the operation.

A small machine converts all waste, including agricultural waste such as dried ground nut and so on. The end product looks like a smooth sausage which is in high demand for industrial use. The demand outscores the supply, therefore is a great opportunity for expansion and consolidation for the community.

“It all started with energy efficient stoves, but branched into producing the energy efficient and carbon reducing fuel,” exclaims Muthu.

CCD sells the Briquettes from small to medium industries; from food to steel industries; in Tamil Nadu. CCD’s business supplies are more than 600 tons with demand far more than supply.

On the left of Nathum road, 17 kilometers north of Madurai is Kadavur village. An area that is at the heart of massive mango production for

more than a century. Here, small to medium sized mango pulp factories existed that folded up due to economic reasons. If there is now revival of the pulp factory, the credit should go to the initiative and effort by the Aharam business of CCD. Aharam has revived the mango economy, provided jobs and revenue for the community living here. Presently CCD sells about 400 tons of mango pulp both in India as well as exports.

In the last two decades, business and enterprise have expanded in India. But, the benefits have mostly eluded rural communities who are at the heart of supplying items, raw materials, and semi finished products. CCD wants to change this and reverse the process through fair and sustainable models of business and enterprise.

When asked what would help to make this business expand, “Through reach add value,” says Muthu in his inimitable way adding, “The sky is the limit for these products due to heavy demand, but we are constrained on the working capital needs. This is the only bottleneck,” he smiles.

For all innovators, entrepreneurs, and rural business start-ups CCD and Muthu is an inspiring and potential partner. For investors who care for sustainable investment—here is a superb opportunity!

— **Pushpanath Krishnamurthy**



Engineering Water For Sustainability

Depletion of ground water reserves across regions has remained a concern, specifically in the context of agriculture. India being an agrarian economy primarily has the obligation of replenishing these resources to make them sustainable. Centre for World Solidarity (CWS) is an organization working on this front by promoting community based models. “Headquartered in Secunderabad, Andhra Pradesh, CWS works with more than 150 organisations spread across 5 states in India – Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar and Jharkhand,” introduces Mr R V Rama Mohan, Joint Director-SuGWM project. Also supporting the state and national networks of these organisations, CWS plays an intermediary role engaging in developing new models, providing technical support to implement them in the communities, support organisations to take these to people and thence advocate to policy changes for a wider impact.

Rama Mohan explains that CWS works on three broad themes – *human dignity*, that concerns the rights of tribals, dalits, women discrimination and violence; local governance, where empowerment of Gram Panchayat leaders is focused through capacity building, encouraging women participation; and *sustainable livelihoods*. Access to water resources, forest areas and their usage, agricultural land usage/distribution, right to land are concerns that have to be addressed with equity to ensure sustainable livelihoods in the rural areas. “We have been working consistently on promoting participatory approaches in water management, especially ground water management for the last 10 years,” Rama Mohan informs. “We work on creating small models, promote alternative approaches to water management, generate experiences and demonstrate the impact through our partner organisations,” he adds.

Along with the technical permutations in line with the local needs, CWS plays a liaising role by aggregating experiences and relating them with existing policies or schemes. Participatory ground water management, community management of ground water are approaches promoted by CWS through various projects. They have also gone over finding a place in the latest Model Bill on Ground Water in India. Often farmers are seen investing in drilling new wells to suit individual farming styles, but most of these wells are failing. Replenishment of ground water is never thought of or they are unaware of. Competitive drilling of wells by farmers, as many as 50 to 60 over a period of few years but all failing, lead to loss of investment and, profusely ground water reserves. “Our work with the communities is two pronged. Social regulations to manage the already existing wells (some jointly owned too) and prevention of drilling new wells. It has taken 4 to 5 years to convince

people about this approach, only for the cause of sustainability. With no other option, they have to think of sustainability,” he says.

One of CWS’s landmark projects —Community based Sustainable Ground Water Management (SuGWM)—has demonstrated the workable combination of integration and sustainability, through community participation. “Water-Sanitation and Irrigation are usually dealt as two separate themes. We tried to bring these two together. This was strongly influenced by the inference that construction of water infrastructure that ends to be defunct is not enough. Absence of a local operation & management system and the lack of source sustainability when (wells dry out in summer) have added to this dismal picture. Inequity in water distribution during these times has a strong implication on peripheral habitations where marginalized groups like dalits and tribals live,” shares Rama Mohan, whose team worked on a holistic approach with these concerns staring at them. SuGWM was initiated to achieve sustainability in ground water management, addressing drinking water, sanitation and agricultural needs. Institutionalising social regulations on water use management in the 6 Gram Panchayats of Andhra Pradesh, promoting traditional water sharing practices, enhancing water and energy use efficiency in agriculture, ensuring source well sustainability, improving local operation and maintenance systems have all come together in benefiting more than 3000 families in accessing water.

Constant exploration has led the team under him to the discovery of Gonchi irrigation system that is more than 700 years old, still prevailing in Andhra Pradesh and bordering districts of Karnataka. “In Gonchi, seepage water from a river or a stream is diverted and shared by farmers in an equitable manner. We documented this practice in the present condition and informed the government departments about it. Today,

renovation of these channels is taken up through NREGS”.

CWS has of late launched a campaign called ‘SpliceDrip’. Interestingly, SpliceDrip is based on the model of social entrepreneurship, generating employment for rural youth. Drip irrigation, also known as localized irrigation, is a method that saves water and fertilizer by allowing water to drip slowly to the roots of plants, either onto the soil surface or directly onto the root zone, through a network of valves, pipes, tubing and emitters. This is done through narrow tubes that deliver water directly to the base of the plant. The campaign is an effort to retrieve abandoned pipes once used for drip irrigation, thereby preventing plastic pollution to the environment. On retrieval, these pipes are connected and their reuse is promoted for the cultivation of vegetables and food crops. “These pipes can be used for another 4 to 5 years,” says Rama Mohan.

The most exciting part of this campaign is the local network that has emerged in the Anantpur and Warangal districts of AP. Appreciating the cooperation of farmers in this initiative, he goes on to acknowledge the same from local entrepreneurs and micro irrigation companies, who have walked the extra mile to balance sustainability and micro investment, for long term benefits. Here is how the cycle works.

- The farmers are assisted by CWS in retrieving and installing the old pipes in their fields. The other spare parts required to make this system operational are purchased at subsidized rates from companies that partake in this initiative. These micro companies also provide other services to the farmers at subsidized cost.
- Local entrepreneurs are the youngsters from the neighbourhood trained under this campaign to do the installation and

maintenance for the farmers, with decent remuneration.

Having been a part of multiple projects and campaigns such as the aforesaid, Rama Mohan is confident that CWS will be able to influence policy decisions and widely disseminate the need and effectiveness of an integrated approach to ground water management at the local level.

For more info on SuGWM project <http://cwsy.org/sugwm>

— **Shanmuga Priya.T**



Can The Other Side Also Adapt?

Recently, there was a video on SIGNS Restaurant in the West, doing its rounds on YouTube. The restaurant employed only people who were deaf and mute. Their menu also had clear signs mentioned on it to help customers place their orders. SIGNS received an appreciable response. One obviously wonders if things like these can come up in India. And the answer, hearteningly, is YES!

Deaf Leaders Foundation, founded by Mr. Murali is the organization that has grown beyond nominal expectations. Founded in 2002, Murali had worked very hard to evolve it into its present form. Today, the Foundation is quite synonymous with empowerment of hearing impaired. Murali, himself being one, could study only till class 12. His father, who was then the District Collector of Salem, was very much interested in Social Welfare activities. When both of his children were

born deaf, he decided to work more constructively for the welfare of the disabled. Education and marriage were the two areas he had concentrated upon.

Passing out of school, Murali decided to run a tailoring shop and employed two more persons with hearing impairment. However, this was not successful. The family soon moved to Ootacamund in 1990, where he worked as a Supervisor for Hindustan Photo Films (HPF). 12 years at HPF exposed him to the harsh realities that deaf people face in securing employment and challenges thereafter. Sympathy and indifference disturbed him. While discrimination in private sector was becoming way too blatant for him to handle, he got married in 1991.

Murali and his wife were very much interested in Sports and Murali represented the country in Table Tennis tournaments. By 2000, his family moved to Coimbatore and Murali was more than clear on leaving HPF and initiating something for people like him. He opened a school for the deaf children in 2000, with only 20 children coming on the rolls. The school was started in collaboration with a local NGO. Within a year of its completion, Murali learnt that the language used for transacting lessons, inability to develop leadership among deaf children, and teaching computers were serious flaws and called for urgent attention. He decided to build on this line of thought and thus was born Deaf Leaders (Deaf Empowerment Activities For Literacy Education Accessible Development Empowerment Rehabilitation & Sports) Foundation in March 2003.

Deaf Leaders Foundation works with the focused objective of contributing to the betterment and understanding of DEAF people in India. The school provides a conducive atmosphere for all round

development of the deaf from class 10 way up to a wide range of UG courses and a few PG courses as well. On completing their studies, the students are also assisted in seeking employment. Right of choice is encouraged and promoted in every school activity. If a student wishes to start a business independently, Deaf Leaders also routes initial capital to support their venture.

For instance, when one of the students who was interested in catering and hotel management, he was assisted in opening a cafeteria in Coimbatore. This D' Café is run completely by the deaf in Peelamedu taluk of Coimbatore district. The basic knowledge of using signs for alphabets is all that one needs to know to make life easier for the deaf people around us. The menu at D' Café had signs of the alphabets T and C detailed to order Tea or Coffee respectively. Just about a year old, the café has now attracted attention from many, thanks to the press coverage by popular dailies. Local colleges in the district are now lining up to start a cafeteria in their colleges, in collaboration with the D' Café. Presently, there are two branches of this café – one outside a corporate office and another inside a fitness studio (both in Peelamedu), and both have been received very well by the localites.

Over the years, Deaf Leaders began to document soft copies of the teaching modules used for different subjects. Since sign language is the medium used, these DVDs can be used by any teacher who is working with deaf children. With life skills being an inbuilt component of the educational experience here, Deaf Leaders became more proficient in matching candidates with the jobs available in the market. Following skills enhancement and employment assistance, the foundation also took the initiative of launching a matrimonial site for the deaf people.

With entries coming in from across the country, Deaf Leaders perceives this as the need to give deaf people their space in deciding on their marriages.

Besides the above activities, there are parallel programmes to create awareness and promote the learning of sign language by the community members so that deaf people can interact with ease. Social Work and Psychology students have come forward to learn sign languages. The foundation has mastered in Indian and American Sign Language, the difference being use of two hands and only one hand respectively.

National Youth Leadership Training for the deaf was organized in 2010 giving a platform for the deaf to articulate their concerns and work on possible suggestions to take them forward with the government. The first ever T20 cricket championship for the deaf and marathon for the disabled were also initiated by the foundation in 2010. Interestingly, Deaf Leaders also organizes a pageant show for the deaf every two years and the winners are given an opportunity to represent the country at the International contest.

Deaf Leaders has also pioneered in organizing the International Deaf Film Festival, the second edition of which concluded recently in Calicut. The regular films do not have signs to help deaf understand or follow the story. This prevents them from enjoying a movie in completion. This film festival is an attempt to nourish their talent in making short films, where the entire crew are deaf members. Additionally, these movies also have sub titles so that ‘normal people’ can also understand. Every four years, they also organize the International Deaf Conference where the present scenario of deaf in the society are discussed from multiple perspectives.

Deaf Leaders does struggle for its existence. There is continuous look out for sponsors and the need to expand their network of donors. The school charges a deposit of Rs. 500 from every student so as to inculcate interest and responsibility amongst the students and all services are offered free of cost here.

Murali, a recipient of Best Social Worker Award from the Government of Tamil Nadu, lives to see the day when deaf people will be treated with equal respect and rights. Believing in their potential completely, Murali also articulates his dream project of establishing a channel exclusively for the deaf and dumb people. “Why should they be deprived of entertainment?” he exclaims through his signs.

(Thanks to Ms Sneha, Murali’s daughter and interpreter in helping us with the interview)

— **Shanmuga Priya.T**



Caring for childhood

While child rights itself has got its activists grappling with multiple things, addressing issues of children due to different circumstances needed its own space and attention. Especially for children living on the streets, it is all the more imperative to implement a well thought out strategy to ensure that their childhood is not all mired with the vagaries of street life.

Don Bosco Anbu Illam in Chennai was established in 1985 with the objective of rehabilitating children rescued from the streets. Rescue efforts were organized from a small centre in Mannadi. “Eventually, we realized that we had to provide shelter to rag pickers, children working on the platforms and those loitering on the streets as they had nobody to care for them,” says Fr Johnson, who has been Don Bosco Anbu Illam’s Director since 2010.

A humble beginning with 25 kids beset with numerous challenges in their rehabilitation saw Anbu Illam growing more pronounced in their strategies and pertinent efforts. They had to first draw the children out of street life's trauma. Inculcation of moral values and de-addiction counselling created more space for the children to realise their purpose in life and get mainstreamed. "Those were the days when schools would not be ready to accept our children," recalls Fr Johnson. The centre therefore began to impart basic education to these children. Children targeted were those below 13 years of age and over the years, Anbu Illam reached out to children below 18 years of age, as the universal definition of a child goes.

With some basic education and vocational training, the rescued children were able to secure jobs in the informal sector, and plan their future. As children were now being admitted in formal schools, the focus became to encourage them to continue at least till class 10. "Certificates in class 8 and 10 are becoming very crucial. Children are forced to take non-formal courses even in vocational training otherwise. With a class 10 certificate from the Government, they will be able to secure jobs in companies, which does promise a better pay structure and thence a better standard of living," says Fr. Johnson.

Vocational training for the children like tailoring is managed through network organisations like Don Bosco technical institutions. With the centre providing them all basic amenities, boys particularly are encouraged to do part time jobs so that they can manage their educational expenditure themselves. All children rehabilitated in the three centres have a personal bank account to save their earnings and are also covered under medical insurance, which is a commendable effort indeed.

Funds raised from Indian and foreign donors have been the centre's lifeline. Although foreign funding is now plummeting drastically, Anbu Illam has been constantly on the quest for donors. "Donors would want to celebrate their birthdays here with our children, who get to feel the sense of belongingness. Competitions are organized to commemorate specific events or in memory of great leaders and sponsors. It is very heartening to see the children participate with all zeal and try to win," smiles Fr Johnson.

In the 90s, it was the centre's conscious decision to send the children to private schools, the reason for which was twofold. One, government schools would not admit without the requisite documental proof and secondly, the quality of education at the private schools were much better than that in government schools. As the donors were able to support children and were more concerned about the quality of education for the children the choice of private schools became a norm for majority of the students, except those who preferred/required teaching in specific languages. "Private schools promised the concern we wanted for our children. They were very considerate and regularly kept us abreast of our children's academic progress. However, government schools are really picking up. Some of our children in government schools narrate enriching experiences during sports hours and other extra-curricular activities," says Fr Johnson.

Presently, there are 57 boys at Royapuram centre, 26 boys at Mullainagar centre and 39 girls at Kudangayur centre. Of the 39 girls, ten are in a boarding facility for better experience and socialization. They were also looking forward to that opportunity as it allowed them to focus on their studies better. From the 29 girls staying at the centre, three of them are attending college and one is pursuing nursing. Children, both boys and

girls avail the centre's facilities until they attain 18 years of age. Once adults, the centre intervenes to mainstream them in the society, which is the premise for this rehabilitation.

Fr Johnson says: "Children are with us until they complete their graduation. After securing a job, they move out independently and are also encouraged to do so, so that they learn to handle their lives independently. They are always in touch with the centre as meetings, celebrations always provide an occasion to come together. For girls, this is the first batch and therefore, the centre is not yet clear with concrete plans to settle them."

Efforts are made to reunite the child with his or her family. This is always the preferred choice. Unfortunately, this does not work in many cases. "Sometimes, the child comes back to the centre, when the family does not accept him/her. These circumstances affects the child emotionally and all the years' work in boosting their self-morale takes a beating. In one case, the child had returned to the centre thrice. He was not received well by his family," he adds.

"The help from a full time counsellor does not completely eliminate the trauma. With these impending challenges, the institution felt the need for a Social Reintegration Policy which will allow the people in charge to take appropriate steps when necessary. There are parents who wish to come to the centre and meet their children. Such parents are requested to come to the head office in Mannadi and not to the centre directly, as they are more conscious about the yearnings of the other children who do not have their families visiting them.

Three decades of being with the street children and the recent work on a Social Integration Policy have much to communicate regarding the

plight of vulnerable children living on the streets. But, how long the street children would have to thrive on such support is a deeper question that needs prudent answers.

— **Shanmuga Priya. T**



When Education Meets Development

It was 1974 when Padmabhushan Karamshibhai Somaiya established the Girivanavasi Pragati Mandal, a public charitable trust. The aim was simple: achieve what few trusts back then succeeded at — integrated rural development. Today, the fruit of his work sits on 11 acres, and is formally known as the Nareshwadi Learning Centre. It is in a nutshell, a continuance of the seeds that Padmabhushan Somaiya sowed, when he decided that integrated rural development was the way forward. “Being someone who couldn’t finish his schooling owing to his family background, he decided that he needs to pledge his life to educating children, communities who do not have the means and resources to pursue further education,” explains Dr Patricia Gokhale, CEO of the Maharashtra-based trust. “He would travel all over Bastar, interior areas of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan for health camps and eye camps,” she adds. It was during these travels, Dr Patricia explains, that Padmabhushan Somaiya concluded that he needed to establish a centre for training, livelihood and education, and thereby, the need for

vocational training institutes.

“He started with livelihood, imparting knowledge to the local tribes by way of training workshops and programmes, helping them to grow with better agriculture practices,” says Dr Patricia, “But at the same time, he said if he was to start a school here, it would have to be a residential school.” This was chiefly because Padmabhushan Somaiya realized that continuity was the key to educating migrant, agricultural labourers. “Being a one-crop area, after October, the whole family migrates, taking the children with them,” says Patricia, emphasizing on the need to establish a residential format of education back then.

Integration of vocational training, agriculture and education was no doubt, the way forward. Residential education soon ensured that continuity in instruction was established. The school that Padmabhushan Somaiya built was later registered as a Zilla Parishad. “The first Class 10 batch of the school appeared for their examinations in 1994,” recalls Susan, “There were no more than two students who made it all the way to Class 10.” It was, however, a small step in realizing the dream of integrated education and training.

Six years since 2007-08, Nareshwadi has focussed on re-living Padmabhushan Somaiya’s dream. This, it has achieved through renewed quality education. “By way of this revised approach to learning, we began paying a lot more attention to teacher training, health and community outreach, all of which became core issues in this mission to achieve quality education,” says Dr Patricia. Along the way, the NGO has battled challenges like school dropouts, including striving hard to improve the percentage of girl students in these schools. “From a relatively humble number of 22 percent enrolment of girls, we’ve

brought that number up to 47 percent,” Patricia says, “Our aim is to take it up to 50 percent even as we continue to witness improved attendance records.”

Through these advances in education, attendance and gender inclusion, Nareshwadi hasn’t forgotten its original mission of integrated rural development. Two hrs per day (between 9 and 11am) are spent on agriculture, sericulture and dairy. Along the way, the focus also shifted towards improving attendance records through one of the most unique studies conducted on this front. “It was always a known fact that if we needed more children in our schools, parents should not have to leave the village and go out in search for work for work,” explains Patricia. In an attempt to tackle issues like this, Nareshwadi Trust brainstormed the formation of what would then go on to become a one-of-its-kind resource-planning group run exclusively by children. “The children decided that the first thing they needed was electricity,” Patricia says. Incidentally, the village had no electricity until 2010. “Electricity was the responsibility of the Maharashtra State Electricity Board (MSEB). We gave the MSEB a call. Our children learnt to write out applications, requesting for power to these villages. They were successful.” The focus then shifted to another problem: drinking water.

Through all these efforts, the target of the group’s activities has been Maharashtra’s Warli tribe. Introducing Warli children to mainstream education, however, was no mean task. “The schools here were all Marathi-medium institutions,” Patricia explains, “Marathi is a language alien to the Warli people. That is when we decided that we had to quickly adopt a focus-based teaching model.” According to this model, children would be taught language and mathematics in a language that was familiar to them, which in this case, was Warli. “When the time

was right, we decided to slowly introduce them to Marathi,” Patricia adds.

An effort like this required teachers. “We approached Cognizant with a request to support the payment of salaries for four new teachers,” says Patricia, “The company agreed.” As part of the new teaching programme, these teachers taught the children songs and poems in Warli. This was followed by a slow introduction to Marathi. “Based on the competencies that the child needed to develop, we broke up the syllabus,” Patricia continues, “That’s how we got children into mainstream education.” If there was one little detail that the teachers were keen to follow, it was the need for inclusive education. “No child was ever dubbed a slow learner,” Patricia explains, “There were children who coped well, and others who needed extra attention. We never gave children the impression that they were being graded on the basis of performance.”

Today, the Nareshwadi Trust continues to introduce tribal children to mainstream education, with great success. Dr Patricia for one, believes, that the focus-based model of teaching must continue. Challenges also exist in large numbers. Thirty-two teachers, after all, can take a toll on funding. However, what remains unchanged is tireless work towards improving the quality of education and the continuance of integrated rural development, which could soon become a benchmark for other learning modules.



Everywhere For Children!

Statistics on children in India have always cried loud for concerted efforts in order to make children’s holistic growth and development a priority. With many government and non-government organisations doing the ride in this regard and special efforts in different states to incorporate child rights as part of the election manifestos of political parties, it is only timely that we spent some time to learn the story of one of the country’s oldest establishments protecting and promoting child rights in Tamil Nadu.

Post Indian independence, there was growing realisation amongst many leaders that most Child Care Institutions in many states were run by religious organisations. The need for a secular body working for children, with a pan Indian presence gained prominence. In 1952, Indian Council for Child Welfare (ICCW) was thus founded as a national level NGO

under the auspices of the then Health Minister. Notably, the seeds were sown by many women freedom fighters. ICCW's primary objective was to serve as a platform for launching different initiatives for the benefit of the country's children. The National Body's work is complemented by respective State Councils, which are all now registered as independent bodies, affiliated to ICCW, New Delhi.

ICCW – Tamil Nadu was established in 1953 under the aegis of Smt. Manjubashini, a great freedom fighter and a staunch follower of Gandhian principles. Today, ICCW-TN stands as a pioneering organisation in the state, protecting children and influencing many others in this realm. ICCW-TN has its branches in all the Districts of Tamil Nadu, with District Collector as its ex-officio President. Special Programmes are being implemented in the Districts of Madurai, Virudhunagar, Krishnagiri, Kanniyakumari, Cuddalore, Vellore, Trichy, Nilgiris, Thanjavur, Thiruvallur, Tirunelveli, Kancheepuram, Salem and Nagapattinam.

ICCW-TN's work is spread across three planes – direct intervention, capacity building of key stakeholders, and advocacy. All these efforts are supported by the extensive documentation at the council that progresses as a parallel activity alongside other projects and programmes. One of their projects in Usilambatti proved that consistent interventions supported by capacity building of the communities can go a long way in moulding people's mindsets.

Usilambatti is infamous for its record of female infanticide and foeticide. ICCW-TN began to work on the prevention of female infanticide and initiated multiple programmes here. The district that recorded 200 killings per year in 1987-1988 came on headlines for another reason

in 2001. It was the first year with no female infant killings! As the change in people's attitude towards the girl was more apparent, ICCW-TN changed course in the following years to suit the needs of the community.

Presently, ICCW-TN focuses on empowering girl children by facilitating education sponsorships and other such interventions. Also, work is administered through the 350 SHGs formed by the Council. Another notable of their projects in the Tsunami Response project that was implemented in five coastal districts of Tamil Nadu. Counselling services, building of houses, sponsorships for children, etc were some of the components of this project. These programmes are still functional in Kanyakumari and Cuddalore districts, the worst tsunami affected districts. Comprehending that the impact of disasters like this leave the children most traumatised, ICCW-TN designed exclusive programmes that will help children's development in a family or community set up.

Another project that needs a mention is the one implemented by ICCW-TN in Virudu Nagar, Srivilliputhur district – Child Labour Relief Project. In 1993, the district teams worked tirelessly with 3000 children who were engaged in 139 match factories. The launch of Women Self Help Groups, Training programmes for enforcement personnel, well-planned advocacy, awareness programme on dangers of child labour, and motivational programmes for youth were some of the early efforts initiated to thwart child labour.

On the other hand, enrolling and retaining children in schools was seen as the only possible way of keeping children away from labour. Village Education and Development Committees (VEDC) were formed with the local people on board and thrust with capital to be given as

loans influencing parents from marginalised communities to send their children to school. The project that started in 10 villages, expanded to 110 villages in a decade's time. In 2001, 83 villages were declared child labour free!

As the child labour scene improved, the Council met with the challenge of guiding children who had completed 10 years of schooling but had no technical skills. Lack of Employability drove them back to the match industry and some joined the textile mills. To avert this crisis, the Sudar Community College was established, giving these adolescents space for skill accumulation, thereby leading to gainful employment.

In Srivilliputhur, the ICCW team worked with the mothers of children from the 3 most backward blocks in Krishnagiri District. SHGs of mothers were formed to help them earn a supplementary income that will aid their children's education. Soon, networking with 21 government schools also came in handy to control school drop outs. Other services like transport facilities, bridge schools and teacher training programmes were introduced to eradicate child labour in this district.

ICCW-TN is very categorical about its support services for children. Parents and relatives are supported through sponsorships in order to prevent institutionalisation. Kinship care or single parent care is facilitated so that children do not miss the atmosphere of family and community in their formative years. More than 450 sponsorships in Chennai and another 300 in Cuddalore and Kanyakumari are being provided presently.

ICCW-TN also runs crèches for children in 5 districts in the state, helping women in the agricultural sector and others. Unlike commercial day care centres, children are provided with noon meals and health

services. 3 children's homes and Child Line in Chennai and Cuddalore are also administered by ICCW-TN.

The Council is the only training centre that caters to Supervisors of ICDS (Integrated Child Protection Scheme) centres in the state. As a pioneer in training child care workers in the government departments and others, the Council has evolved a multi disciplinary training module that will address the needs of all those working for the protection of children. The Council also has an Information, Documentation and Research Unit to abet its advocacy efforts. Regular publications provided insight on the plight of children in the State and also advocated policy level recommendations. One of their publications exclusively analysed the budget for children in Tamil Nadu, adding discrete value to the debate on the need for child budgeting to be made mandatory. Studies are also undertaken on subjects related to child rights and pertinent topics. Presently, a study on residential care has been undertaken. The library here has an exhaustive collection of articles and books on child rights, child abuse, child development, child health, etc.

Six decades of work for the cause of children has won them several accolades. But more importantly, ICCW-TN has achieved that merit, giving the space to be active and articulate about government's policy decisions. With every success, they have identified the subsequent need requiring their intervention and thus, the journey continues, inspiring and supporting many stake holders, in the best interest of our children.

— **Shanmuga Priya.T**



Helping Them Move Independently

The urge to give back to the society and contribute something for the have-nots has been the primary motive behind most of the social initiatives. Mukti, a social organisation based in Chennai, comes as no exception. But, its consistency for almost three decades now is noteworthy and appreciable.

Mukti was founded in 1986 by Mrs. Meena Dadha, who was then a housewife hailing from Jaipur. Chennai exposed her to many tragedies like accidents and diseases that curtailed people from even moving around independently. “She was alarmed with the number of accidents that shattered families,” recalls Ms Stella, Chief Operating Officer of Mukti. Meena soon realised that providing artificial limbs for amputees could make a world of difference. She decided to do this free of cost for the poor. Soon after, Ms Tulsi, her close aid, was sent to Jaipur to learn the art of making artificial limbs.

Mukti started off as a small unit in Meena's garage, with Tulsi and a handyman beginning to manually produce artificial limbs. Her initiative was supported by her parents, who decided to help her in every possible way. In a few years time, they bought a place in Minambakkam to set up Mukti Centre. Her conviction to make the services accessible for all was clearly reflected in her choice of locality for the centre. Minambakkam is located close to the railway station and the airport and is easily accessible by road too.

The laborious manual production yielded only 10 artificial foot per day. Was this capacity adequate? "A beneficiary who was brought in by his/her friends or relatives at 9 am, can actually walk out of my centre by 4 pm with the artificial limb that was exclusively produced for him/her. We have proven this possible, while hospitals take weeks of time to deliver the same service," asserts Stella adding that the manufacturing unit now functions with five technicians and three assistants.

In early 2000s, Mukti decided to venture into production of callipers for polio victims. "Our beneficiaries are amputees and polio victims from India, Srilanka, Bangladesh and other developing nations. We also provide free boarding and lodging facilities for those who hail from rural and semi urban areas," informs Stella.

Mukti also provides artificial limbs and callipers for new borns. Providing attention to each and every beneficiary reiterates the happiness and fulfilment of the Mukti team. "These artificial limbs are a big boon to care takers of patients who have to be carried everywhere. Their sense of liberation and relief is so apparent and touching," shares Stella.

Besides providing mobility aids, Mukti also works to mainstream

differently abled individuals in the society. Characteristically, we can see physically challenged members working here to prepare the artificial foot. Awareness programmes, camps, sports and cultural events are organised frequently for the beneficiaries.

Mentally challenged individuals affiliated to SCARF have also been employed at Mukti. Mukti spares no effort in acknowledging their talents. Outstanding achievements by physically challenged individuals are recognised through the Lalchand Milapchand Dadha Award instituted by Mukti.

In the last 28 years, Mukti's style of producing limbs and callipers has remained manual. "Looking back, more than 200,000 people have benefitted from this effort. How all this is sustained is our next concern," Stella smiles.

She says, "Mukti receives no grants or donations. Friends, family members and well wishers have contributed to our organisation in several ways. Our visibility comes through word of mouth. Not surprising though, given that Mukti is the only NGO providing artificial limbs and callipers free of cost to the poor. A beneficiary is charged only three hundred rupees, and that too to meet the administrative costs.

This is not all! Mukti has its second centre located at Kottakuppam near Pondicherry. This centre comes in with additional facilities for the talented and upcoming physically challenged artists. Apart from the regular logistic support, Mukti centre arranges regular interactive workshops with renowned artists in the field, allowing beneficiaries to observe, learn and be guided by professionals. Further trying to complement their talent, Mukti has also established an art gallery in this centre. "It is an art gallery that has been set up to promote artists;

organise workshops with renowned artists, but with a deep - rooted connection with the physically challenged.” The restaurant and event management venture in the campus are add-ons to comfort guests and visitors. Every step is taken considering its usefulness to Mukti’s cardinal cause—providing artificial limbs and callipers to amputees free of cost.

With such innate work and presence, Mukti has successfully delivered 700 artificial limbs along with raw materials to provide foot to Sri Lankan war victims. “Mukti is not into bulk production. Every beneficiary is different and it is important for us to produce a suitable limb for them. We make 5 limbs and 5 callipers in a day, along with the repairs ranging from 15 to 20. The procedure for a limb takes about 4 hours. So far, our technical team has been able to successfully meet the demand,” says Stella who oversees the production of 600 limbs and 400 callipers every month.

Mukti’s future, is seemingly driven by the growing demand and the expertise it has accrued over the decades. The centre presently hosts student interns from universities in US and UK, who have come here to learn the procedure of making artificial limbs and callipers. As Stella explains, Mukti has always been open to exploring opportunities within its limits to best benefit its target beneficiaries. With new grants promising to come in, Mukti is also looking at the option of adopting machinery for its production. Soon to hit the three decades mark, Mukti has succeeded remarkably in its mission to help amputees and polio victims move independently. It has also gone further in facilitating their integration in mainstream society.

— **Shanmuga Priya.T**



Change-Maker

When Mohammed Azaruddin completed his polytechnic course a few years ago, he did not seek out a career that would test his engineering skills. It was, instead, a social calling that had him wanting to make a difference to his surroundings. Back then, he volunteered at the Tamil Nadu Handicapped Federation Charitable Trust. Today, he runs an NGO. Nearly two years ago, Azar decided to do his bit for society by starting the Nal Vidhaigal Trust. Aimed at bettering the lives of underprivileged children and the physically challenged, Azar’s trust is at the forefront of championing social change, in a small way.

“Get a job wasn’t exactly a priority for me, once I finished my education,” says Azar, taking us through how he went about setting up the trust. “Sure, getting a job would definitely mean my family would be in a much better place than they are, right now. But working for the society, especially the physically challenged and children was what

really got me going.” Today, at 26, Azar is certainly one of the younger social entrepreneurs around. What keeps him going is simple: the drive to sustain something that was put together by students like him. “Our trust was the work of a bunch of us who studied at college. That, to me, is what Nal Vidhaigal is all about. That, to me, is what I feel must continue.” And that’s why, even today, Nal Vidhaigal continues to be independently funded with Azar standing firm about not wanting to accept sponsorships or funds from outside. “It’s quite encouraging to see something that we founded and funded grow on its own. Many a time, when you have people offering to fund our trust and its activities, you become obliged to them in some way or the other,” he says, recalling an incident that happened just over a year ago. “A well-known club came forward to fund one of our events. It was a blood donation camp that we painstakingly put together with limited resources. But when a big name like theirs came to be associated with the work that we did, they ended up becoming the focus of the camp that we put up. Even the media began projecting our work as their handiwork. It was then that I decided that Nal Vidhaigal would be independently funded and that what we do, remains to be something that is wholly conceptualised and funded by like-minded individuals who don’t have personal interests in a social cause.”

Over the last couple of years, Azar’s trust has done some ground-breaking work in Maduravoyal. This included sponsoring the education of children who had lost a parent, enhancing their educational capabilities and even providing them with a launch pad to showcase their work. “August this year, will see us host a big science exhibition for some underprivileged students who we’re currently working with. So, that’s something to look forward to,” says Azar. Other activities

that the trust has engaged in, involves environmental drives. “We have been quite enthusiastic about planting trees and thereby caring for our environment,” he continues, “But we’ve also come to realise that caring for the environment doesn’t just stop with planting trees. That’s why we’ve got our volunteers to go the extra mile in caring for these saplings, nurturing their growth and literally go the extra mile in shepherding them into big, strong trees.” Other activities of Nal Vidhaigal include awareness drives on Child rights and women’s rights (the trust took up another campaign championing the cause of women’s rights on International Women’s Day, this year). Educational camps have also been a regular feature of Nal Vidhaigal.

Blood donation is an aspect of social service that remains close to Azar’s heart. As part of some of its earliest initiatives, Nal Vidhaigal organised several blood donation camps and blood donation campaigns. “The campaigns were a runaway success, and helped spread the word about what we planned to achieving,” says Azar, “All these campaigns, which we took up in public spaces like beaches and parks, were aimed at educating the public on how important it was, to donate blood.” Azar himself has donated blood nearly 22 times. “One one of our blood donation campaigns, we managed to register nearly 22,500 interested donors,” he says. These names are part of a data base that Nal Vidhaigal continues to compile, which Azar says, will go into making the process of blood donation quicker, easier and a lot more efficient. “We go about making liaisons with government hospitals, and thus get to know of cases where patients need blood with utmost urgency,” he explains, “It is then, that this database comes in handy. Our team has a list of names of one particular blood type, and the necessary mobilization is thus

carried out.” However, by his own admission, this pet project is also Nal Vidhaigal’s most challenging. “Blood donation requires massive awareness campaigns and publicity drives. And public spaces like malls work well for such initiatives,” he says, “Sadly, however, most malls ask us what kind of mileage they stand to gain out of our publicity drives, without realising that this is a noble cause that must be carried out in the greater interest of society as a whole.”

Over time, the work of Nal Vidhaigal began spreading to far-flung districts like Thanjavur, and Azar has been working tirelessly to replicate the good work of the trust here, in other districts as well. “That’s the objective,” he affirms, “As long as our work can make a change to society.” In due course, Azar also managed to secure a job at Ma Foi Management Consultants, where he has worked for three years now. “Like I’ve always maintained, getting a job wasn’t a priority. And if I did manage to get a job, it would have to be one that would give me ample time to focus on the work of the trust,” he says, “Luckily, for me, when the Ma Foi opportunity came along, it allowed me to play a bigger role in bringing about social change. The job itself requires large-scale coordination with NGOs across the board, including my trust.” As part of his new responsibilities, Azar plays a vital role in planning and coordinating social service activities. Taking Nal Vidhaigal to greater heights, of course, continues to be part of his dream.



A Movement By Them, For Them

Movements for the welfare and upliftment of the marginalized castes have had some critical incidents pushing them to take this form of assertion. There is always one name, one leader's charisma that would contribute to the growth and spread of the movement. Puthirai Vannar Ezhuchi Peravai also follows suit, being led by Mr. Chellakannu.

Born and brought up in Vadipatti Taluk of Madurai district in Tamil Nadu, Chellakannu could study only till class VII. As a child he might not have understood the importance of caste certificate in education. But, he did realize this when he had to discontinue studies for not having one for himself. "Not having a caste certificate not only affected my education. It also forced me to stick to my father's vocation of being a barber for dalits and performing their death rituals. The system made sure that I could not move up in the social ladder," recalls

Chellakannu, visibly moved.

Officials had demanded witness to issue a caste certificate, but nobody from his village came forward to facilitate this process. “The officials wrote my destiny. I was told that I must do what my ancestors did; only then they will issue my caste certificate. I could not take this discourse against the much touted slogans of socio economic development,” he laments. Chellakannu gave up studies and took to his father’s vocation in his very salon. He struggled, like everyone else in his community, to make ends meet with the paltry sum he earned every day.

History repeated itself for Chellakannu when he sought a caste certificate for his nephew in 2004. He was deeply disturbed with these questions in his mind—“Will the future generations also be pushed to this fate? Can I not do something about this now? Why should we remain to be barbers for generations after generations?” This volley of questions led him to start the movement called Puthirai Vannar Ezhuchi Peravai, in 2006.

As his first effort, he brought together 10 people from his community and applied for Caste Certificates at the District Collector’s Office. Following enquiry, the applications were declined for the reason that none of the applicants were actually practicing the said vocation. Chellakannu and team did not give up. Drawing inspiration from other movements, he mobilized 50 people and protested outside the District Collector’s Office. Yet, no avail.

Chellakannu has been very conscious of what he knew and what he could. He picked up his learnings from other movements as he knew that he could not afford one wrong step. The first good news for the movement came in 2009 when his team succeeded in getting caste certificates

for 5 members. “It was 18th April 2009,” he remembers emotionally. As the news spread wide, people of Puthirai Vannar community from Virudunagar and Ramnagara districts sought Chellakannu’s help to acquire their caste certificates. So, he started working for them as well.

Chellakannu remained very pragmatic about his commitments. “So far, we have obtained 800 caste certificates for our community members. Every certificate was a challenge and has a story to share,” says Chellakannu who proudly shares that all Puthirai Vannar families in Vadipatti, his home town, have their caste certificates. He soon achieved the same feat with Arupukottai Taluk in Virudunagar district.

The Movement’s demand for a welfare scheme for Puthirai Vannar community was achieved with the announcement of Puthirai Vannar welfare scheme in 2007-2008. This scheme promised an assistance of 15,000 rupees for the differently abled, old age pension for senior citizens, besides land pattas amongst other benefits. “As with many other welfare schemes, a lot of it remained only on paper. We therefore filed an RTI plea to learn the status of implementation of the scheme. The findings came as no surprise for us. More than 1 crore rupees was allocated, but not spent. We appointed committee members from the Hindu Vannar community to deal with this issue,” elaborated Chellakannu.

Caste system in India is so fragmented that there are divisions among people who perform the same vocation. While Puthirai Vannars wash clothes, cut hair, and perform death rituals for dalit people, Hindu Vannars do the same for upper caste people. Chellakannu’s deep engagement in the field brought in many shocking revelations. The first of it being false caste certificates being used to qualify for a government

job, practice medicine, etc.

“I also learnt about a family in Madurai where all its adult members were government officials. While true members of Puthirai Vannar community struggled to get caste certificates to prove eligibility for the welfare schemes and faced humiliation in the name of enquiry when applying for the same, we could see others who procured false certificates and used it to the optimum. My people, without awareness, were forced to practice the same vocation for generations,” shares Chellakannu.

He also explains about the sexual harassment that the women from his community have been subjected to. The villages are organized with only one Puthirai Vannar family per village, staying in the village’s common land. So, when the parents go out for work, the girls are left alone. Not owning a land or place of residence has created many odds to these families. Chellakannu has advocated with the government and sought land pattas for 25 families living in Madurai. He is also working towards obtaining ration cards and old age pensions for these families.

Although the movement has made a mark with its achievements so far, Chellakannu remains wary of the future. “I earn hundred rupees a day. I give fifty rupees to my family and spend the rest for my travel costs across Madurai.” While sustaining the movement is one challenge, the other daunting factor is the shattered manner in which these families are situated. “My economic standard stops me from reaching out to many families,” he laments.

Chellakannu has been strongly advocating for an Act in the lines of Prevention of Atrocities against SC/ST Act, as the humiliation his community is subjected to has not been adequately addressed by the

present Act. Besides, atrocities meted out to SC/ST by other castes are said to be punishable under this Act. Chellakannu feels that atrocities meted out to his community by dalits should also be punishable.

Through the movement Chellakannu has also succeeded in mobilizing educated youth from his community to teach the school children at 5 tuition centres. Aware that only education has the potential to change the fate of the next generation in his community, he narrates the case of five members from Puthirai Vannars who have managed to get government jobs. “Not much of a difference though. They used to wash clothes of dalit families. They are now washing clothes in a government hospital. We are just not allowed to move out from this caste identity,” says he, who leaves no stone unturned in equipping himself as a leader.

Chellakannu has attended many workshops and trainings, yet finds it difficult to develop a second line of leadership. “I am trying to do it as best as possible. For now, all I want is to create awareness about this movement. Government and Dalit people must know that we are rising!”

— **Shanmuga Priya .T**



Adding value to lives by the Sea

The life of fishermen, as we can recall from yesteryear movies and the media coverage they have had so far, is very challenging and requires them to settle with the minimum that has been provided for them. With no alternative sources of income at hand, and lack of any other skill, the fishermen community are very much inclined to engage their children, especially boys in fishing. This leads to their children's education take a back seat. Society for Education and Action (SEA), based in Mamallapuram, Kanchipuram district was founded in 2000 by Mr Desingu to free children from this vicious circle before they get reconciled with it and lose all interest in education.

As the Founder Director, Desingu has been involved in the complete journey of SEA, shaping its growth and reach through each of its programmes. With a background in psychology, he was exposed to multipurpose health work during college days. While engaging in community health work projects, he was appalled by the status of

education and the alarming dropout rate of children from the fishermen community. “Only 40 percent of the fishermen children were educated. It was too shocking for me to note that even their parents were not keen in their education. The task of educating them was daunting and we had to work with the children as well as the communities simultaneously,” recalls Desingu.

Having decided to focus on coastal areas, Desingu and team consciously worked with children engaged in labour and those who had dropped out from school in order to supplement their family’s income. Preventing these two circumstances is a task that has drawn multifarious players into the picture. “These issues are so entangled in the lives of the fishermen communities that reorienting them was very painstaking. We had to be very innovative in our strategies,” he says.

SEA started motivation centres in every village to encourage children and members of the community to prioritise education and readmit their wards in schools. Every centre catered to 25 children at a time. As these children were getting ready to be re-enrolled in schools, the schools required attention. With 1:80 as the teacher - pupil ratio in the nearby government schools, SEA had to intervene to ensure that children attended schools regularly.

Realising the criticality in the role of teachers in this process, their availability in adequate numbers was inevitable. Therefore, SEA decided to entrust this responsibility with the local students who had passed class 10 and 12. As these new teachers recruited by SEA were from the local community, they were able to take personal interest in ensuring that all children were regular at school. “We capitalised on the community bonding. It worked very well for us,” shares Desingu.

Soon, SEA worked on raising the quality of teaching by bringing in those with a Diploma in Teacher Training. With many more teachers recruited by SEA, there was still a large number of vacancies that needed attention. The Higher Secondary School in Mamallapuram had 800 students studying from class 1 to 10. Since the last three years, children did not have the option of studying economics or commerce, owing to lack of teachers. SEA recruited two candidates from the local community who had completed MA and M.Com so that the children could learn these subjects.

Appointing new teachers in a government school was no easy task. SEA had to go through the Parent - Teachers' Association to enrol new faculty as supplementary teachers. To support students who were weak in their studies, SEA also initiated a non-residential bridge centre to coach them subject wise. After passing the supplementary examinations, these children were mainstreamed in schools or admitted in polytechnic colleges. So, far 300 children have been mainstreamed through this bridge centre, with many working as software engineers. It is in this context that Desingu urges the significance of mainstreaming children, not just in schools but also in communities.

SEA's emphasis on engaging teachers from the local community paid off as they took special interest in ensuring that there were no school drop outs. If there were children who did drop out, then they followed it up personally and ensured that they re-enrolled with renewed interest. This, however, was not done by the government teachers. This close follow up increased the community bonding and helped SEA achieve its objectives.

SEA also provides scholarships for 100 students every year by

aggregating funds mobilised from different sources like community members, local/state/central governments, donor organisations, doctors, corporate partners, local leaders, etc.

“Initially, the jitters was very much there. It was very difficult for us to talk to the community members. They were very rude to us and collectively ignored us. They asked if we could compensate the money their children would otherwise earn for them,” smiles Desingu, who is now a respected member among the people and is more than happy to see children coming out of schools successfully.

15 villages around Kalpakkam were surveyed by SEA over two years, revealing a very disturbing trend. The survey identified 136 mentally retarded children falling in the age group of 5-15 years. Physiotherapy, ocular therapy, speech therapy, music therapy were provided to these children through a special school started by SEA in 2011. Alongside, SEA is also providing vocational opportunities to widows and destitutes in these villages by introducing them to a six-months course on tailoring and craft making. Women, after completing this course usually join apparel companies and earn a monthly salary of around 7000 rupees.

After 15 years, SEA is now planning to focus on promoting awareness on child rights by reaching out to different stake holders like the PRI members, village officials like the VAO, representatives of civil society like the Lions Club, SHG members, Anganwadi workers, Police personnel, etc. “With UNCRC celebrating its silver jubilee, we have a long way in realising it. We have decided to begin by promoting its awareness, along with other legislations like RTE, RTI, POCSO, etc,” concludes Desingu.

— Shanmuga Priya.T



Reaching out

Rani was waiting to meet the duty doctor at Thirumalai Mission Hospital. She was cheerfully chatting with her daughter Priya while she awaited her turn. Noticing me with my camera, she spontaneously engaged in a conversation. “I was suffering from knee pain for over three years. It was tough for me to carry out the household chores and the pain was getting unbearable. It was then a lady who worked in this hospital visited my village. She asked me to consult the specialist in this hospital and undergo treatment. I have now come to tell the doctor that I am feeling much better.”

Rani hails from Ammapudur village which is 18 kilometers from Ranipet. She has to change three buses to reach the Bharti Nagar bus stand which is located two kilometers away from the hospital.

After enquiring about her family, I asked her if she could walk the distance from the bus stand to the hospital with ease. Moving her head

from side to side she said, “I called the hospital as soon as I reached the bus stop and within a few minutes the hospital van picked me up. I was tired and so chose the van service.”

As soon as the nurse called out Rani’s name, she sprang from her seat and went to meet the doctor. I looked around and noticed that several patients were seated at the waiting hall. This is a similar scene every day at this Hospital that has been started by Thirumalai Charity Trust (TCT) in 2010 to offer accessible, affordable and quality health care.

Started 43years ago, this NGO works in 315 villages in Vellore District, and providing services in community health care, women empowerment, disability, de-addiction, and village development.

Dr. Bhooma Parthasarathy, the Director of Thirumalai Mission Hospital welcomed us and took us around. A social worker, she has been instrumental in establishing this hospital. “Our Founder Shri N.S. Iyengar believed that Social Responsibility of Business is not Optional, but Obligatory”. He set up the Thirumalai Charity Trust in 1970 to put this belief into action. Since then, we have implemented and supported a number of projects in Health, Education and Rural Development,” she said.

“Villagers had to travel some 25 kilometers to access health care services. We conduct awareness camps in villages around Ranipet. Women screening camps are organized every Wednesday and Hindu Mission hospital conducts eye camps every month and cardiac camps every alternate month. On World Diabetes Day, the hospital organized camps in two villages where people were screened with the help of family care volunteers. It was found that a majority of them had blood sugar in the range of 400 to 500,” she added.

The lab is fully equipped and technicians were busy. Talking about the lab, Dr. Bhooma said: “Cognizant Foundation has donated few equipment. We take a conscious call on what we need to invest our money in. We have recently added an auto analyser; hormone analyser; automatic analyser, and Vitamin D analyser. Most of our staff are from the local villages. We offer training to our technicians to enable them operate the equipment effectively. The lab has been the focus of our Medical Director right from the day he joined in. It is something that he felt is a must of the hospital.”

She took us to Dr. Seshadri who was busy with his patients. It was our turn to wait.

Speaking about the support offered by Cognizant Foundation, he said: “All equipment provided by Cognizant Foundation has been put to good use. I feel that we need to upgrade the equipment in the laboratory. Osteoporosis is a common problem amongst our patients and we have a DEXA machine and we carry out free dEXA scan for our rural people. Our objective is to provide services on need basis. We have not gone for a CT scanner or MRI, because that is not our priority. We do need an immune assay analyzer for the lab, laparoscopy equipment, ophthalmic equipment, a c-arm and intensive medical equipment at the right time as these are in our list of priorities. “

TCT created the cadre of Family Care Volunteers in 2009, recognizing the need to have close contact with the families to ensure access to health, awareness for early detection, and seeking health care. These community selected volunteers are the first point of contact for social and health care needs and they are offered a 2-day training programme every month on Health and Development.

Topics for Training include Hygiene & Sanitation, Water borne & Air borne diseases. Safe drinking water, Nutrition & Nutritional disorders, Alcoholism, Dowry, Domestic Violence, Legal rights of Women, Mother and Child care, HIV / AIDS, Mental illness, Disability, and Suicide. They carry the messages given to them in the training to the families in the villages and give feedback to our staff on the problems in the families. As a pilot project this was implemented in 30 villages, training 100 volunteers

Thirumalai Mission Hospital networks with Hindu Mission Hospital, TTK hospital, Rotary clubs, Andhra Mahila Sabha, WORTH Trust, Sundaram Medical Foundation and several other organizations to ensure the benefits reach those who deserve them.

In June 1994, in response to a long felt need of the Ranipet and Walajapet community, TCT established Vedavalli Vidyalaya, a co-educational school affiliated to Central Board of Secondary Education, at Walajapet. Two more schools were added on in 1999 with state syllabus in Walaja and in 2003 with CBSE to meet the growing demand. With the belief that a child-friendly atmosphere is essential for learning, the school's teaching methods and procedures blend the traditional with modern ideas that provide for the all-round development of the child, preparing him for responsible adulthood.

Thirumalai Mission hospital conducts regular medical camps for the school students. "This is one of the hospitals which is closer to our home. They have the best facilities and offer 24 hour service. My parents also visit this hospital for treatment as this is the biggest hospital here," said Vijay who was studying in tenth standard.

As the village volunteers provide local support to mobilize the people,

TCT's projects are now functioning in 40 Panchayats, 315 villages at Walaja and Katpadi Taluks of Vellore District to serve a population of about 1,60,000 people.

“While looking back at our own journey, we realize that we have been able to deliver our programmes only through networking. The mission for the participating hospitals is also very clear wherein they also want to reach out to the poor. If doctors feel that the patients can't afford to pay the treatment costs, they are recommended for concession. As much as possible we try to establish links between the need and the resources available. We make sure that people who need the most are reached in one way or the other,” concluded Dr. Bhooma.

TCT through all its community initiatives has facilitated development through Volunteerism, Women empowerment and Community action. If you wish to know more about the organization, please contact Dr. Bhooma Parthasarathy at bhooma.p@tmhospital.org or write to Thirumalai Charity Trust, Vanapadi Road, Ranipet 632404. Visit www.thirumalaicharitytrust.org.

— **Marie Banu**



Evolving Continuously to Empower the Differently Abled

Working for the welfare of disabled has seen many approaches over the years. But there are few organisations that have focused on empowering the differently abled to work for them. “A sense of economic independence for an individual is still incomplete when the community does not realise its capacity to sustain itself and fight for its needs”, says Mr. S Subramania Shiva, Chief Executive Officer of UDIS Forum. The name itself signifies the lack of integration of differently abled with the mainstream society. “UDIS can mean two different things. You and Disabled or Understand Disability. Our founders felt that there was no integration of differently abled in our society and that they were always identified as a separate group who were in need of care and attention. Thus, the name UDIS emerged to show our intention to bridge the differently abled and the society,” explains Shiva.

UDIS Forum was started as a foundation in 2006 by Dr M.N.G. Mani, an expert in the field of disability. Differently abled need special care since childhood, assistive devices to aid their mobility, and specific health care facilities. All these needs are largely met by government and NGOs. However, when they become adults, they remain dependent, without realising economic independence. With a comprehensive understanding of the macro picture, UDIS set out to do something unique—creating employment opportunities for the differently abled. “It was all based on a strong conviction that economic empowerment will automatically lead to social and political empowerment,” says Shiva.

Employment opportunities for the differently abled in government enterprises were very limited. The 3 percent reservation that was introduced by the government came in after a long struggle by likeminded groups. Yet, its implementation calls for better coordination and execution. Given this scenario, UDIS decided to focus on promoting employment opportunities in the private sector. “Self-employment ventures were also tried out, but we did not succeed. It suited only those with locomotive disability. Marketing and Resource Management was also a concern in these ventures. We therefore remained fixed on employing differently abled in the private sector,” elaborates Shiva.

UDIS approached many enterprises and sought opportunities for the differently abled. Although there was hesitation in the beginning, these companies have now started recruiting people with disability. Private companies have also begun to associate this section of work force as a very secure base as there is no trade unionism that would disturb their productivity. The tendency of the differently abled to continue in a job that suits them has worked out to be in their favour.

In 2007, UDIS Forum set up a small office in front of the District Employment Head Quarters in Coimbatore, so that differently abled can approach them to explore opportunities in the private sector. While field workers went out to convince the employers, those in office followed tedious procedures to gather as much details as the Employment Exchange did.

Beginning with only four staff, a German based organisation named CBM came forward to fund the administrative expenses of UDIS. “Mani’s extensive networks helped us in every stage. He was an Advisor in CBM for Education. With everyone critiquing our movements, we were determined to employ at least 100 people in the first year of operation,” says Shiva, who quickly added that they managed to place 140 people in jobs.

Alongside the Employment Guidance Programme, UDIS soon realised the need to provide vocational training for those who lacked basic skills. All skills that the staff could impart were managed internally. Training in computers and tailoring were imparted through partnerships with NGOs who were pioneers in this space. UDIS supported the transport costs that the trainees had to incur to attend these training programmes.

The next stage of intervention was advocacy. UDIS realised that there was an urgent need to educate and sensitise the public about the needs and capabilities of differently abled. Coming in contact with college students in the process, UDIS eyed on a different strategy to create platforms for the differently abled. An increasing number of students began to volunteer for their administrative work. Very soon, a training manual on disability was prepared to train students and youth volunteers

on disability.

UDIS created the Youth Wing for Disability (YWDIS) in Coimbatore with elected office bearers who planned their own activities for the differently abled and also carried out advocacy campaigns. Their engagement ranged from doing training programmes in schools to reference management for job opportunities, and teaching spoken English/Computers to the target group.

UDIS came up with a new intervention at this stage. Learning that the non-disabled cannot always advocate for the disabled, it was imperative that the disabled were empowered to represent themselves in any forum. Soon, they also examined that the already existing associations of disabled were functioning without any legal status. UDIS brought these associations together and trained them on organisational management, fund raising, and finance management.

When lack of coordination amongst groups that focused on a specific type of disability became an issue of concern, UDIS came forward to be a nodal agency and coordinated these groups. UDIS's work in the district of Coimbatore grew to be an exemplar.

In 2010, Sight Savers International wanted UDIS to reach out to other districts as well. With lack of staff, UDIS decided to create similar groups in other districts too. So, organisations and associations of the disabled in other districts were trained in organisational matters, and also in cross disabilities in order to forge coordination from the beginning.

Thus, district level nodal agencies were created in five districts—

Thiruvallur, Namakkal, Erode, Madurai and Ramanathapuram. Later with the support of CBM, district nodal agencies were also set up in Krishnagiri, Tirunelveli and Sivagangai districts. This large network managed to place 900 disabled persons, train 300 persons in various skills, mobilise 2,500 college students, and orient 27,000 school students on disability.

UDIS was conceptualised with three disabled and five non-disabled persons on board. The founder of UDIS wanted this to evolve into an organisation that was run and administered by the differently abled themselves. This transition came in 2013, adding more value to the engagement of UDIS with various stake holders. A dedicated helpline for the differently abled—9442556168 —providing information services on employment, counselling, marriage, skill training, and a scholarship scheme for visually challenged girls pursuing higher education was launched with the support of a German through CBM. UDIS has been transforming from one role to another, leaving no stone unturned in the empowerment of the differently abled. If you wish to get in touch with UDIS, Please call Mr. Shiva at 9442215014 or write to shivass48@gmail.com.

— **Shanmuga Priya. T**



Worthy Leaders Of Change

In 1963, leprosy was a dreaded disease. With chances of survival at a meagre percentage, the only option that was available was rehabilitation. With this objective in mind, the Swedish Red Cross began one such rehabilitation centre in Katpadi, Vellore. In 1976, Worth Trust was formed to continue the efforts of the Red Cross and spearhead the rehabilitation of leprosy patients in the area. “Gradually, leprosy ended up becoming a lesser potent disease than what it used to be. So, we then turned our attention towards polio,” explains Myke Nunes, who is today, deputy manager of Worth Trust. “Pretty quickly, polio started getting eradicated too. So, we felt that the time was ripe to focus on people with visual impairment, and speech and visual impairment.” However, as medical discoveries advanced, and treatment for most illnesses became readily available, Worth Trust decided that speech and visual impairment remained one of the more critical areas of concern

and decided to focus a bulk of its attention, there. “We also started turning our attention to cerebral palsy patients, in an effort to look into their rehabilitation.”

‘Worth’ is an abbreviation for ‘Workshop for the rehabilitation and training of the handicapped’. In the last 25 years, the NGO has painstakingly worked towards helping physically challenged people, have a better life. “Someone with a physical disability is always expected to match up to a society that’s somehow tailor-made only for normal people without physical challenges,” explains Myke, “Even in schools, those with physical challenges have to cope with an environment for normal schoolchildren. Even while applying for a job, chances are one in five hundred candidates is physically challenged. No employer would want to risk his productivity by giving such a candidate, a chance at the job. That’s exactly why rehabilitation of the physically challenged is such a critical requirement in today’s day and age; because we felt that the onus should not lie on the physically challenged person to match up to a society only for normal people.”

One of the biggest talking points about Worth Trust is the fact that it is one of the few NGOs in the world that doesn’t take donations for its functioning. “We have never accepted any money as donation, since we are perhaps the only NGO in the world today, which is self-sustained,” says Myke. So, how does this work? “We have two wings,” he elaborates, “Our first wing is the rehabilitation wing, which takes care of the needs and rehabilitation of physically challenged people. The money that goes into funding this wing comes from the profits of our business wing, which strives towards employing people with physical disabilities in order to make them industry-ready and employable.” The Rehabilitation Wing of the trust includes the Technical Training

Centre, School for Hearing and Speech Impairment, Early Intervention Centre for Infants with Hearing Challenges and Day Activity Centre for Children with Intellectual Challenges, to name a few. This, while the business wing includes divisions like Worth Industries, Worth Plastics, Worth Brailleurs, Worth Mobility Aids and Worth Digitization. “Our Worth Brailleurs deserve special mention since we continue to remain the only organization in the world that manufactures the world-famous Perkins Braille,” says Myke. Worth Brailleurs has so far, assembled and sold close to 200,000 Perkins Brailleurs. Worth is also a sub-contractor for Brakes India. This has meant that nearly every automobile in the company has an automotive component that hails from the production line of Worth Industries. The speciality of these business centres is of course, the fact that all their employees are physically challenged.

Its business and self-sustenance apart, one of the more notable aspects of Worth Trust is the fact that nearly half its students are employed in its business units. This ensures that they become employment-ready and that their production skills are fine-tuned to the rigors and demands of any engineering-oriented industry. In the last 25 years, a number of physically challenged students have become industry-ready thanks to the training imparted at these business units.

In its 25th year, Myke believes that Worth Trust has what it takes to push the boundaries of its work with physically challenged individuals. Along the way, equal weightage, he says must be given to both rehabilitation and business development so that the trust’s self-sustenance model can be successfully sustained well into the future. September 5, 2014 will also mark the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the trust – an occasion that is truly special given the long way Worth Trust has come in the last two decades. Creating and impact that is truly becoming of an NGO

dedicating itself to fighting for the inclusion of physically challenged people in day-to-day living, Worth Trust is certainly looking all set to achieve a whole lot more going ahead. In doing so, there's little doubt that a self-sustained NGO like this, is certainly the answer to encouraging inclusiveness, rehabilitation, employment and quite simply, a better world, for those with physical challenges.



Giving through ‘YouSee’

These days, we come across quite a number of people who contribute to the development sector either through donations or by volunteering. The trend revealed the need and potential of organising ‘giving’ in such a manner that individuals on both sides (giving and receiving) are able to realise their roles effectively. YouSee is one such platform that began to streamline ‘giving’ in Hyderabad through its website www.yousee.in.

Founded in 2009, YouSee was construed as an online platform to enable giving in four different ways – Shramadhan, Vasthudhan, Kachradhan and Dhandhan. “The website plays a key role in our work. By managing this multifaceted work through the website, we are also able to maintain the administrative expenses under control,” shares Mr Gunaranjan, Founder of YouSee. Gunaranjan’s experience in the development sector through Basix (a micro-finance institution in Hyderabad) got

him grappled with apprehensions of outcomes by not only individual donors, but also the corporate and government sector. The idea of post-pay philanthropy helped him solve this apprehension, simultaneously paving way for deeper engagement which allowed him to venture into other forms of giving. YouSee thus evolved to be a low cost platform facilitating multiple forms of giving.

In Shramadhan, YouSee facilitates structured volunteering where volunteers can choose to work for a non-profit organisation onsite or offsite, in three different sectors—education, health and environment. In addition, the website also allows volunteers to choose a city of operation— from the options available. The website has been designed to provide all the granular details, and enables the volunteer to decide on his or her commitment. Be it skill requirement, time commitment, number of volunteers, or the domain of interest—the site has it all. “Once a volunteer commits online, the volunteer and the concerned non-profit organisation are connected,” he says.

An interesting case is that of Gandhi Hospital in Hyderabad, which is a tertiary care government hospital, with a capacity of 1,200 beds. The hospital was in need of IT management to manage the data on influx of patients every day and maintain the patient records in a systematic manner. A group of volunteers from the IT sector (through YouSee) developed the Hospital Information System which has now been in use for more than two years. This free and open software was also made available for others to adopt. Three blood banks of Indian Red Cross Society in Telangana have adopted the software, making space for donors to know through email when their blood was being used for a particular surgery.

Noting these developments, the Andhra Pradesh Medical Service Infrastructure Development Corporation adopted the modules developed for this software and adapted it to streamline sanitation services across hospitals.

In Vasthudhan, YouSee facilitates contributions in kind. The website allows non-profits to register their requirements and also the donors to register the kind and number of items they are willing to offer. With requests coming from both sides, YouSee conveys the same to the non-profits in the said geography. Vasthudhan is now operational in many cities across India. Transportation of the items (books, furniture, clothes, etc.) are also committed online either by the donor or by the recipient non-profit organisation. Interestingly, YouSee also intervenes with the help of a volunteer to check the genuine need of the organisations. Furthermore, YouSee actually encourages donors to be part of the need analysis so that they get to learn ways in which their contributions can make a difference.

Kachradhan, in simple words is donation of waste. The way this is being executed is sure an instance to be explored. YouSee works with residential communities, offices by promoting segregation of waste. Every month, a camp is organised wherein the waste from a community is handed over to the local 'radhiwala' (rag picker) who weighs and hands over the appropriate cash value. While some communities used this money themselves to further promote segregation of waste or purchase of organic manure for their gardens, others used it for charity. Most intriguingly, some of the residential communities had established decentralised compost units, and some others organised waste segregation in such a way that kitchen waste was directly led to the compost.

Admitting that this kind of a behavioural change takes time, Gunaranjan is equally excited about the increasing participation that YouSee's Kachradhan has seen over the years. "It has to be convenient to be good. Today, there are residential volunteers who themselves take the role of convincing other members and Hyderabad has demonstration points in some parts of the city to encourage and facilitate such residential volunteers," he says.

Gunaranjan felt sure of YouSee's concept when he came across individuals who started with one kind of 'giving' and eventually moved into the other types. Reiterating the strength of consistent and focused volunteerism, he says that YouSee is an example of such volunteering. "This kind of a deeper engagement has allowed us to retain our volunteer base across the cities. At any point, there is not more than two individuals who draw salary under YouSee," he says.

Dhandhan is where donors are engaged in financial 'post pay philanthropy'. Contrary to the prevailing model where projects or development interventions are implemented after a donor brings in resources, YouSee introduced the post pay philosophy where it worked with the concerned NGO partner through their programmes and documented the resultant outcome (for which they lacked the knowhow). All the nitty-gritties of the said intervention and its impact on the targeted beneficiaries are listed on the website. Donors who wish to contribute pay for the work that has been accomplished. This leaves them with no apprehension about the use of their money. Funds raised are then set aside for the respective project for which it has been mobilised.

Recently, YouSee organised a Sevamela at the Joy of Giving week in

Hyderabad. In about 5.5 years since its establishment, YouSee was able to garner participation of 114 NGOs. With the open interactions making information easily available, Sevamela was able to pool in 6 tonnes of rice over two days. Facilitating more collaboration between the participant NGOs, YouSee not only gave visibility to their work, but also ensured accountability and transparency.

Gunaranjan strongly believes in the spirit of giving and his YouSee has been able to allow socially concerned individuals to be able to contribute in different ways possible, thus spreading the message of ‘giving’.

Next time you want to ‘give’, please click www.yousee.in and learn what all you can give and the pertinent answers to questions that arises in your mind.

— **Shanmuga Priya.**

Positive Energy

Yours Energetically

Dr. Bhulakshmi V and Ms. Bhuvaneshwari Ravi are trainers and facilitators of the Positive Energy (PE) program. They are spiritual seekers with a vision of transforming their own energy state from surviving to being. In this journey they have gathered deep insights and are 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, the authors are working in the Organization Development and Leadership Development space.

This intervention is offered by GapSkills Learning Solutions Pvt. Ltd is being offered to corporates and schools. You can contact them at info@gapskills.com to design a customized intervention for your organization or join the PE open program - www.gapskills.com.

The articles featured in this section have been authored by Dr. Bhulakshmi V and Ms. Bhuvaneshwari Ravi

A Stitch in Time Saves Nine – The Positive Energy Perspective

From this series onwards, we intend to interpret ‘sayings’ from yesteryears through Positive energy lens. The first in series is about— ‘A stitch in time saves nine’.

We all know that a stitch in time saves nine. Then, what stops us from pursuing timely effort?

1. Our mind is ‘full’ of thoughts without clarity about what we need to do
2. With the intent of saving nine, in other words, pursuing a big picture, we do not even take the first, small step
3. Limiting beliefs which create fear, doubt, anxiety, worry and stop us from being in the present
4. Need for perfection

Being in the present

Being conscious about time restricts actions and creates a sense of finiteness. We go about our daily lives with long to-do lists every single day, carry-forward tasks from previous day/s, unanticipated requirements cropping up, leading to plans being messed up. Some people seem to be handling all these demands with great ease, while some others are rattled and pressured with such situations.

A rather typical explanation we all make is that those who respond to such situations with ease are good at multi-tasking or have greater

control on the situations due to their position, or they manipulate people to getting things done, etc. All these explanations assume that for these people everything gets done to completion and therefore they are happy people. This may, however, be far from truth in most cases. Such explanations are directed towards the results or outcomes. However, in reality, their ease comes from a simple truth – doing their bit for the task at hand, in a timely manner, in other words being in the present moment, moving things forward to the best of their ability, and leaving it for others to take over. The energy of such people is flowing vigorously and with a positive charge. This dynamic and positive energy inspires and motivates others around and creates a momentum that conserves one's energy and enables smooth movement forward.

A stitch in time, a small action to move things forward, can help our energies and support the completion of tasks as well. Such timely action saves much extensive work at a later point in time.

Being a Leader: Unfolding the Spiritual Energy dimension

“When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy.” — Rumi

Being a Leader not because of a position or title given by others, but being a leader through sincere pursuit of knowing and leading oneself – this is the first step towards unfolding Spiritual Energy.

Spiritual energy means being with oneself, developing a practice of listening to oneself deeply, in a committed manner. Often this energy dimension is misunderstood. Most tend to think of spiritual energy as something esoteric. The common notion is that spiritual energy can only be experienced when one has grown old enough and evolved. However, fact is that all of us experience spiritual energy right through our lives, albeit fleetingly. The drawback is that neither do we recognize such experiences as spiritual nor are we able to make them more consistent and enduring. The journey of personal evolution is learning to become aware of such experiences and practicing rituals that contribute to making such experiences enduring and consistent, until it becomes a ‘state of being’. Deepening one’s awareness of spiritual energy converts it from being an acquaintance to a dear friend, to finally becoming ‘the self’.

Finding the Leader within

When one tunes into tapping this dimension of energy, one can create a life program. Most of us live our life with programs given by our parents, our teachers, our peers, and incomplete life experiences. These programs are not meant for us and therefore we experience ‘bugs’ along

the way. These bugs are energy blocks that impede our natural growth and flowering. We can remove these energy blocks and move ahead. However, a more sustainable way of living, is to create a program that does not have a bug in the first place. This is when Spiritual Energy becomes an ally. When the spiritual energy dimension opens up, one

can experience a ‘clean slate’ and the capacity to be in wonder, learn, do, experience, and discover living life. In such a state, the spiritual being is in a flow and is guided by the energy of life. Such beings radiate energy in their sheer presence.

When one starts leading oneself, then healing begins. Healing essentially means erasing old patterns, living life in a ‘light way’ so that even new patterns do not become heavy imprints.

How is this Leadership nurtured?

1. Being with nature: Nature is the purest form of energy and one can get in touch with their spiritual core when the environment around does not deplete energy. In fact, nature enriches and cleanses the being and provides a sanitized environment for energy to flow freely.
2. Doing day-to-day activities mindfully: Being completely present to the moment is an approach that not only helps complete the activity, but also gives the doer a true experience of that activity. When we experience something wholesomely, we generate energy for ourselves.
3. Developing the ritual of meditation: Silencing the mind gives an opportunity to go within and locate the seeds of creation. Energy stems from within and flows into our entire existence.
4. Pursuing a cause beyond the self: When one strongly believes and pursues a cause that impacts a larger section of the universe, the self melts into the collective energy. This pursuit translates into an existence where one experiences the universal flow of energy.

Unsung Beacons – Volume 5

Leaders, who have thus unfolded the spiritual energy dimension for themselves, serve every individual and the society at large. Through their spirit of compassion and detached attachment, their wholesome presence and deep involvement, and their pursuit of truth, they become the guiding light for humanity at large.

Empty, Yet Complete: Building awareness through Positive Energy practices

“The clay gives support and structure, yet it is the empty space at the centre that makes the bowl useful.”—Dr Paula Horan

A university professor goes to have tea with a teacher. The teacher pours the visitor’s cup full and then keeps on pouring. The professor watches the overflow until he can no longer restrain himself. “It is overfull. No more will go in!”

The teacher responds: “Like this cup, you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?”

When I am full of myself, full of my pain, full of comparisons with others, full with knowledge of gaps in me, do I feel complete or incomplete? Incomplete! Surprising, right; because logically, something that is full, is complete. But this is not true when we are talking about our energies.

Imagine a weekend where you feel free, have no nagging thoughts of things to achieve; there is an empty feeling and yet it feels so complete. Again this defies logic!

The other word used to denote the same meaning as emptying, is openness. We often say, open your mind, open your heart.... in other words it means empty your mind and your heart to receive that you have been longing for.

The practices that we promote with the Positive Energy Program enable us to be ‘empty’, because in being empty lies the key to breaking learning barriers, creating clarity, and channelizing the release of

emotional energy blocks.

Few practices that help ‘empty or open us’ are:

1. **Feeling and Reflecting on gratitude:** Most often things that make us full are stuff that we consider we do not have or desire to have. By experiencing genuine gratitude, we consciously empty out ‘want-have-desire thoughts’. It serves as a regular reminder of all the things we feel grateful for.
2. **Meditating:** Pausing to ‘throw out’ the fullness inside our minds. In meditation, we are often told to observe our thoughts and let them go. As we continue to do this, over time, the inflow of thoughts reduce, and at some point we reach a state of ‘thoughtlessness’ – this is a state of emptiness, which fills us with bliss.
3. **Living in the present:** We are constantly living either in the past or the future. In looking into the past, we are grieving over what happened, feeling a sense of loss, lacking, sadness, etc. or we are thinking of the good times which are lacking today. And when we are looking into the future, we are getting anxious and planning for a time which is yet to arrive. In both states, we are ‘full’ and dwelling on a lacking. However, when we live in the present moment, we can give off ourselves completely to the present moment and enjoy it completely. By emptying ourselves and being in the moment, we open ourselves to new experiences and living the present fully.
4. **Clearing the Conscience:** We are all conditioned about various aspects of living and life from our childhood. The values,

culture, habits, beliefs, desires, feelings, behaviors, etc. are ALL programmed into us. We do not ‘choose a value or belief’ from our experience. We first adopt a belief or value or behavior, etc. and then we spend the rest of our lives justifying them. By clearing our conscience we open ourselves to ‘first hand’ experiences and this in turn enables us ‘be in the present’ and practice ‘discerning living’ in every moment.

5. Chanting: This is an age-old practice that helps us ‘be in the present’ and sharply channels our focus on one point – the chant. This prevent us from ‘filling ourselves up’ and thereby we remain empty and open.

Being empty makes one feel light and one goes about life with a joy and openness that brings life alive.

Giving from Energy Abundance and receiving in the “inner game”

“You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.” - Kahlil Gibran

Living life as a Positive energy practitioner has resulted in three realizations:

1. Giving happens because of energy abundance and not material abundance. Giving is triggered by not even having the thought of giving. It’s a natural way of living, overflowing with bliss.
2. Often, we tend to believe that once we give we will receive. Though we may not acknowledge it openly, there is a tacit feeling around receiving that each of us carries. Positive Energy practices liberate me from this tacit expectation. Receiving happens before the act of giving. Receiving is not a material gain or a praise or appreciation in the outer game. It is the removal of energy blocks that I carry in the form of anxiety, fear, thought of scarcity, which is my inner game.
3. Giving is seen as an altruistic process, where individuals go beyond me, mine and I. In Positive Energy terms it means going beyond the ego-self and reaching the real-self. This transition from ego-self to real-self is greatly helped when there is energy abundance received from giving.

Receiving in the inner game: Experiencing Energy abundance and wholesomeness

In this article we have looked at the impact of giving on my inner and

outer game. Before we proceed further, let me explain what we mean by inner and outer game. Inner game is what is happening in my mind and the emotions that one feels and expresses, in short what one thinks of herself. This is the intangible, yet powerful part of my existence. The outer game is the ‘happening’ on the outside in one’s existence. The inner game has a deep impact on the outer game.

Once, I was asked by a friend, that how do I give so unconditionally? Until she asked the question, I did not even know that I was giving.

I had two pathways to process my response to my friend—one, saying that giving gave me joy and such a response would have definitely stroked my ego and I was then likely to get into a compulsive state whenever I gave or did not give. By compulsive, I mean, an expectation that the recipient would acknowledge and praise me or that I will always seek out occasions to give so that I could feel complete and content. This pathway would certainly orient me to the outer game more deeply and make me externalized. In other words, I would draw my purpose by events happening in the outer game. It would also add to my inner game but in a negative way, by reinforcing thoughts of incompleteness.

My second pathway of response could have been to surrender the thought of giving to the inner game. And by this I mean, reinforcing my inner game with awareness that in the act of giving itself, receiving was built-in. Let me explain how that happens - in giving I have challenged my limiting beliefs, I have shifted from the inertia of “I won’t do” or “I can’t do”. I have let myself experience the opportunities of addressing the interferences within me by the process of giving, thereby leading to energy abundance.

This choice-making lets us see giving in a very different light. Giving

is not measured by emotional gain in the outer game after the act; it is by knowing and deeply experiencing the gain in the form of energy abundance even before the act of giving. This is a step towards focusing on whatever is wholesome.

Giving ‘myself’

We came across this practice in a book on healing which says, ‘native Americans gave away all their possessions in a ceremony they called the great give away’. Humans over many centuries have been made to believe that “having” is better than “giving”. As long as we remain identified with our human body, we inevitably become a part of such a belief.”

As we practice the rituals of Positive Energy, the energy abundance results in giving of one’s presence and trust, something that triggers changes in our individual consciousness. And others experience this shift in consciousness as a serene and harmonious exchange.

So giving ‘myself’ is not altruistic anymore. Altruism comes up when we still take a position from the ego. Giving ‘myself’ is a process of gaining energy abundance which supports one’s journey of meeting the real-self. And at one stage, giving and receiving merge into a seamless experience, where the giver and receiver is the same universal soul. In this state all lines blur and total wholesomeness is experienced.

Grow in Gratitude

“If you’ve forgotten the language of gratitude, you’ll never be on speaking terms with happiness.”

Experiencing gratitude everyday is the means to happiness.

Gratitude is many things to many people. It could be appreciation, saying thank you, experiencing abundance, looking at the brighter side even during a setback, it is thanking the divine for giving the awareness of how simple things in life lead to joy.

Most of us live life in the gap - looking at things that we do not have and that others have. This state of existence is very oppressive indeed! And yet we continue to live in the gap.

Growing with Gratitude draws our attention to things that we have. And doing this regularly allows us to celebrate the abundance we already possess.

As we compare ourselves, our surroundings, our work, with others, we have an opportunity to take lessons about areas for our improvement. However, we cannot magically transform or improve. We require a stable position from where we can make the leap towards improvement. This stable position is bestowed by living in Gratitude.

Gratitude is an attitude towards grace – it makes us more receptive to grace. Grace is an intense energy that brings harmony and abundance to both, the inner and outer dimensions of our life. We seek grace, but in the absence of gratitude we cannot experience it. On the other hand, when we are in gratitude, grace fills us.

Gratitude is like a wellness spring; once gratitude begins to flow,

it attracts more and more wellness into our lives. We experience abundance in every facet of our existence. And when we live our day to day with an experience of abundance, our thoughts, words, and actions are also driven from a deep sense of security, openness, and trust. This in turn attracts more abundance. Gratitude creates a virtuous cycle of fulfillment in our lives.

Begin your Gratitude journey today and allow yourself to cherish your existence and increase your self-love.

Steps to grow Gratitude in your life:

1. Keep a daily gratitude journal of three things you are thankful for. Let it also include the daily things in life that we tend to take for granted, such as, seeing a bird fly; an old person smiling; hearing a child's laughter, having a comfortable bed, etc.
2. Make it a practice to appreciate people about something in them, every day
3. Look in the mirror and appreciate yourself everyday - think about something you have done well recently or something you like about yourself
4. Write a gratitude letter to people who have impacted your life profoundly – such as a parent, teacher, sibling, friend, mentor, neighbor, colleague, etc.
5. As you meditate, with each in breath, recognize and appreciate a part of your body for performing its functions efficiently and with each out breath, say thank you to your body for keeping you fit and healthy

Gratitude Meditation	
<i>Thank you for this breath Thank you for this inhale Thank you for this exhale Thank you for this Life</i>	<i>Thank you Heart Thank you for this pounding Thank you for this pulsing Thank you for this Love</i>
<i>Thank you feet Thank you for this walk Thank you for this run Thank you for the Dancing</i>	<i>Thank you Eyes Thank you for the Sunrise Thank you for the Sunset Thank you for all the Colors</i>
<i>Thank you Ears Thank you for The Music Thank you for the Rhythm And Thank you for the Stillness</i>	<i>Thank you Hands Thank you for the Caressing Thank you for the Clapping And Thank you for the Holding</i>
<i>Thank you Nose Thank you for the Flowers Thank you for the Pines Thank you for the Sniffles</i>	<i>Thank you Nose Thank you for the Flowers Thank you for the Pines Thank you for the Sniffles</i>
<i>Thank you Mouth Thank you for the nourishment Thank you for the Wine Thank you for the Kisses</i>	<i>Thank you Nose Thank you for the Flowers Thank you for the Pines Thank you for the Sniffles</i>
<i>Thank you Arms and Shoulders Thank you for the Carrying Thank you for the Burdening And Thank you for the Hugging</i>	<i>Thank you Voice Thank you for the Expression Thank you for the Word Thank you for the Gift of Creation</i>
<i>Thank you for this Day Thank you for the Light Thank you for the Stars Thank you for the Night</i>	<i>Thank you Self Thank you for the Laughter Thank you for the Play Thank you for You</i>

—Gary van Warmerdam

How do you measure your success at work?

Being relaxed, at peace with yourself, confident, emotionally neutral, loose, and free-floating - these are the keys to successful performance in almost everything.” Dr. Wayne W. Dyer

In our workspaces, we are often focused on performance. We feel successful by achieving targets and goals. Our appraisal systems are also performance-focused. We often tend to miss the learning dimension of work, which enables our continuous growth and the experience dimension, which makes us enjoy what we do and feel energized too.

You may have heard about the Performance-Learning-Experience model for work. All three dimensions are important measures of one’s success at work. However, a disproportionate emphasis on performance is leading to Performance anxiety. In short, performance anxiety means, getting caught in action to the extent that we forget the purpose of our action. An individual, who is caught in performance anxiety, neglects learning, growth, and the inherent quality of the work experience.

When we journey through our work-life like a travel, we learn and cherish the experience of doing the work as much as the actual performance itself. When the measure of all three dimensions begins to matter, we are able to reflect positive energy in the way we do our work. Both, learning and experience, invoke supportive emotional energies that enable high performance.

However, it is also important to remember that too much focus on only learning can lead to a performance deficit and too much emphasis on getting a good experience of work can narrow one’s opportunities. Therefore, performance-learning-experience, in a rhythm, is the mantra

to holistic success. Bringing such a rhythm into our existence is the first step to stop “bullying” ourselves and other people into performance anxiety, performance deficit, and narrowed opportunities.

Typically, when we want to recover from performance anxiety, we take a sabbatical or go on a vacation. During this time we attempt to pursue learning and create enriching experiences for ourselves. How realistic is it to switch our external environments to toggle between performance, learning, and experience, simply because our workplaces do not value all three dimensions equally?

We can begin this journey at our workplaces by including all three dimensions (performance, learning, and experience) into our self-appraisal. When we begin to value learning and experience as much as performance, we create a sustainable work triangle, where one dimension feeds and strengthens the other. When the effects of this process become evident to those around us, they are also likely to value and embrace them. And soon we can collectively reflect positive energy in the way we do our work at our workplaces.

It is time to look at our work from a spiritual dimension. When we do that, leaders and team members will be able to expand the definition of success at work to include learning and experience also. This, in turn, will intrinsically support workplaces where individuals perform from a loose, free-floating, peaceful and confident state.

Inner Abundance – Positive Energy Way

The Positive Energy journey brings various experiences our way. A state of Abundance is one of them. However, we experience this differently from the typical worldly ways.

The dictionary meaning of abundance is ‘large/great quantity, plenty, loads, wealth’. All these words are typically understood as ‘having or possessing’ something of value in plenty. Therefore, people attempt to create abundance in their lives by hoarding wealth. Some people create wealth through hard work and then hoard it for later, others resort to grabbing or stealing wealth to create abundance. This form of wealth creation and hoarding, are actions that arise out of fear and insecurity - fear of the future.

In the Positive Energy path, abundance takes on a different experiential meaning. Abundance ceases to mean ‘having or possessing’ plenty of wealth. Abundance to the Positive Energy seeker is ‘knowing’ that whenever s/he needs, whatever s/he needs, as much as s/he needs, s/he shall have access to it. This comes from a strong connection with the universal energy, of which s/he is a part. This experience of connectedness and oneness makes the universe our wealth and all things in it, become shared resources.

Abundance in Positive Energy terms is the awareness that I’m a spiritual being living in a material world. Then, one has access to the pure energy that a spiritual being possesses. In turn, then one becomes less compulsive in daily life as abundance stops being associated with material possessions.

Unlike the abundant wealth of worldly existence, this form of abundance

is renewable, fair, nourishing, and fulfilling. It creates contentment in every instant. There are no comparisons, no competitiveness, no jealousy, no hatred, no yearning – it is a state of ultimate freedom and deliverance. It releases the positive energy seeker to live to their fullest, in pursuit of their spiritual path. This state of abundance is liberating - it sets us free to live life in the present moment, in complete mindfulness. Every moment then becomes fulfilling and joyful. There are no regrets from the past, no fears of the future, no guilt, no anxieties, no shackles that bind us to worries.

Abundance, then, is not a physical state, but a state of being, of existence. This is a natural state that becomes us, when in the Positive Energy path. This form of spiritual expansion brings many more experiences, such as renewal, restfulness, energizing, gratefulness, humility, and learning.

Abundance in the four energy dimensions translates into:

			
Physical Energy: Physical stamina for sprightly action	Emotional Energy: Calm, creativity and restfulness	Mental Energy: Intense Focus, providing momentum to every idea, plan and action	Spiritual Energy: Body-mind-spirit alignment resulting in openness to and deep awareness of life's meaning

Struggle with abundance happens when one's energy is engaged in reinforcing limitations and lack.

Limiting Beliefs

A powerful ritual that attunes one to abundance and consistently addresses limiting beliefs is writing a gratitude journal—which brings to the conscious mind things that are going well in life. We need to learn to be grateful for the abundance we already have. That is what makes it grow and multiply. When we live in gratitude, we experience abundance and support of the universe, and we actively contribute to the abundance of the universe too.

Here's how you can easily incorporate this practice into your life.

- Cultivate a spirit of gratitude: Be conscious and mindful of the blessings – big and small – that surround you.
- Write down at least three things that you are grateful for everyday: Either at the beginning or end of each day, write down every thing that you're grateful for. These questions are helpful to get you into the habit of experiencing gratitude--- What am I thankful for in this moment? What's working for my good right now?

Integration, Centeredness and Oneness

At times, we all experience moments of perfect harmony, moments when everything around us and inside us, align so well to create joy, a joy not triggered by external reasons, a joy so deep and intense, that we cannot even explain it.

Similarly, some tunes seem to directly reach our heart; tunes of unexplainable melody, touching any heart. At other times, we walk into nature and find the beauty of God's creation in all its glory. Everything feels centered, they all seem to be in their due place in the larger scheme of the universe, and there is a calming comfort in their presence. All this makes us wonder – what makes these moments, tunes, settings, so centered?

When all the elements of a composition, be it a tune, delicacy, or person, are balanced and integrated, then it seems so natural and joyful. Every human being has multiple energy dimensions to themselves – physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Much like the earth that rotates on its own axis as well revolves around the sun, each energy dimension needs to be centered in itself and seamlessly integrated with all the other energy dimensions. When all four energy dimensions are in integrated, then the person is centered within.

A centered person enjoys immense completeness with oneself and everything around. Such a person stops seeking things outside one self. Such people live in alignment with what matters to them and their true self and purpose. This true self and purpose then becomes the pivot on which everything else in their life rests and rotates - with ease and grace. And what is miraculous is that when one is centered, actions

and people that no longer serve them, belief systems and habits that no longer aid in the fulfillment of their purpose – all exit their life.

A centered person radiates calm, expansiveness and has an aura that brings others also calmness in their presence.

In the spiritual path there are multiple rituals and practices that enable a person achieve a state of centeredness. Meditation is one such practice – regular meditation is an essential practice in this journey. Given here is a meditation that activates, balances, and integrates all the energy dimensions in a person, leading them towards centeredness.

Integration Meditation (from *The four levels of Healing*, by Shakti Gawain)

This meditation helps you integrate all four dimensions of energy.

Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes and relax. Take a deep breath and as you exhale let go of everything you don't need to focus on right now. Take another deep breath and as you exhale let your awareness move deep inside. Keep breathing slowly and fully and allow your attention to move deeper and deeper inside. Move deeper than your body, mind or emotions until you come to a quiet place inside.

In this quiet place, open to feeling and experiencing your spiritual essence. Whether or not you feel anything in particular, just assume it's there. Know that it is always with you every moment of your life.

Now move slowly to the mental level. Imagine yourself very mentally clear and alert. Imagine that you believe in yourself, you have a confidence in your power to create and manifest whatever you want in

your life. You believe that life is supporting you in every way.

Now check in with yourself on the emotional level. How are you feeling right now? Can you accept and be with your feelings? Imagine you are feeling comfortable with your emotions. Know that as human beings we have many deep feelings that are gifts to help us take care of ourselves, to teach about life. So imagine yourself respecting and honoring all your feelings and learning to express them appropriately and constructively.

Become aware of your physical body and begin to sense how it feels. Give your body the love and appreciation it needs and deserves. Imagine that you are learning to listen to your body and pay attention to what it needs and feels. You take good care of it, and as a result it feels healthy, fit, alive and beautiful. Imagine feeling comfortable and happy in your body.

Now expand that feeling to your surroundings. Imagine yourself feeling comfortable and confident in the physical world, able to take good care of yourself and handle the practical aspects of life easily and efficiently.

When you feel complete with this, slowly open your eyes, stretch gently and go about your life.

Have a wonderful journey!

Unsung Beacons – Volume 5

While integrating the four energy dimensions is a way to experience centeredness, spiritual centeredness is the master key. This is the place where one lives life connected to spiritual energy and not to one's ego. Such a shift clears up the space for magnificence at physical, emotional and mental levels.

Let this article and the meditation give you the experience of stillness, because in it you will discover Oneness.

Releasing emotional blocks: “For every tear shed, a day is added to your life”

Continuing with our Positive energy series of focusing on an ancient saying, we are particularly moved with the saying “For every tear shed, a day is added to your life”.

Often one relates tears to only suffering and sadness. It is also considered to be emotionally weak to shed tears. How our society and culture has snatched away an important existential mechanism of crying and helping our emotions flow!

As we dwell on emotional energy, one aspect that comes up repeatedly is, when deep emotional patterns are cleansed, tears well-up. It is not a sign of distress, but one of release. On the same lines, when we experience abundance and bliss, tears manifest in such an experience.

Like the physical body has the process of perspiration to regulate the body temperature, similarly, tears have a role to play too. Though perspiration is uncomfortable, we still do not stop it, because we cannot. However, with tears which regulate emotions, we have learned to stop it. Like perspiration removes body toxins, crying removes emotional toxins.

There is a huge limiting belief around crying. The belief is, crying indicates that you are sensitive and not emotionally strong. Hence, many of us wear the mask of being emotionally strong without crying and are unknowingly depriving ourselves from the natural process of regulating our emotions.

We begin repressing our feelings when we do not want them to ‘come-out’. In other words we do not accept them. Shedding a tear is acceptance. It is a choice we make to liberate ourselves from traps that we set on our own.

Learn to release your tears. Experience the healing properties of tears. Crying is a spiritual process, as it indicates an open and softened heart. The ancient saying of ‘adding a day to our life’ points towards life force energy flowing through us and adding a day to our life.

This cleansing of emotional toxins is essential to create physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual harmony. The emotional toxins create blocks that hinder our movement forward. Removing these blocks may not be a one-time activity; rather it may require a regular check and maintenance. When the life force energy flows unhindered, it nurtures every dimension of our existence and creates balance and centeredness.

Some guidance on emotional cleansing:

- Become aware of ‘how’ you are feeling during various situations and interactions and acknowledge the feeling/s, without branding it as good or bad, nice or not nice
- Next, accept the feeling/s, with humility and openness – whatever it is, it is OURS
- Then, recognize whether the feeling serves you or not, whether the feeling stems from ego or the feeling is an external projection on our self. If it does not serve you, release it either by sharing, writing it and tearing the paper, or crying it out of your system

Finally, attempt to live in the present moment, without any past or future references or predetermined notions handed down by society or books, without any expectations projecting yourself into the future, and without an ego that misguides and draws you away from your true self – the universal energy.

Speech is Silver, Silence is Golden

We have often heard this adage and most times people interpret it as - keeping silent is good. However, silence does not mean not talking; silence cannot be imposed from outside. Silence is an outcome, not a process. Silence descends on us when we are intensely engaged in searching, and then deep within us, we realize that many things that we are searching for in the world outside us, does not really exist there, but can only be found within us; then silence descends on the person.

Silence also occurs on occasions when words are not necessary - a mother who sits by the bedside of her sick child, does not have to go on speaking reassuring words to her child, and yet something warm and comforting spills out of her heart, and that is experienced by the child.

What does Silence mean?

- Silence refers to silence of the mind, and not silence in speech. When the mind is silent, even speech becomes silent. There is a pause in the thought process. Such a shift happens only when we experience deep trust in the universe
- Silence means communicating with the universe to understand the deeper meaning of life
- Silence means silencing the intellect and opening the ‘heart’
- Silence provides an opportunity to identify the qualities within ourselves that have the capacity to transform us
- Similar to how we ‘slow down’ to experience vitality in the physical body, silence is the ‘slowing down’ of the mental body so we can reach the source of our energy

Silence is a discipline, not of ‘doing’, but of ‘being’

We often use the phrase, ‘listen, don’t just hear’. If listening is a deeper participation than hearing, silence is the next ‘deeper’ step to listening. It is a movement from the surface to our core - silence is a step towards very deep listening; listening that goes beyond our five senses, where we begin to listen to the vibrations of our existence.

Speech that comes from such a deep experience of silence naturally impacts people in many positive ways.

How Silence serves us

- Silence helps us get in touch with our body; we ‘experience’ our body in entirely new ways - it enables us appreciate the work of nature that is working through us and is the source of our physical processes
- Silence helps us hear our thoughts, it reveals patterns in our thought process; patterns that may or may not be serving us
- Silence helps us experience emotions with an open heart and not a prejudiced mind
- During conflict, when one has a strong view point, deep silence helps sift through superficial thoughts and takes us to the truth
- In suffering, physical or emotional, silence helps one reflect deeply about patterns that have led to physical and emotional disturbances
- Above all, Silence brings us to our breath, to the present moment and enables us savor and live it to the fullest – the state of ‘beingness’ in all its glory!

Wholesomeness in Living

“There is a light in this world, a healing spirit more powerful than any darkness we may encounter. We sometimes lose sight of this force when there is suffering, too much pain. Then suddenly, the spirit will emerge through the lives of ordinary people who hear a call and answer in extraordinary ways.”— Mother Teresa

The Positive Energy framework presents four dimensions to energy management, namely, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. The first three dimensions are fairly well understood by most people. However, the fourth dimension, spiritual energy is either confused as being religious, or is thought to be something one pursues later in life.

Going back to the Positive Energy framework, one needs to understand that all four dimensions of energy need to manifest in tandem, for wholesomeness in living. Therefore, understanding what is spiritual energy and also exploring how this energy dimension can be expressed, is helpful.

Spiritual energy is expressed by not doing more, but by stopping to do many things that we compulsively do in our lives. Do you postpone your spontaneity, are you managing risks (read as doubts, worry, fear) all the time, are you waiting for a ‘golden moment’ to arrive to do things differently, are you constantly looking for external appreciation and acknowledgment, do you give because you want to receive, are you comparing yourself to others in your environment and so on. The list of such actions is endless.

Spiritual energy gets released from the day-to-day choices we make. It is letting go all actions that are done to receive abundance with the

thought that the current state of life is incomplete. It is making the choice to be deeply aware of the presence of our ‘spirit’ that is abundant, and celebratory as that is its true nature.

My spiritual journey

Recently, on a long flight, I found myself recounting my spiritual journey thus far in life. Although we are all born spiritual beings, this realization only dawns on us at some point in our life.

Well, I distinctly remember that stage of my life when this realization dawned on me. I had just come out of a major setback in my life; a period of intense suffering, pain, and anguish. During this period there was a transformation that happened in my life. From living a life on the surface, I began going deeper within myself. I was dwelling on life and its purpose. And the deeper I withdrew within me, the more I came in touch with my core. This was the time when my understanding of the spiritual nature of our being came to my realization. And it aroused an intense desire to explore more of that dimension and thus I set off in this journey. I searched everywhere, seeking to know the truth – in books, meeting ‘religious gurus’, taking all forms of courses in my spiritual pursuit. I was completely externalized, where I was looking for a ‘Guru’ in the world around me. While I did not find all the answers, this pursuit certainly left me more enriched – providing knowledge and understanding that the ‘Guru’ is within me and I should journey inside to find it. However, I knew not how to journey inside. So, I kept at it, attempting to meditate, read spiritual books, attend religious and spiritual lectures, take courses in meditation, healing, pranayam, etc. All these continued to enrich me, but they didn’t show me the direction for the inward journey.

Then, after years of this pursuit, I began to realize from my own experience, that life is lived in the present moment. Initially, this only meant the dimension of time to me. And I began practicing it – attempting to live in the moment, without worrying about the future or delving and living in the past. I released my past, forgave all those who caused me pain, deeply thanked all who touched my life positively, and most of all forgave myself. This helped release the ghosts and pain of the past from my consciousness. Then some situations suddenly placed me in a situation that made me evaluate ‘what is the worst that can happen to me’ in the future. In that moment, I realized that there is no way to know but I somehow felt like I would be taken care of in the future. And suddenly I felt a wonderful sense of freedom – breaking all shackles of future anxieties. However, it wasn’t that I never worried about the future or pained over a past event. Only their frequency and intensity had considerably reduced. The digression from the present moment was minor – such as, I have to get these things done next, I am not sure I did that well, I should have done like that, I need to do that in this way, etc. The digressions were in short time deviations – in days and hours. However, as I continued to practice being in the present moment, one thing dawned on me – in addition to the dimension of time, being in the present moment meant ‘being fully present’ to whatever I am doing, whoever I am with, wherever I am, etc. I realized that it was the act of bringing my hundred percent to the activity of the present moment. This eased my ability to be in the present moment. I found myself very capable of giving my complete attention to one thing at a time. And what I also soon began to experience is that when I was fully engaged in each present moment, the future took care of itself. Life unfolded in amazing ways – and I always felt that the tapestry of life unfolding perfectly, each and every time. This was my lesson in being

in the present moment.

I still did not realize that my inward journey had begun and progressed. I had begun to meditate regularly. I was practicing yoga and experienced balance and centeredness. I began to notice that I intuitively knew things, I was able to look beyond the physical vision, I sensed things, I received messages during my meditation and dreams; I was feeling like I was in touch with a much larger consciousness. I experienced loving guidance and care. I began to feel part of this consciousness – a kindred sense of oneness. And then people who were on a similar journey began to come into my life and pursuits that were aligned with this journey began to unfold as my work. I felt people were more loving and supportive now and I felt great sense of love and compassion for others even in most difficult situations. I am enjoying being in this journey and being in this space – I am truly experiencing how the journey can be so wonderful that the destination ceases to matter.

The essence of Spiritual Energy is:

1. ‘Being in the present’ as it is the most authentic way to live life – it aligns our core with the external world, it enables us live life fully, and it teaches us to exercise free will and do our actions while we also live in total surrender, allowing life to unfold in ways most fitting for us
2. And To ‘be’ and not ‘do’, that brings us in touch with the universal consciousness and thus the experience of oneness

Trendsetters



Cancer Crusader

A life of dedicated service towards cancer prevention and cure- Dr V Shanta, Chairman, Cancer Institute (WIA), Chennai, speaks to Nidhi Adlakha on her journey so far and her dreams for the Institute and vision 20:20 of making India a cancer-free country .

Health is the greatest gift, contentment the greatest wealth, faithfulness the best relationship. —Buddha

Working towards providing this very wealth to millions battling cancer, Dr V Shanta, is an epitome of persistence and hard work. In her illustrious career spanning over six decades, she has fought her way through numerous obstacles and continues to deal with many challenges hampering cancer care in India.

Belonging to an era when women professionals were few, Dr Shanta was determined to chase her dreams. “I dreamt of being a trained physician,

a doctor, from my school days. Back then, a majority of women settled down to a married household life and very few women took up a career. None of this appealed to me and my mother was very supportive of my choices,” she says.

Dr Shanta studied at what was then called National Girls High School at Mylapore. Today, the school has been renamed as National Boys and Girls Education Society. She pursued her Intermediate Class (Class 10 to 12) at the Presidency College. “I completed my MBBS from the Madras Medical College, and I had the opportunity to be tutored by exceptional teachers. I went on to pursue a Post Graduate Diploma in Obstetrics and Gynecology and trained at the Women and Children Hospital from 1952-54.” Dr Shanta also appeared for the Public Service Commission to enter the State Medical Service and was selected. “I was posted as a lecturer- antenatal care at the Women and Children Hospital, Egmore; this was truly the turning point of my life and career,” she adds.

Her active involvement in cancer management was in 1950 when she was posted as a house surgeon at the Cancer Unit of the Government General Hospital (GH) which had just been organised by Dr S Krishnamurthi, who had returned from the US after training in cancer surgery. Dr Shanta says the strongest impression in the cancer unit was the overwhelming flood of patients, advanced disease, the exploitation of the hapless patients by hospital touts and physicians alike and Dr Krishnamurthi, young and idealistic struggling against all these odds. “He encountered unimaginable corruption, witnessed poor cancer patients being exploited by professionals. He often told me, more people live on cancer than die of cancer, which I remember even today and still fight against. Soon after, the cancer unit was closed and all records confiscated. Only the OP remained,” she explains.

It was in the same period when for the first time, she heard of Dr Krishnamurthi's mother, Dr Muthulakshmi Reddy, the first woman medical graduate of India at a Sheriff's meeting, organised as part of a fund raising drive for a Cancer Hospital. Dr Reddy organised the Women's Indian Association (WIA) Cancer Relief Fund in an effort to start a separate hospital for cancer care and treatment since there were no facilities for cancer treatment then.

Dr Reddy had lost her younger sister to a misdiagnosed cancer and was a witness to her sister's painful end. She determined to start a facility for cancer and could fulfill her dream only after India's Independence. She sent Dr Krishnamurthi to the US, who later returned to India and founded the Institute in 1954. It was founded as a Voluntary Charitable Hospital for treatment of the underprivileged. "There was very little money and she needed a medical officer. It was April 1955 and I had just qualified for my MD and was the youngest one in Tamil Nadu. I renounced my selection by the Madras Public Service Commission to the State service and joined the Cancer Institute. This was the beginning of her long and untiring journey in the field of cancer care and support.

Under the tutelage of Dr Muthulakshmi, Dr Shanta learnt how important it is to sustain an initiative and ensure that its performance speaks. Speaking of how she has sustained the Cancer Institute over the years, Dr Shanta says, "Back then, gathering support and donors was easy as we had the backing of Dr Muthulakshmi. As we grew, I have learnt that it is your transparency and effort that pays off. Your change should be measured by patient satisfaction and not on monetary grounds." She believes patients play a pivotal role in this process and the message that they take across from the Institute will help spread awareness and

automatically bring in goodwill and funding. “People in Tamil Nadu still need to open their minds about donating to social causes. Attitudes are changing and it is a welcome change to note that in the last one year, 50% of our donations have been unsolicited.”

Since 1955, there have been exceptional technological advances in cancer care and cure - and Dr Shanta stresses on the need for a focussed approach to tackle the disease. “I have witnessed an era of incurability evolve into an era of curability”. Having said that, common cancers which are tobacco related cancers, cervical and breast cancers are not only curable if detected early but preventable. Many NGOs are taking up different initiatives. We need to coordinate and integrate them with governmental support. Spreading awareness is of primary importance and it is a painfully slow process,” she adds. She highlights that although Tamil Nadu and other southern states fare better in terms of healthcare, we have a long way to go in battling cancer. “As there is no follow up with patients, we are unable to analyse success rates. Cancer Institute is the only centre in the country that has lifetime records and unless others follow suit, it will be difficult to formulate statistics and success rates and this is why unfortunately, India fares poorly internationally in terms of mortality rates,” says Dr Shanta.

With a number of firsts to its credit, the Cancer Institute (WIA) has been instrumental in introducing the concept of super-speciality training in surgical and medical oncology and founded the first Dr Muthulakshmi College of Oncologic Sciences in 1984. They were the first in the country to introduce the super voltage era, Co60 therapy, in 1956.

She envisions the institute taking up a leadership role and gathering

government support as the way forward. “We need to focus on early detection as in the 1950s, only 20% of cases were detected in early stages but things have improved since. Today, over 40% cases are detected early but we need to focus on and reduce the 60% cases detected in later stages.” Dispelling myths about cancer takes precedence and she constantly spreads the message that cancer is preventable and curable.

Speaking of her vision for the institute and the country, Dr Shanta, says, “Research plays an important role in tackling such diseases, especially in the field of genetic analysis. We need to work on research to put our achievements over the last decades to use. Secondly, training doctors to be compassionate and follow ethical practices is crucial.” Drawing attention to the important role youngsters play, she says, “Over 50% cancers can be prevented and it is shocking to note that 40% of cancers in men are tobacco related and cervical, breast cancers are common among women. Taking preventive measures and early detection can go a long way of youngsters spread awareness on these matters.” USA reduced its tobacco consumption to 20% from 50% and India needs to follow suit and ensure the implementation of laws set to regulate tobacco sale and use, and educate the masses. “Educating children goes a long way in making a difference. The media must take the effort to spread awareness and control advertising that supports tobacco manufacturers,” says Dr Shanta.

With social entrepreneurship clearly the buzz word today, and a number of youngsters stepping into the field, Dr Shanta looks at it as a positive trend that needs to be encouraged. However, keeping your focus on one cause is what she believes is needed. “There are numerous individuals and organisations that are doing commendable work and are unheard

of and these ‘invisible’ workers must be supported. In my opinion, enhancing and sustaining these organisations by providing them support would bring a world of change, rather than look at starting many similar organisations,” she says.

Her dedicated service towards cancer prevention and organised cancer care for the underprivileged in the country, is an inspiration for many. Her tireless support to the field of healthcare has garnered her the praise and admiration worldwide. Apart from the 60 awards from government and private organisations, Dr Shanta is the recipient of the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award for Public Service (2005) and Padma Bhushan (2006). She has published numerous research papers and participated in many international and national conferences. Speak to her about her success and recognition she has received, a very humbled Dr Shanta says, “As Dr Abdul Kalam, former President of India repeatedly says, the organisation you work for, the nation of which you are a part is above the individual. There is so much to do, think and act towards betterment of the Institute that there is hardly time to think of anything else.”



Encouraging Volunteerism

Kartheeban C is eight years into volunteering. And since the time he founded Team Everest in 2006, is working for an IT firm that required after-hours work. “I would finish off my job at around 11pm, and spend time at the office till about 1am in planning for the NGO,” he says, recounting his first steps in establishing Team Everest. Ever since he entered his teens, Kartheeban always wanted to do his bit for society. Team Everest’s website even has an anecdote about how he knew a friend who used to help his father change punctures and earn a meagre amount to help him fund his education. It’s little wonder then, that these motivations served as the primary driving force in Kartheeban wanting to be a change-maker. But it wasn’t enough that he sign up to become just another agent of change. “Today, people are willing to donate their money. Time, on the other hand, has become a more valuable

commodity,” he says, attempting to explain where Team Everest is an NGO with a difference. “Money is certainly important, no doubt. But if there was nobody to go about collecting these donations, making out receipts, and putting the money into good use, what good is the money? These processes require time. At Team Everest, we try to encourage the donation of time.”

From its inception, Team Everest’s mantra has remained a numeric fraction, literally. “Twelve-by-three -sixty-five”, Kartheeban says, “If everyone tries to volunteer once a month, we get a total of 12 days a year. Twelve days out of a total of 365 days a year is a big number if we get everyone to do their bit for a cause. A nation of a billion people can really go out there and make a difference, this way.” Kartheeban’s approach, in fact, is an extension of Team Everest’s guiding philosophy of encouraging volunteerism — making volunteering an activity that the common man could engage in. Today, the NGO has close to 8,500 volunteers, all of whom are active across volunteering platforms. “Our website has an active calendar with logs for volunteers; we have an android app that schedules volunteering activities and a very active Facebook page,” says Kartheeban, detailing how Team Everest has caught up with the age of social media, successfully implementing its many functions into a noble activity.

Along the way, Team Everest’s volunteers have also engaged in a long list of social service activities. This includes computer training sessions, puppet shows, talent hunt competitions, organizing orphanage visits, educational tours, science awareness sessions, essay-writing competitions, soft-skills training and art competitions, to name a few. But what has truly revolutionized the way volunteering is looked at, is its novel attempts at what Kartheeban calls “virtual volunteering”.

He elaborates: “a number of people don’t have the time to go out there and volunteer. But it’s also possible to volunteer from your home. Volunteering activity can also mean content-writing, working on designs, creating websites, etc. That’s virtual volunteering, giving your time although you may not be present, physically.”

Team Everest’s funding is driven almost exclusively by kind-hearted individuals who make contributions from their personal income. But that, Kartheeban admits, is far from satisfactory when it comes to running an NGO. “That’s why we are literally sustained by the kind-heartedness of our volunteers. We can’t afford to hire staff, but our volunteers more than make up for it, especially because they aren’t obliged to work for us. They do it because they want to. They actually go about making that difference in our lives and the lives of others.” Along this journey of encouraging volunteerism, Team Everest has also done its bit to improve acts of kindness and volunteerism, like its “Kindness Challenge” which has 10 acts of kindness, encouraging volunteers to perform random acts of kindness and then share their experiences with each other.

Going forward, Kartheeban remains firm that Team Everest’s continued goal will be its 12/365 mantra. “We want to continue encouraging people to volunteer and do their bit for society. People’s mindsets need to change when it comes to giving, irrespective of whether they’re giving their time or money.” He points out how India is ranked a lowly 133 on the World Giving Index, which attempted to gauge the generosity of 153 countries across the world. “Unless and until we change that about ourselves, there will still be a lot that’s left to be desired about the way we go about doing things today.” Along with this change in mindset, Kartheeban also plans to go about a propaganda mission to

make volunteering part and parcel of everyday life. “The aim is to make volunteering as routine as visiting a temple or going for a movie. You don’t write out a status update after visiting a temple, right? Then why does it become a matter of discussion when you visit an orphanage? That’s because we don’t do it often; it isn’t routine. Once we change that, and when we do, only then can we reconcile ourselves to having achieved a true

spirit of volunteerism.” And how does he plan on achieving that? “By creating avenues of opportunity”, comes the response. “In my experience, I’ve discovered that people are interested in spending time for a cause. Volunteering, therefore, is a natural tendency. What’s missing is the right opportunity. And creating that opportunity is what we at Team Everest are committed to doing.



Energy Centre

After negotiating the impossible Chennai traffic and getting lost, I finally arrive at the Rain Centre. This rather nondescript building is at the forefront of rain water harvesting in Chennai. And now, it is the venue of a breakthrough experiment in alternative energy.

Dr. Ram and Ram, as I call them, have just put together an integrated workable solar energy system, working on both DC and AC current that homes and industries can use at half the cost of existing technologies. Dr. Ramarathnam created the system after few years of R & D, while the other Ram, S. Ramakrishnan, enabled the system to be installed in the Rain Centre. The company, Basil Energetic Pvt. Ltd., has been recently formed to take the invention to market.

As the country is attending another round of talks at COP 19, the Minister of Environment and Forests in an interview said, “I don’t think I would

be wrong in saying that India has taken far more initiatives than many, and are internally very proud of these. We are by no means a naysayer. We only object to any prescriptive policies that are dictated to us by others, who are actually not doing anything to combat climate change. We have a great deal to show. We have initiatives to enhance building efficiency and we are doing studies on the issue of black carbon.”

It is innovation, the likes of which Dr R and his team have delivered, that are the real solutions that are changing the scenario, amid the many COP meetings that have happened over the years.

After meeting Dr. Ramarathnam and looking at his invention, I can say that at this point of time there is no building anywhere in this world that has the kind of system that harnesses, harvests sun energy to give light and cooling, saves expenses, and provides efficient appliances cost effectively. At a household level, the application of this innovation has critical use across a wide variety of users.

In a lay person’s language what this does is use a compressed and space efficient solar panel that continuously absorbs the solar light and converts it into energy. The electrical energy goes directly into appliances such as the ceiling fan, an air conditioner and a refrigerator, as well as other appliances such as computers. This set up can be used in a household as well as for industrial use.

How it works?

Existing rooftop solar systems

- Consist of Solar Panel, Battery with Charge Controller and Inverter

- Uses existing inefficient appliances – Air Conditioner, Fridge, Fan, Light

Inside homes, it is difficult to handle larger motor driven loads like AC and fridge due to a high in-rush starting current and the need for a higher power rated panel, battery and inverter. Due to the above the size and cost of the system goes up and hence has not been deployed in a wide manner. The roof top area required is high and hence deployment in apartments becomes an issue. Battery maintenance and replacement costs are also a deterrent.

The new system

No inverter. Hybrid application which can work on AC Mains or DC from Solar panels.

- Soft starting of motor loads – no in-rush current
- A Central grid controller does the following:
 - £ Continuously monitors the power availability and load requirements
 - £ Switches the appliances from DC to AC or vice versa
 - £ Ensures maximum utilisation of solar power at all times
 - £ When generation is more than the load requirement, the excess energy can be fed back to the grid, if allowed, like in a smart grid.
- 1 All the above result in the drastic reduction of the panel power rating, which comes down to a third of the conventional system
- 1 The roof top area is also reduced correspondingly. Hence

applicable in multi-storeyed apartments easily.

- 1 The overall cost of the new system, including the appliances is less than that of the existing system even after excluding the cost of the appliances
- 1 When there is no sun shine and solar energy production, the system runs from AC Mains. Even in this case, the energy consumption is cut by half
- 1 The power factor presented to the grid is near unity at all times.
- 1 There is no need to store the energy in batteries. However this can be done if back up power is needed. Even here the KWHr rating of the battery is drastically reduced, resulting in smaller floor space.

Model Installation in Chennai

Load consists of One 1 Ton Air conditioner, One 330 Litre Refrigerator, Three 1,200 mm Ceiling Fans and Nine LED lamps. A conventional system needs a 5 KW solar panel, battery with charger and a 6 KVA inverter with a roof top area of around 40 sq.m. The new system uses only a 1.44 KW solar panel, no battery and inverter and the roof top area used is only 11 sq.m.

The cost of the new system including the hybrid appliances is only about half of the present system without accompanying appliances.

Model costs

600W – One 300 litre fridge, Three 1200mm Ceiling Fans & Nine LED lights. – Rs 2 Lakhs

1440 W – One 1 Ton Air Con, One 300 litre fridge, Four Ceiling Fans and 10 LED lights – Rs 4 Lakhs

1920 W – One 1.5 Ton AC, One 300 Litre Fridge, 12 LED lights and Four 1200 mm ceiling fans – Rs 5 Lakhs

Possible Application Areas

The new system can be deployed in homes, offices, shops, etc without any change in the wiring. It is ideal in remote areas where electricity is not available but sunshine is. Additional new energy sources like Roof Top Micro Wind, PICO Hydel, Biomass/Biogas generation systems can be easily added to the smart micro grid. Depending on the site conditions and availability of the renewable sources we can install a local smart micro grid for a hamlet, village or a set of homes.

Even as the technology is travelling to urban centres, from health establishments to businesses, buildings and IT complexes, it is the 400 million people in India still do not have access to electricity and use kerosene for lighting that Basil wants to take the technology out to.

The Energy Centre is to be formally inaugurated on Feb 26, 2014 by Dr M S Swaminathan, the renowned agricultural scientist. Ms Shanta Sheela Nair, IAS, Vice Chairperson, Tamilnadu State Planning Commission, will preside over the function.

“Regarding our solution we are taking up a pilot batch installation of around 15 homes/offices in the suburban area of Chennai. Everything is line up now as far as the appliances and panels. The system is working very well in the Energy Centre, automatically controlling the loads between the AC Mains and Solar Panels. We expect a rush of enquiries after the formal inaugural. Only thing is we have to gear up on the

Unsung Beacons – Volume 5

working capital in case a rapid ramp up of deliveries are required. I am still searching for help from green funds,” says Dr. Ramarathnam.

You can find out more about this Rooftop Solar system with hybrid appliances by writing to: rramarathnam@basilenergetics.com

— **Pushpanath Krishnamurthy**



Made in Bangalore

As someone who grew up in Bangalore, I have seen my city undergo a startling transformation, from the Pensioners Paradise — to the Silicon Valley of India. I am almost a pensioner myself now!

Sometimes, I feel stupefied and amazed by the changes, but I can't feel old: not with so much energy all around me. And from what I see, I feel truly optimistic about the new India, and in particular, the remarkable ways in which a new generation of entrepreneurs are harnessing business skills to tackling the miseries and injustices of our country.

I have been involved in a study with the Centre for Social Markets into the new forms of innovation pouring out in forms of enterprises here, which we have published as 'Made in Bangalore'.

Take for instance 'Vindhya-Infomedia Pvt Ltd', an IT company that does business process outsourcing. Vindhya employs more than 230

physically challenged young men and women, which forms two-thirds of the entire staff.

I am greeted by Srinath at the door. I was about to extend my hand to him when I realised that he had just two stubs for hands. Seeing my confusion he smiled and explained: “I lost them while working on a construction site. The metal pole I was carrying got stuck to a high-tension wire and my hands got completely burnt. I cannot work on computers, but I can do many other tasks.

Vindhya was founded by 26-year old Pavithra Ashok and her husband Ashok Gil. Early on they faced many hurdles. For several months in 2006-07 their staff had to go without salaries; employees were accommodated in spare rooms; and Pavithra cooked the food. Realising the difficulties, the employees said: “Give us one meal a day, and that would suffice.” Today, Vindhya has clients ranging from Yahoo to local microfinance institutions and has an annual growth rate of 80 percent.

Now, let’s talk about Dr Sudhakar Varnasi who observed that it is possible to deliver a pizza within 20 minutes, whereas it was almost impossible to deliver health care during emergencies. Out of anger at that incongruity, Dr Sudhakar created the GVK-Emergency Management and Research Initiative (EMRI). In conjunction with the government, this initiative provides the 108 toll free number for emergency services.

108 was the brainchild of Mahindra Satyam who began it in Karnataka. In five years 108 service was available in 10 states, and was the only professional service of its kind in India that handled medical, fire and police emergencies. In Karnataka, 108 has 517 ambulances and typically able to get to any emergency within 20 minutes – the equivalent of a

pizza delivery! In a day 108 saves over 300 lives, and some 8,000 babies have been born in its ambulances. The GVK-EMRI works on a public-private partnership model, with the state underwriting 95 percent of the cost and GVK and private donations meeting the remainder.

Dr Sudhakar says: “We need to marry the passion and professionalism of the private sector and the power and reach of the government to have a win-win solution. The time is ripe: politicians have recognised that good development is good politics. If the private sector shows the way by transparent, innovative approaches to solve some of these tough problems, partnership with the government can result in phenomenal success, scale and impact.”

Let me give you one final example. In 2001, the Supreme Court ruled that state governments must introduce a cooked meal at mid-day in all government primary schools. Now ‘Akshaya Patra’ provides nutritionally balanced and hygienic mid-day meals to 1.3 million children from the world’s largest centrally managed kitchen, using cutting edge culinary technology. It is another public-private partnership. The government supports some of the running costs, individuals and corporates like Infosys, Biocon and Bosch provide the rest.

What lessons do I draw from these and many other case studies in our report?

I would say that we are seeing a new stream of business developing and leading the way in taking on the challenges of equity, accessibility, and sustainability. These businesses are many different types; there is no one model. But, what they have in common is two-fold: their focus, to tackle poverty and exclusion, and their use of IT to deliver accountability, transparency, and most vitally efficient and prompt

delivery. A new ecosystem of support facilities has started to emerge around these enterprises and what these entrepreneurs are doing has started to be celebrated. A virtuous circle has begun!

As we all embark on a new year, I see my city changed beyond belief. But, I feel buoyed by the efforts of these new change makers, not downcast.

Please do please read these stories in detail from <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/made-in-bangalore-how-social-enterprise-is-transforming-business-as-usual-204790> and share my excitement.

— **Pushpanath Krishnamurthy**



Mission Medicines

The fact that he's 79 is no deterrent to M Ramani. The almost-octogenarian has his heart and mind firmly set on serving society. And that's why no sooner than he retired back in 1994, he's dedicated his life towards making society a better place to live. For 20 years now, Ramani has dedicated his life to distributing medicines to the needy. "I'm a follower of Sathya Sai Baba and I've always wanted to make the most of my retired life, instead of spending my silver years doing something that would mean little to the world around me," he says. "When I got down to thinking about what I wanted to do, I realized that in several rural hamlets, a number of people don't have access to medical care let alone proper supply of medicines." That was when Ramani decided that distributing medicines to people who needed them, would be his life's

calling.

“I am inspired by two people: my father and a social worker by the name of R Sridhar. In fact, Mr Sridhar was polio-affected but still went about making society a better place, by way of his yeomen service to those around him, running a charitable trust that would impart financial service to deserving people, for their educational needs. I wanted to do something tiny, yet meaningful for those around me.” Encouraged by friends and the doctors he knew, Ramani then went about collecting medicines that doctors didn’t need, and shipping them to people who needed them the most. “So many doctors get samples of medicines nearly every day, which they hardly use. I collect these medicines and bring them back to my place.” A process of filtration begins. This includes checking for expiry dates and grouping relevant medicines. “Once I have grouped my medicines together, I begin identifying people who need these medicines and don’t have the financial wherewithal to afford them, and thus go about the distribution.” Ramani goes about distributing these medicines himself, or asks his beneficiaries to come by his place and have them collected.

Earnestness, dedication, sincerity and honesty have for long, been the four pillars over which Ramani has built his service. “I have gone about distributing these medicines without fear, favour or preference for a certain caste or creed,” he says. Not only has he networked with doctors to collect these medicines, but Ramani has also visited several medical camps with large stockpiles of medical supplies, in order to source medicines. The most important rule that he has, is never to derive personal benefit from his service to society. “That’s something I faithfully adhere to,” he says, “In fact, I had a skin condition and a doctor had prescribed certain medication. These medicines weren’t

available in the pharmacy. However, strangely enough, I found them in my box of medicines that was to go out to people who needed these medicines. But I told myself that I was not going to benefit from the service that I resolved to do for others.” Ramani chose to wait until he found the medicines that he needed.

Working as a volunteer, according to Ramani, requires two qualities: commitment and divine grace. “You cannot be successful even in social service without these two qualities. And thankfully, I have been blessed with both,” he says. In fact, his inspiration to engage in social service occurred to him much before retirement, when he worked as a senior audit officer. “When I would visit hospitals to do audits, I could see the number of people who were struggling with life-threatening conditions. On several occasions, we complain about pain in our legs. But only when we see people who don’t have limbs, do we realize the value of life and how much we are blessed,” he says.

As if 20 years of service were not enough, Ramani feels that there is a long way to go. “I want to keep doing this until my last breath,” he says, his voice full of commitment, dedication and enthusiasm. “I truly believe that this is my calling and that I can do a good job at making society a better place to live.” Along the way, he hopes that his efforts can reduce the gap between need and lack, especially when it comes to medical facilities. “A number of rural areas don’t have proper access to medical facilities or proper availability of some very important medical infrastructure,” he says, “If in a small way, my actions will help these people; that will give me immense happiness,” he says, “I bear all the expenses of my service, including transportation of these medicines.

Unsung Beacons – Volume 5

And I do it joyfully, because I know that there is no better feeling than to know that your actions have helped someone who is truly in need, and needs your help the most.” If there’s a lesson that can be learnt from Ramani’s service to society, it’s simply that age can be no barrier, in the effort to brighten the lives of those around us.



The Eye-Opener

It was Dr A P J Abdul Kalam who said “Giving light to the blind is the greatest service to humanity”. The former president was referring to Sankara Eye Care Institutions, visibly taken aback by the service to society that the hospital and its institutions thereafter, had provided. Today, that’s a mission that the group continues to work towards. But learning the story of Dr V Ramani and how he went about establishing an impressive network of eye hospitals requires some re-winding. “My father was one of the few doctors who stayed back when Coimbatore was suffering from a plague in 1942, in order to treat patients who fell victim to illness and disease,” says Dr Ramani, tracing the origins of his medical empire. “This continued to an extent that the people around him began showering him with so much love, affection and support.” When Dr A Ramanathan breathed his last in 1966, it was Dr Ramani’s plan to start a private practice in Coimbatore in his father’s honour.

With his wife, Dr Radha, the medical duo established a private practice that would go on to signal the rise of Sankara Eye Care, to where it stands today – a colossus in the field of providing quality eye care to the masses.

It was 1972 when Dr Ramani and Dr Radha began their private practice in Coimbatore, when the former chanced upon a temple started by the Kanchi Sankaracharya. “When the Sankaracharyas came to Coimbatore, they met with a number of doctors and explained the importance of utilizing medical expertise in the service of the deserving,” Dr Ramani explains, “A chance meeting with one of the senior members of the mutt led me to understand that while a number of doctors agreed in principle, to do their bit for society, little had been done thereafter.” That was when Dr Ramani decided that he would spearhead the service that the Kanchi Sankaracharya had spoken about. “I chose not to start right then, though,” he says, “I called together a few doctors of my age group and spoke about what we could do, do fulfil the Sankaracharya’s plan. I did not want to include doctors who were very senior since I was a bit wary of what they might think.”

That was how the Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Medical Centre came to be, in 1977. It was Coimbatore’s answer to its genuine dearth of quality medical care. “The relevance of the medical centre was very important,” Dr Ramani explains, “In India, back then, you had government medical centres and hospitals on one hand... and you had private hospitals on the other. There was no middle ground. I hoped that the medical centre that I helped build would take care of that gap.” Starting off with just 10 doctors involved in the operation of the medical centre, Dr Ramani was careful not to take any title in the functioning of the medical

centre. “Calling myself ‘president’ would have automatically meant an invisible line between me and the other doctors,” he says, “I decided to merely be a coordinator, and thus work with the others in fulfilling a common interest.”

Over the next few years, 10 doctors became 75. And over time, the Sankaracharya advised Dr Ramani to disengage the medical practice from the affairs of the mutt, and run it as a separate trust. That was how the Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Medical Trust came to be established in 1982. “Medical facilities across the country saw a great improvement around this time. The government was doing its bit to ensure that people had access to better healthcare than there was,” recalls Dr Ramani, “And that’s why I figured that the time was ripe to specialize in one field. I chose to run an eye speciality hospital for two simple reasons. The first was simply because India, being home to nearly one quarter of the world’s visually impaired population, needed it the most. The second reason was because helping someone to see the world around him, made for one of the best feelings anyone could ever have.” That was when Dr Ramani decided to establish Sankara Eye Hospital in 1985.

Over the last two decades, Sankara Eye Hospitals have cropped up in several States across the country. “The vision is to ensure that by 2020, we have a hospital in every Indian state,” says Dr Ramani. For every surgery performed at the hospital, four surgeries are performed free, a practice that the hospital refers to as ‘the see-saw effect’. Just last year, the chain of hospitals had successfully performed one million cataract surgeries across the country. Its welfare initiatives included a number of medical check-ups for children, free surgeries and yeomen service to the betterment of ophthalmologic health. “We began collecting donations for different purposes,” Dr Ramani explains, “We allowed

our donors the option of choosing what they were donating for: cataract surgeries, surgeries for children, development of infrastructure, and so on.” The hospital also made an active move towards educating the public on the importance of making small donations towards the noble cause on special occasions like birthdays and weddings. “Just the thought that your donation has made a difference to somebody’s life, can make so much of difference to your life. And it doesn’t cost as much as celebrating your birthday at a star hotel.”

The future looks bright for Sankara Eye Care. With its focus firmly set on improving quality of eye care, and health in general, the challenges that lie ahead never seem to run out. Perhaps the biggest is establishing a hospital in every Indian State by 2020. There’s no doubt though, that Dr Ramani’s establishment is certainly heading in the right direction.

Unsung beacons is a unique publication brought out by CSIM each year. The stories featured in this book are about changemakers who have overcome several challenges in their journey of bringing about social change, and in their mission of promoting social entrepreneurship.

Unsung Beacons is pleasant to read and compels one to develop the attitude of giving. After reading this publication, I realize that if only each of us could make an effort to promote social citizenry, we could make the world a better place to live.

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