

UNSUNG BEACONS

Volume IX



A compilation of articles featured in Conversations Today - 2018

CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INITIATIVE AND MANAGEMENT

Unsung Beacons

Volume IX

*Stories of people for
whom humanity matters*

*A compilation of articles featured in
Conversations Today – 2018*

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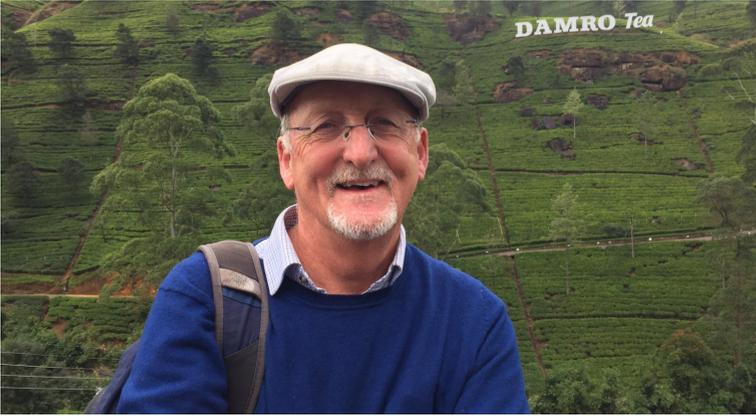
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Foreword



This compilation of stories from *Conversations Today* is well named – ‘Unsung Beacons’. It is a publication that focuses on the people and organisations that do not get a huge amount of attention, but who through dedication and hard work are changing the world for the better.

It shines a light on those working under the radar. In this world of celebrities, social media megastars and magazine success, it is gratifying to come across a publication that considers the achievements that are ‘unsung’ in our increasingly complicated world.

So congratulations to the Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) for publishing this easy to read yet highly diverse book. In particular, congratulations to Ms Marie Banu, the Chief Editor of *Conversations Today*, for bringing all the articles together in an accessible form.

This is a book that you will want to dip into rather than read from cover to cover. It is divided into five sections: talk from CSIM Alulmi; inspiring conversations with celebrities, profiles of NGOs, short articles on positive thinking, and trendsetters.

Each section contains articles to inspire the reader. They are thoughtful stories about what ordinary people are doing on a day-to-day basis. It is humbling to read about how people and organisations have developed and changed when addressing some of the most tricky social and community problems of our time.

I am particularly fond of the section on Positive Thinking as that collection of articles are concise, pithy and to the point – an inspiring read if they catch you at the right time and when you feel the need for inspiration or indeed support.

The other sections are equally interesting and thought-provoking, but all in different ways. The section that profiles NGOs is notable in that it highlights how organisations work and how they have tried to address some of the social challenges they have had to face.

Unsung Beacons is also international in its perspective. It does not concentrate on one country or region but instead takes a global perspective and recognizes that social change is something that can occur across the world. We can learn from each other as the similarities in our societies are far greater than the differences. At the same time, many of the vignettes are about local people trying to better the conditions of others in their communities. It brings to mind the mantra of ‘Think Global, Act Local’.

There is a need for this kind of publication – despite the fact that many, if not all, of them have already appeared in the excellent *Conversations Today*. It brings together a volume of thoughts, reflections and considered opinions in a form that will be read by future generations of social and community development specialists and charts out the achievements of the ‘unsung’ people working at a particular time.

The strapline for this publication is ‘stories of people for whom humanity matters’ and this is exactly what it is about – the story of humane activists. It brings to our attention the work

of others and makes us feel in some ways more human, more willing to get involved in the support of the down-trodden, the under privileged and the poor.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate CSIM on this publication and would recommend that you settle down in your armchair or mattress, open the covers and envelop yourself in a series of inspiring stories...

Alan Kay

*Co-Founder of the Social Audit Network
Senior Visiting Fellow, Yunus Centre for Social
Business and Health,
Glasgow Caledonian University.*

Editor's Preface

I am delighted to present the ninth edition of 'Unsung Beacons'. The title also resonates with a quote by Shannon L. Alder: "You don't have to say everything to be a light. Sometimes a fire built on a hill will bring interested people to your campfire."



Over the last three decades, we find that Social entrepreneurship has emerged to be an active area for practice as well as research. Despite its growing popularity, scholars and practitioners are far from reaching a consensus as to what social entrepreneurship actually means. This has resulted in a number of different definitions and approaches within the field of Social Entrepreneurship.

The main objective of this publication is to shed light on this issue and share stories of change makers who have been tackling social problems in an entrepreneurial way. In many ways, this book is a time capsule, a peek back into how these Social Entrepreneurs have been adopting several strategies and evolving different models to address issues like education, healthcare, disability, gender and environment.

This book considers a range of options for where meaning might lie for us. It is time to turn the pursuit of a meaningful life from a routine-complex impossibility to something we can all comprehend, aim for, and succeed at. To the casual reader, this book will be impressive because of its sheer size and simple language, but I am sure that will serve as a handbook for aspiring social entrepreneurs to seek reference from.

I would like to thank to all the contributors for their kind cooperation to this book.

First and foremost I would like to thank God. In the process of putting this book together I realized how true this gift of writing is for me.

I wish to thank Mrs. Latha Suresh for her continued encouragement and editorial advice. Thanks are also due to Mr. PN Subramanian for his support.

My warmest thanks and appreciation to my fellow writers who were carefully chosen to provide the perfect blend of knowledge and skills.

Nobody has been more important to me than the members of my family. I would like to thank my parents, whose love and guidance are with me in whatever I pursue. Most importantly, I wish to thank my loving and supportive children, Shakthi and Surya, who provide unending inspiration.

Marie Banu J

Chief Editor – Conversations Today

Director – CSIM

I. Alumni Talk

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

1. MAHABALESHWAR BHAT

Life-skills for children

“I needed a guide who would evaluate my thoughts and ideas, detaching them from my sensitivities. And CSIM turned out to be that guide.”



Development is a context driven process, manifesting in different forms in different regions. This is probably the reason why every individual gets to perceive development differently, based on his level of experience and exposure.

Accordingly, comprehension of impacts of the development process also vary and hence, the difference in association with different social realities.

Mr Mahabaleshwar Bhat, a software engineer turned life-skills trainer, always believed society to be a big sociological laboratory and his observations led him to conceptualise Ajeya Foundation as an NGO that can provide life skills training for school children.

Having spent almost 25 years in Wipro at Bangalore, Bhat realized that it was time to change gears. “I know it sounds cliché but the very thought of giving back to society is exciting,” says Bhat who tested the waters by volunteering with some non-profit organisations for about three years. Volunteering gave him an opportunity to realise the scope and potential of simple, small scale interventions that had a great impact. “The fact that your time and skills can make such a difference, is very rewarding. My engagement in the development sector also honed my skills and I became a more conscious observer,” he asserts. Soon, Bhat decided to pursue Masters degree in Sociology to equip himself for the development sector.

A colleague referred him to CSIM Bengaluru and Bhat felt that he would receive the exposure he needed from the Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Programme. “My decision about the course was not just to prepare myself. I am a very sensitive person. I needed a guide who would evaluate my thoughts and ideas, detaching them from my sensitivities. And CSIM turned out to be that guide,” he says.

With no prior association in the non-profit sector, the course brought about a revelation in him. Bhat not only learnt the innards of this sector, but also identified himself and his ideas in this area. He was startled to learn that social outcomes were a result of a set of factors, unlike the corporate sector where every outcome had a pre-conceived, measured input. Soon after his realisation about the significance of social objectives in any organisation, Bhat decided to focus specifically on imparting life skills education to young children. His decision was based on his personal experience and observations in the society. “Attending an interview was very daunting then. I used to be terrified at the very thought of articulating personal opinions. This fear also kept me from socialising with friends and colleagues from different backgrounds. I saw many children, who were capable of doing wonders, if only they knew how to articulate well. A lot of behavioural training happens in the corporate sector. The same could be imparted to children as well, but I was not sure if they received such opportunities. I read extensively and came to

know that these skills could be and were actually being imparted to children in different ways,” he elaborates.

The ensuing research he undertook to further understand the trends in life skills training helped him analyse new perspectives and their relevance. He believed that any intervention had a lifetime and this had a great influence on the resultant impact. “What has to be long term, must be planned as a long term intervention. Lifeskills training is one field where short term goals are not only inadequate, but also restrict the very progress in impact. The values we try to inculcate must be reiterated so that it ultimately becomes a part of a child’s personality. The clarity I was gaining reminded me of the responsibility at hand,” he recalls.

Bhat also adds that life skills were important in improving children’s cognitive learning, analytical ability and personal development. Hence, they were important for children belonging to all age groups. Acknowledging the efforts in this sector, Bhat felt that non-profit organisations had a critical role to play in filling the gap in delivering such trainings to children and wanted Ajeya Foundation to share this responsibility. With the business plan in hand, Bhat is now working on the content for training. He wants to ensure that the content balances all present needs and leaves room for emerging needs as well. He intends to run the programme in five schools for a year, and then scale up after evaluating the results.

By preparing himself for the role of a trainer, Bhat is all ready to launch Ajeya Foundation soon and is determined that this experiment is worth it all.

–Shanmuga Priya.T

2. MANISH RAI

Ageing through generations



Ageing is an experience influenced by many societal factors, beginning with family. As the immediate support system, family offers not only a sense of social security but also the confidence to live through the ageing years. The much revered demographic transition and the economic liberalisation that encourages youth to migrate for economic reasons, has cast a long term impact on the ageing experience of elderly in our society. Beginning with changes in living arrangements, elderly in both rural and urban areas are forced to make difficult choices.

Today, it is not very uncommon to see retired persons engaged in different firms on full/part time basis. While the educated lot manage this kind of productive engagement, that essentially boosts their psychological wellbeing, the illiterate fend through means, mostly as a means of survival. Cutting across all phenomena, class has also affected the experience of ageing. “It is a transition that must be handled both by the elderly and other members in the family. We must realise that the experience of ageing can be more holistic, fun and enriching for both the elderly and the young who come forward to engage with them. Dohara tries to create that space in our society for the elderly,” says Mr Manish

Rai, Co-founder of Dobara organisation in Hyderabad.

Manish spent most of his youth in Adilabad district and completed his Engineering from Surat, Gujarat. He then moved to the US where he pursued his Masters and joined a reputed company. Back in India in 2006, his perspectives changed. He was again consumed by a corporate career in Bangalore. “In spite of being a self-driven, passionate person, I saw myself drawn into targets and deadlines. There was no satisfaction. I felt a vacuum in me. Life became monotonous and I was not learning or doing anything new. My whole system was in conflict with what I was doing. Every time I thought I would quit next year, it never happened. In 2015, I finally took the call and returned to live with my father in Hyderabad,” recalls Manish.

While taking care of his ill father, Manish was determined not to return to the corporate life. The transition in the way of life led by his parents forced him to think seriously about working for senior citizens. “My parents’ resilience was a big lesson for me. It was hard hitting to realise that not all elders were capable of experiencing ageing like my parents did. Many needed support of different kinds. Dependency in some way or the other was inevitable and how this affected family dynamics is very apparent in our society. I wondered what I could do. A lot of questions came up in me and I was pretty sure that I must seek those answers,” says Manish.

Manish was interested to simultaneously work in the education sector. Having identified a mentor in himself, Manish decided to explore ways in which he can lead freshers to a stage of self-discovery, after which they can independently handle the city life. His search then led him to the idea of bridging generations. “I was in a mode of introspection. I analysed the challenges senior citizens were facing and also looked at the needs of younger generation. While doing so, I was intrigued about why these two generations were drifting apart. I landed at the idea of age friendly neighbourhoods,” he smiles.

Manish sought to redefine the experience of ageing through a multigenerational system. Since we are no longer a standard, traditional aging population, traditional solutions to elderly care are ineffective. He felt the need for an approach that addressed emerging needs of the elderly. After connecting with Ms Mateen Ansari, a social gerontologist, both of them founded the Dobara organisation in 2017. Their research revealed that senior citizens yearned to contribute to the society but class differences restrained their opportunities. While some lacked the opportunity to build meaningful relationships outside their families, others (those from low income quintiles) were left on their own, adhering to a mundane routine. Dobara's programmes intend to prevent situations that lead to social isolation of the senior citizens.

A range of programmes engaging volunteers from all age groups are implemented to support the varying needs of senior citizens in the project areas. Dobara Connect enables senior citizens across the social ladder to come together and provide emotional support and social engagement. The team also helps them connect with programmes organised in nearby locations. "The yearning to say hello to somebody is very painful. When senior citizens get to see many more like them trying to socialise outside families and keep themselves engaged, it becomes peer support and a great source of motivation," explains Manish. Interestingly, many senior citizens have also volunteered to help their counterparts. They try to spend time with underprivileged senior citizens and also those who live in homes for the aged. "They are all ears for their mates. It is very heart-warming to see how they stand up for each other".

Besides their peers, senior citizens at Dobara also strive to reach out to others in need. Manish says that Dobara's intention to add meaning to the experience of ageing has let them remove ageism in the context of engaging senior citizens. The team then saw the potential of engaging senior citizens in mentoring young adults. The InterGenEngage programme engages young and old together in organising a range of programmes targeted at both the groups. "The benefits here are not uni-directional. In the process of working together, older members understand the

young’s perspective and the young adults get to see how senior citizens try to cope with new changes in life. The two groups understand each other and this becomes a conscious, resilience building exercise over time,” adds Manish. Under the Age Aware programme workshops and activities are conducted in schools and colleges to help children visualise ageing and imagine the possibility of looking at their elders as social assets.

Acknowledging that measurement of impact in such interventions is complicated, he hopes to see children visualise more ways of helping the aged, going beyond the notion of helping senior citizens cross streets or read out stories to them. Going a little further, Dohara also adopted the build-operate-train-transfer model to introduce social, recreational and physical infrastructure sensitive to the diverse needs of elderly population in the city. “CSIM helped me see team dynamics from a social point of view. When I see my groups, I realise how relevant it is in the development sector. I now know for sure that unless we exhaustively analyse the needs of a group, we may never be able to visualise them as part of a whole. Development, then, cannot be inclusive and holistic,” says Manish.

—*Shanmuga Priya.T*

3.PALANI

In resonance with nature



In recent times, the most ensuring trend is the interest shown by city bred youth in agriculture and its prospects. While health is one of the dominant reasons behind this, some also give in to the cycle of impact that entrepreneurship in agriculture can bring about. Mr Palani's pursuit is very much the case in point. Coming from the fishermen community, his childhood was replete with incidences that ensured that the future will always be towards nature and sustainability. Therefore, very early on, he was sure that he would start something on his own so that his children could carry forward the legacy. Palani completed his school education in his native, Uthiramerur, Kanchipuram district. After his high school years in Chennai, he pursued Diploma in Mechanical Engineering. "I soon got a job in the industry and spent around fifteen years, learning all different trades through the cycle of job rotation. I kept working for my companies tirelessly. And then it struck hard that going on like this would consume my entire life. I had to build on my childhood dream. This was the time to explore my options. So, I resigned when I was 33 years old," shares Palani.

After assessing his interests, the available options and scope in market, Palani finally decided to produce and market vermin

compost in Chennai. With no technical knowledge in the field, he embarked on all contacts and opportunities to prepare himself for the journey. Since the idea of being close to nature was already clear, it was easier for him to pursue his choice. He soon purchased earthworms from the Earthworm Research Centre in New College, Chennai and cultivated them in his backyard. As his proficiency in work grew, he felt the need to acquire a certificate so that lack of credentials did not affect his growth. He completed the four-day course from Gandhi Niketan in Madurai and also engaged in training SHG and farmers' groups in vermi composting. "I was drawn by the need to spread the knowledge to all those in the farming sector. Although I am a new comer in this field, these farmers have been there for years and this professional knowledge will enhance their productivity. Farming eventually gets you to think for the sake of the community," he assures.

Gradually, Palani also trained farmers' groups in Kanchipuram and Thiruvannamalai districts in organic farming. "I was able to do it under the RSVY scheme – Rashtriya Sam Vikas Yojana. I facilitated training programmes on production, supply, and marketing of vermin compost. While knowledge and contacts from my business helped me reach these new destinations, I was marvelled by the scope it created. I began to dream of an organisation to create a wider impact," shares Palani. Having seen the role and work of many NGOs during the training days, he was inspired to establish his own NGO that could work for farmers. He felt this was the best way to reach out to more farmers than managing things at an individual level.

For any healthy society, food is the foundation and Palani strongly believes that chemical free farming will become an urge very soon. "I can sense this inclination from the response given by students in schools and colleges during my awareness programmes," he adds. While he strives to use his reach to go out to schools and colleges, to sensitise future generations about the need for organic farming, he also endeavours to spread the knowledge on herbs for good health. Palani does not see this as a revival to traditional knowledge, but rather feels that good health

has lost its value in the era of shelved food products. With this in mind, he ventured into production of unadulterated, handmade ghee.

With all this work backing his decisions, Palani established the Jayam Foundation in 2015. While the foundation was taking shape in its initial years, he learnt about the PGDSIM course at CSIM. “The course introduced me to different levels of preparation I had to go through to be able to realise my vision. CSIM not only strengthened my resolve but also helped me understand the potential of collective vision for social change. I can now see my work in perspective,” says Palani, who is now pursuing his Bachelors in Farm Science from Tamilnadu Agriculture University.

–Shanmuga Priya.T

4. PRIYANKA JARIWALA

Waste from the scratch



It is time that we all seriously took individual responsibility to the waste we create. In the absence of a holistic ecosystem for waste management, responsibility at the user level is the critical step forward. “The sooner we realise this, the better. With only few end destinations in place to manage the segregated waste, all that we are equipped to do right now is only a small fixture in the maze,” says Priyanka Jariwala, Project Manager at Saahas (a non-profit working in the field of waste management) in Bengaluru.

Hailing from Surat, Priyanka was always beset by the limited opportunities her city offered. In spite of pursuing her favourite course in her post-graduation (Biotechnology), she wasn’t able to edge a career in the field. “My family preferred me to stay with them. So, seeking career opportunities outside Gujarat was not an option for me. Learning that there was no scope in biotechnology, I took to my mother’s advice,” she says. Her mother, Chairperson of Apollo Clinics in Surat handling Operations, suggested that Priyanka complete Master Degree in Hospital management and join her in the same field.

It was during her Master's in Public Health that Priyanka realised her true interest. She was inclined to community health and looked forward to working with people, paying attention to service provision. "I was more interested in working with people than managing space. I was intrigued by the genesis of health programmes and policies, and hoped to get into a responsible position soon after the course," she recalls.

As she had expected, Priyanka got to work with the National Rural Health Mission as its District Programme Coordinator in Kheda district, Gujarat. Inspired by the vision of the programme – 'health for all', she felt that she had landed at the right job and all her endeavours would ensure that the Central Government programmes reached all villages, panchayats, cities and districts thereby improving the lives of poor people. Despite all the enthusiasm and the impressive goals she was chasing, she found that three simple yet significant factors were missing. "There weren't enough doctors to serve the remote villages. People were hardly aware of their entitlements and those who were aware were crippled from accessing due to the lack of documents that ascertain their status of poverty. This puzzle never moved towards a solution. Programmes continued, perpetuating inequity. And I, could not witness all this. All impressive targets were simply numbers that were not supported by appropriate interventions to bring about a lasting development. I was not only disappointed, but annoyed at the state of affairs," she elaborates.

Back in Surat in 2013, Priyanka decided to focus on research in health that could have an impact on health policies. She joined Urban Health and Climate Resilience Centre as a Consultant for Public Health and coordinated their research projects. While the exposure and nature of work honed her skills, Priyanka was simultaneously being drawn towards a new concern that disturbed her. Days of field work forced her to face the enormous trash the city created. "As a resident of Surat, I never came across the scale of this menace. I felt people literally drowning in their waste". She soon began to research on the waste management principles and models followed by big companies. "I embarked on this journey with an elementary understanding of the potential

waste management promised. With no background and guidance, a colleague's chance reference to Saahas' and CSIM's work gave me new hopes," she says.

Priyanka's homework and research began again. She learnt about small scale organisations and enterprises trying to face the challenge of solid waste management with the infrastructure in place and those that they could build upon. Inspired by Saahas' vision, she decided to intern with them and further learn the innards of this sector. A seven-month internship helped her comprehend the scene of waste management in the country. "It is a completely different battle here, compared to other issues because no stake holder understands his/her role in waste creation. In a country where city wide solutions are not established everywhere, the limited resources and space delegated to managing waste are only a miniscule, given the scale of the problem. Sweeping or gathering all waste together for disposal is not the end. Households have a larger role to play beyond gathering and segregating. We must all remember that some remote region is facing the wrath of waste we create," she warns.

During her internship in Bangalore, Priyanka also completed CSIM's SEOP programme, which helped her visualise her own enterprise. Having decided to work in the field of solid waste management, she felt that the design of the course allowed her to imagine her enterprise as a legal entity, backed by a suitable structure that addressed the limitations in waste management other organisations faced. "It was all clear and happened faster in my mind. No doubt, I was ambitious. Waste management is a grave problem and the fact that one has to work with the government for a long term, sustainable change got me thinking hard. How do I make this a priority for all stakeholders? How do I enable citizen engagement? Where do I start? My first attempt to file a tender for Vadodara Municipal Corporation turned futile," shares a disappointed Priyanka.

While her research about the scope and opportunities in her city continued, she realised that her lessons from CSIM were useful for her sister's enterprise as well. She got 'Khadi Cult', an

enterprise promoting sustainable fashion through the use of khadi, registered. Further, she went on to help her sister make Khadi Cult a ‘zero waste’ enterprise, reusing all the scrap in such a way that there was nothing left to reach the land fill. “Personally, this was a big accomplishment for us and a big source of motivation. All the scrap and waste created was used to make quilts, wall hangings, home décor items, chairs, footwear, garments for new borns, a variety of bags, tool case and many others. Instead of the paper bags they gave to customers, Khadi Cult shifted to using cloth bags, produced by wives of security guards working in a diamond company. We hand printed them to add value. Today customers love these bags so much that they want to buy them,” she adds.

Priyanka simultaneously worked on building her own enterprise. As a city that is yet to wake up to the crisis, unlike Bangalore, she had to start from the scratch. After a few months, she got two clients who barely recognised the value of the processes she was initiating. Yet, she went ahead because she had to start somewhere and demonstrate the urging need for such an initiative. She also pitched in for CSR engagement in five companies in and around Surat. “Things moved very slowly. I tried every option in hand. I found buyers for the different products Saahas produced from recycling waste. My survival was in question too. My negotiations for waste management in a Bharuch based company commenced in 2016. I submitted the proposal in July 2017, which has just got approved,” laughs Priyanka. One thing that continues to challenge her is the attitude towards waste. “When this is hardly a priority, convincing stake holders to invest is a huge challenge,” she exclaims.

Given the pace of development in Surat, Priyanka felt that moving to Bangalore would be helpful for her to gain experience and simultaneously manage the opportunities coming up in Surat. “It was a tough call,” she iterates. Presently, she is the Project Manager at Saahas, building the Surat vertical and executing the Bharuch project with her small team. Her vision is to enable Surat work on its end destination for waste management. The efforts to segregate waste at the residential level, she feels, will be futile if

the city does not build its end destination for this waste. “Else, we have to accumulate and then transport to where a destination is in place. This not only makes the process way too expensive, but inconvenient and un-sustainable. City based thinking must emerge in waste management,” asserts Priyanka.

–Shanmuga Priya.T

5.RAFIA ANJUM

Exploring genuine needs



Often times, the urge to give or contribute is so strong that we tend to zero in on options that we know best. And with the habit of ‘giving’ during special occasions or events being seen as a noble way of remembering dear ones, it has become convenient to choose from what is usually ‘contributed’. “Beyond these well-known options, there is a wide range of needs unknown, unmet and more critical in the lives of various communities. I am trying to walk that extra mile to identify such needs,” says Dr Rafia Anjum, Founder of Azvana Foundation in Bangalore.

Rafia is a dentist by qualification and has worked in different institutions like the Fortis Hospitals and Narayana Hrudalaya. Her post-graduation in Hospital and Health Management exposed her to the ‘corporate side of hospitals’. With experience in marketing and management of dental chains across Bangalore, Rafia’s life was as simple and career oriented as any young woman, until she took a small break to spend time with her children. “Life easily brings about a huge change in us. We hardly notice the beginnings of such changes. I was clueless too, when my friend invited me to help her in conducting a training programme on soft skills,” says Rafia.

This sudden opportunity turned out to be a training programme on soft skills for Bangalore City Police. Rafia successfully completed it and went on to do four more such workshops. “I began to see the civil society that consistently endeavoured to improve the lives of poor and vulnerable. Some dealt with the needy directly while some others worked with the system to improve the quality of service delivery. Some worked to create dialogues between the two and some more tried to change the status quo radically to establish equity in the society,” explains Rafia.

Soon an opportunity with Janagraha (an NGO in Bangalore that works to improve the quality of urban life) helped Rafia comprehend the notion of ‘empowerment’. As the Senior Facilitator at Janagraha, she got to manage the Bala Janagraha programme, which was a civic awareness programme for school children. “We worked in government, private and international schools to empower children to use their rights and entitlements. In doing so we believed that we were laying the foundation for active citizenry”, she says. Under this programme, children learnt to resolve fundamental issues like water crisis, electricity outages by approaching appropriate authorities. They also learnt about local governance structures. The programme offered a hands-on learning experience for children and Rafia was baffled to see that children from some of Bangalore’s Municipal schools had a different gamut of needs.

Rafia realised that civic awareness was delivered in a place where children were meandering with other serious concerns like a broken or dysfunctional family. Soon, she figured out that working in an organisation restricted her say in prioritising ‘actual’ needs of the target communities. With neither background nor guidance in development sector, she wondered how to organise her contribution to the society. She says: “I interacted with many friends and began to sense the active citizen in myself. I was advised that to do things in my way, I must do it myself. So, it was time to get my hands dirty.”

Rafia learnt about CSIM from a friend and pursued the Inspire programme in Bengaluru in December 2017. According to her, this was more than a foundation course as it used a hand-held approach to everything. During the course, she was able to map the genesis of social issues and more importantly, the emergence of different needs in similar communities. With growing clarity, she became determined to start her own organisation. Thus, she began in-depth analysis of different issues confronting our society. She was astonished to realise that any social issue, be it child sexual abuse or lack of livelihood opportunities or domestic violence, ultimately came down to ‘education’. With this, she was clear that Azvana Foundation would work with children and education would be the primary domain in all her initiatives. But within education, she was dabbling with multiple concerns.

Given her experience, Rafia did not want to repeat what was already being done. She also did not want to resort to what was being understood as commonly needed by schools or students. As she was introspecting, she also realised that she must work with school administrations for a long term change or impact in anything her foundation chose to do. “I prefer to take it slow. I don’t want my foundation to be another regular organisation falling into the trap of giving what it has to offer. I want to understand genuine needs of students in different schools. I cannot be driven by a one size fits all approach,” says a cautious Rafia. Evidently, she is growing aware of the caveats in this domain.

Reiterating her emphasis on understanding needs, Rafia recalls her interaction with a school principal who categorically stated that government can manage the needs of teachers and that there was need for interventions that could impact learning levels and lives of children from low income households. She was inspired and touched by the perspectives and vision of many such proactive Principals. “I am still learning and trying to understand further. I have undergone a transition from ‘what I can do’ to ‘what I can do to help them realise their needs’. With all this homework, am sure I will be sustainable when I start,” she asserts.

–Shanmuga Priya. T

6. SABARESH

Making a Dream Come True



As a child, you had dreams. And as you are growing up to a young adult it's time to realize your dreams. Getting a plush job is very often your first priority. But, do you love what you are doing? Most people do. There are some who are restless and feel that they got into a wrong bus – living and fulfilling somebody else's dream.

Sabaresh DB is a qualified computer engineer who worked for a Silicon based Fortune 500 IT company, Hewlett Packard, for 15 years in Bengaluru. Somewhere along the line, he felt emptiness and that he was wasting his life. It was at this point in time when he was introduced to a voluntary organization that worked on child rights. Since photography was his hobby, he engaged in visual documentation of their activities. He then enrolled in a 15-day weekend program called 'Inspire' conducted by CSIM that was designed especially for social enterprise start-ups. "I truly got 'inspired' after this programme and decided to start my own social enterprise," he says.

Sabaresh gave up his job and was toying with a number of domain concepts for his. As he was more concerned on the health issue and the vulnerability of people, especially women and children, he chose to work on water management.

Lack of access to portable drinking water leads to illnesses and death, especially among children. Without adequate supply children cannot wash often enough thereby leading to contract infections and diseases.

Having done this background research, Sabaresh started Aaroghya Foundation with a mission to inspire and empower people in communities by bringing clean and safe drinking water to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives.

He opines, “It’s hard not to think about water today. In our country, we face growing concerns about our stewardship of the world’s most precious resource. There’s talk of shortages, evidence of reservoirs and aquifers drying up, and how people who simply don’t care.”

Aaroghya engages in the areas with the greatest concentration of excluded and marginalized communities and empower them to engage in decision making along with the local governance institutions and influence those responsible for delivering the basic ‘WaSH’ services.

“We demonstrate sustainable WaSH - Water, Sanitation and Hygiene - solutions to make an impact at the district state and national-levels,” say the technocrat social entrepreneur. He further adds, “We work across the nation, acting as a bridge to the very best ideas, connections and opportunities. We fulfill our mission by developing new collaborations and partnerships.”

To enable this Aaroghya Foundation has carried out the following projects: Aaroghya: Water;

Aaroghya: Sanitation and Hygiene Aaroghya: Lakes.

Aaroghya Foundations approach to clean water solutions is simple. They find local partners who can identify the need for water filtration systems in communities that lack sufficient clean drinking water and train them on installation of RO systems, logistics, maintenance & technical improvements.

Sanitation and hygiene is integrated into Aaroghya Foundation program and forms part of its 3-pronged approach —hand-washing; safe management & handling of drinking water; and hygienic use of toilets including menstrual hygiene.

Tanks and lakes play an important role in irrigation as well as recharging ground water in the surrounding areas. Lakes play an integral role in Indian culture and serve a variety of purposes. Unfortunately, today most of the lakes and water bodies are reduced to cesspools due to direct discharge of industrial effluents and unregulated dumping of solid wastes.

Sabaresh facilitated fellowship in terms of knowledge sharing with like-minded partners and encouraged field visits to Aaroghya to rejuvenate lakes and understand the issues that are currently plaguing lakes and ponds of Karnataka. “The aim of the fellowship interaction is to facilitate the revival of 4 lakes in Bangalore in the next 12 months and 12 lakes in Rural Karnataka,” he says.

“Water, sanitation and hygiene make a visible impact on the health and hygiene of children and those of their families and the communities. Based on lessons from our practical work and that of other local and international experiences, we work with the state government and encouraged the public to engage in promotion of clean water and hygiene,” he says.

—*Harry Jayanth*

7. SATYADEV

Promising a good beginning

Arietis is a for profit venture that intends to revive interest in vedic mathematics and Abacus.



Education is a very personal journey for every child. Its reception is determined by not only methods and children’s individual capacities, but also by other factors like activity aids, family situations, tuitions, etc. Anything a child receives outside his or her classroom to support this journey has a very strong positive influence on the outcomes. “I do not want to accept affordability as the driving force in this sector. The domain of preschool education is largely driven by private players, making it out of reach for the underprivileged kids. I want this to change,” says Mr A Satyadev, founder of Aalamuri Foundation, a charitable trust based in Hyderabad.

Coming from an industrial background, Satyadev had no knowledge of the development sector. He witnessed the changes liberalisation brought about in the industries in his early twenties. On learning the dynamics between big corporations and small, regional companies, he realised the opportunity to further study the flow of work and processes in different industries. “It is

more important for small companies and enterprises to prepare themselves for such changes. They must be open to it, otherwise, they will lose out even before upgrading themselves,” warns Satyadev, recalling how industrial automation became an urgent need, then.

With experience, he became aware of the dangers of one-person driven organisations, both in the profit and non profit sector. While he gained expertise in industrial automation, channel management and concept selling over the last twenty eight years, he became more conscious of the importance of systems and processes, and their values in both the sectors. “At one point when I felt I was ready to aspire higher, I decided to work independently. I started with a small battery industry. However, market fluctuations led to an upsurge in the price of lead and I shifted focus to distribution of batteries across India. The experience gave me the confidence to do consultancies for other aspiring entrepreneurs,” he says.

Satyadev also co-founded the Arietis Inc – an abacus company, with his wife Mrs Sree Parimala Alamuri. Arietis is a for-profit venture that intends to revive interest in vedic mathematics and Abacus. This initiative exposed him to pre schools and schools run by different managements. Soon, his tenure as the Director of a play school - IRIS Florets in Kondapur and partner at Virinchi Vidya Mandir - an initiative for innovative pre schooling for under privileged children gave him new insights. “I was inquisitive. I saw the impact of pre school education on children’s cognitive development. It promised a very engaging beginning to children’s education experience. But its inaccessibility to a majority of children for different reasons disturbed me. Why should affordability and accessibility keep children away from pre school education?,” asks Satyadev. He founded the Aalamuri Foundation along with his wife in 2013, as a family trust that can enable simple social initiatives. The foundation provided scholarships and free abacus training for underprivileged children. The couple had thought of building a vedic education centre but lessons from another organisation that worked on low cost pre schooling encouraged them to do a thorough research

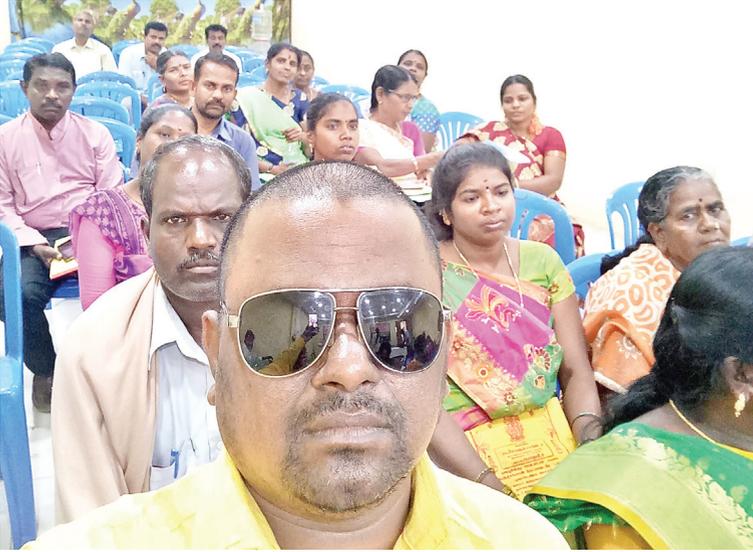
on pre schooling for underprivileged children. During the course of usual work, Satyadev got to know about CSIM and its course on Social Entrepreneurship. He believes that his association with CSIM helped him organise his thoughts and aspire higher. The sessions and interactions with staff and senior batch mates, he feels, helped him understand how resourceful he was with his experience from the industry and the enthusiasm in pre school education. He soon worked on a model to reach out to under privileged children.

Satyadev came up with the thought of utilising physical and human resources within orphanages. As children went to school during the daytime, he wanted to use the space to provide pre school education for kids from the orphanage and neighbourhood. According to him, pre school education not only influenced cognitive, social development, but also ensured that children were motivated enough to continue their education. It lays a strong foundation for a child's character and personality. He also intended to provide free classes on Abacus and vedic mathematics for interested children. "I believe my model addresses both accessibility and affordability in the areas we work in. We have started the programme in three orphanages and are delighted to see the interest in the children. We may be testing the waters now but we feel reassured by the fact that education never dies. Therefore, there is always room for innovation and improvement," insists Satyadev.

—*Shanmuga Priya.T*

8. SHAKTIVEL

Cots with a purpose



One of the social issues that is highly judged and tabooed, without basic knowledge is substance abuse. Whether alcohol or drugs, observers fail to comprehend that addiction and de addiction are not immediate results of any process. Limited knowledge exacerbates the stigma faced by affected people, discouraging all their efforts to give up dependence on the substance. Mr S Sakthivel, Founder of S N Foundation in Chennai, could not agree more.

A native of Naidumangalam village in Thiruvannamalai district, Sakthivel migrated to Chennai along with his family, at the age of three. Financial instability in the family did not allow him to study beyond class ten. He had to discontinue education even before he could make sense of his dreams. “I could barely imagine a future for myself. I did not even have an idea about what I wanted to become in life. I missed school, but could cope with this change in life,” says Sakthivel. His father worked in a private company at Chennai Port and looked for opportunities to place Sakthivel in a regular job.

As the new clerk at the Clearing and Forwarding Division, he got to learn a lot about import and export mechanisms. He soon became an executive and then a manager. A successful stint at the company encouraged him to dream of his own transport business. With all ground work in place, he established his business in 2000. “I tried very hard to not give up. However, in 2007, it was a dead end for my company, suffering a loss of more than 2.5 crores. I had to give up!” admits Sakthivel. It was during this period of stress that Sakthivel took to alcohol. “All hell had broken loose. I was clueless about where to start again. This seemed like the end of life to me. I began to question all my decisions and the very idea of leaving a regular job. I did not want to face anybody, especially those who would remind me of my failure. I was completely broken inside,” he recalls.

Sakthivel acknowledged his alcohol addiction and pledged to overcome this habit. His self-awareness led him to join a recovery programme voluntarily, at the Stanley Hospital. “Counselling was of immense help and I regularly attended the Alcohol Anonymous meetings. Here, I realised that I was not alone. We all realised that alcoholism was like any other disease which was characterised by certain symptoms and could be treated. Although the probability of relapse did bother me, the determination of my peers strengthened my resolve to get over this addiction. We all learnt about people who recovered completely and returned to regular work/businesses and also about others who were still trying. I chose my path,” he says.

Deeply touched by the lives of patients who could not access help, Sakthivel began to think seriously about their rehabilitation. “It was at this point in time that society’s stigma and their judgemental attitude disturbed me the most. My family stood by me, but this is not the case for everyone. Being an ‘Alcoholic’ cannot become someone’s identity. I therefore established the S.N.Foundation in 2013 to support recovering alcoholics,” he says.

S.N. Foundation runs a de addiction-rehabilitation centre for recovering alcoholics and also a home for the aged, together

reaching out to around 100 beneficiaries every year. “We saw families breaking and driven to suicidal thoughts and wanted to extend support to such families. As a collective vision, it helped check the tendency towards relapse,” says Mr.Thyagarajan, who is a caretaker in the centre.

To equip himself with the requisite knowledge, Sakthivel completed a diploma in Rehabilitation. Very soon he got to know about CSIM and its work from a friend. “I took up the Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Programme seriously. We started the Foundation without any theoretical knowledge about its administration activities. The CSIM course not only helped me chart the progress of my Trust, but also encouraged me to think beyond conventional rehabilitation. The motivation from CSIM drew me to pursue a degree in psychology,” he says.

Sakthivel came up with the idea of a special cot to suit the needs of bed ridden patients. His design features the cot with an in built toilet with flushing system and an automatic control panel that would allow patients to alter their posture whenever they wanted. This idea that came up during the project work of CSIM course was appreciated by his mentors and he was encouraged to work on the design further. “The special cot would be a boon for patients as they can communicate their needs on time. It would also play a crucial role in their treatment and would make them feel less dependable,” says Ms.Rajalakshmi, Trustee of S.N.Foundation.

Sakthivel is now prepared to launch a socially responsible business that can supply these cots to those in need. He believes that introducing these cots at a reasonable cost will be a great boon to all care takers – either families or rehabilitation centres.

–Shanmuga Priya.T

9. SIVAGAMI

Moving forward



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

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

Sivagami’s parents had a different plan and she was married off at 17. As a young bride, she resolved to educate all her children without discriminating between sons and daughters. Well aware of

women's participation in household decision making, she began to save as much as she could for her children's education. While she got to know about the SHGs in her neighbourhood, she found them to be a reliable option for women like her. Soon enough, she got in touch with the Thesiyar NGO that was managing the SHGs there. She initially decided to form an SHG and be a part of it, but with no one ready to lead, she decided to step into the shoes of a leader. Sivagami, along with other SHG leaders got the chance to participate in a training programme in Madurai. "I met many SHG leaders there and realised the potential this platform had to transform women into entrepreneurs/leaders, irrespective of their background. Financial independence for women like me makes a lot of difference," she asserts.

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

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

Medical camps, pension for senior citizens and widows, distribution of stationeries for underprivileged children, application for Aadhar, training for SHG members and skill

training programmes for women were successfully organised by the Trust. “When you work at a local level, scale does not matter. In fact, each programme resulting in a chain of intervention and successive programmes is the most gratifying part. We have earned people’s trust and therefore, we will be able to work on other issues too,” says Marie, Sivagami’s colleague who interacts with stakeholders in the field.

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

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

–Shanmuga Priya.T

10. THAMIZHENDHI

Respecting the Abandoned



Street life in our country is very dynamic and one has to walk down the lanes to understand the influence of those bustling activities on our everyday lives. While there is an active and productive side, it also has a sorry face that many choose to ignore. This is because they are clueless about where to begin. Thamizhendhi, Founder of Maatru Trust in Chennai tries to delve into these unnoticed details and build a respectable identity for abandoned souls in our streets.

After dropping out from class eight and with no further encouragement to continue studies, Thamizhendhi joined his father and helped him in his carpentry and construction work. He also accompanied his grandmother who made cow dung cakes and sold them for a living. “I come from a generation where every individual either studied and managed to get a job or learnt to do some work to earn a living. As I was hooked into this earlier in life, I learnt the value of independence. I learnt tailoring in order to earn independently and live without the support of my father or grandmother,” he says.

Thamizhendhi got to work in many export companies. Simultaneously, his life was inspired by Shri Periyar, the founder of Self Respect Movement and Dravidar Kazhagam. Thamizhendhi's father, an ardent follower of Periyar's teachings, influenced him as well. He got hooked into social events and actively followed the progress in social development. When he was about 20-years-old, he founded the Thiruvalluvar Senthamizh Peravai for the revival of Tamil language and culture. "In the rush to go up the social ladder, we cannot dissolve our identities. Our language and culture are an inherent part of our identities. This realisation forced me to analyse the situation of social justice in Tamil Nadu," recalls Thamizhendhi.

In an effort to encourage people to critically understand the picture of social justice in the society, he organised many conferences through this forum and published the proceedings of these conferences. Some of the topics covered included 'Dalit philosophy and Independence', 'Women Empowerment and Independence'.

Thamizhendhi took due care in bringing together activists and experts in the field to present papers at these conferences. He believed that people needed to be guided to have conversations on these topics. He felt that change was not possible and oppression would continue to be a way of life for one part of the society unless they were able to discuss these issues in a relatable manner.

Thamizhendhi used his revenue from tailoring to organise these events and print the publications. When he realised that this was not sustainable in the long run, he decided to establish an NGO. Thus was born Maatru Trust in 2013, to work for the oppressed and marginalised communities. In the process, he also initiated efforts to revive traditional identities of the marginalised communities. He felt that this was necessary to make them feel important as a community. Traditional games, traditional medicine and also dialects were brought to light through simple cultural programmes. However, this was just a small beginning.

“We have tried to know what had once existed as part of our ancestors’ daily lives. We have a long way to go and this requires work at different levels,” he says.

While on his search for an appropriate step forward, he got to observe the life of beggars near Mylapore in Chennai. “I still remember the scene vividly. I was waiting for a friend at the bus stop when two beggars were trying to find some place to sit. Every time they found a place, the very look of the people around forced them to look for a seat elsewhere. To me, it was the sight of a human being, terrified to even sit quietly for a few minutes. That was the moment I decided to start working with them,” shares Thamizhendhi.

The beggars were accustomed to a life of rejection that they were unable to trust someone who was genuinely interested in improving their lives. Thamizhendhi and his team felt that unless they lived with them wherever they went, it was not possible to communicate their genuine interest in their well-being. He therefore travelled with them, stayed with them at different places and also ate with them.

Following them like a shadow was the only thing he could think of doing to earn their trust and it worked. They began to converse with him and shared their life stories. As the rapport built, Thamizhendhi took them home, bathed, shaved, and counselled them. He also managed to reunite some of them with their families. Some of them were also recruited in small enterprises to earn a living. “Each day I worked with them, I was breaking the myth that the general public had about beggars,’ and their attitude towards life and work in particular. Beggars need only an opportunity and acceptance. With time, I saw them trusting the same society they hated earlier. However remarkable the change was, I was not in a position to sustain this effort although I used my personal resources and my home. The beggars themselves felt hesitant to stay longer. After about two weeks they would leave and again, with no place to be accepted, they resumed begging,” explains Thamizhendhi, moved by the way of life they were forced to lead.

Forty five rupees is what these beggars require to use a public toilet and clean themselves. As most of them did not have the money, they remained dirty. Thamizhendhi was more disturbed by the fact that there were well educated men from all age groups amongst these beggars, who were ready to do any kind of labour. Their inclination to work further differentiated them from those beggars who begged outside temples. Having analysed the dynamics between these groups, the team from Maatru realised that they were dealing with abandoned souls in the society who ate what was given in alms, who stayed wherever they found a place and took whatever was given. They did not own any form of identification and were not covered in any of the surveys. Therefore, they could not find shelter in the government homes. Thamizhendhi was shocked to find engineers, lawyers and scholars among them.

“It was a huge pool of human resources left to rot simply because no one, including their families trusted them. Hence, they were vulnerable and likely to be used by anti-social forces, without their knowledge. Some also indulged in criminal activities. They were open to harassment by anyone, including the police,” he adds.

In his search for a sustainable change in their lives, Thamizhendhi decided to prepare himself by enrolling in CSIM’s Post Graduate Diploma in Social Initiative and Management programme. He not only learnt how to operate his Trust but understood the need for collaboration in his efforts. “However strong your understanding of an issue is, there are little details that distract you from main course of action. CSIM helped me learn all that. I now know all the little details that matter in operationalizing my strategies. It was also a journey of correcting my self – an alumnus from an earlier batch corrected my perspective on NGOs. From acting merely on service instinct and understanding at a personal level, I have moved to work on guidance,” confesses Thamizhendhi, whose work was felicitated by IOCL at their golden jubilee celebration, in 2015.

Presently, he is working on a model to build a permanent shelter for beggars where they can stay and also undergo skill training. He believes that skilling them was the only way to help them lead independent lives. Thamizhendhi dreams of a day when all of them will have a livelihood and an account where they could deposited their earnings. He hopes to see them settle down to a respectable family life, very much like all other fellow human beings who rejected them.

–Shanmuga Priya.T

11. VANI BHASKAR
Dreams of a Superior Society



In 2002-03, when a group of friends decided to get together and “do something,” “to help out the needy,” they didn’t start out with a grand plan. They were merely looking for ways to be of use to the underprivileged people they saw around them. There was something of an urge that pulled their young minds towards thinking about people other than themselves. When asked “What was it that compelled you to do any social service at all?” one of them tells us that it wasn’t any one thing. “It” doesn’t have a label. “It just is,” says Vani Bhaskar, Co-Founder of Uthishta Foundation, “I don’t really know that there was anything specific that led us to this.” The simplicity of this answer belies the deep sense of commitment behind it.

Starting young and early

Vani Bhaskar and her friends, decided to give back to society, and devoted themselves as volunteers at various children’s homes

around Bengaluru city. They soon established a Trust, “Reclaim India” and worked on projects for rescuing and educating child labourers. They soon found themselves working with children hanging around construction sites, where immigrant labourers slave away during the day, unable to send their children to any type of school. “We set up what we called the ‘Museum School’, an informal Balwadi type school, near these construction sites. We could afford a dedicated teacher and an ayah for these children, for about a year,” says Vani.

After that first year, as Vani and her friends graduated and began their own careers, they ended up in different places, some within India and some abroad. They managed to keep up some, if not all, of their work with friends from abroad, sponsoring and ideating, friends in India pitching in with physically continuing to volunteer at different NGOs. During this time, they spent weekends volunteering with children who ran away from their homes. Seeing that these children would need some counseling and rehabilitation, Vani and her friends trained themselves under professionals and found sponsors for such children’s education. Understandably, career and personal responsibilities soon take over one’s lives, and Vani and friends’ aim to “Reclaim India” was put on hold.

Vani went on to do an MBA at the prestigious Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts of India (ICFAI), Hyderabad and pursued a 15-year long career in Investment Banking, working with some of the top Indian multinational corporations. Her passion soon beckoned her home however, to pursue a larger dream, a more (in her own words) selfless pursuit, and she found herself a partner in one of her childhood friends who had been with her all along the way. As recently as late last year, Vani Bhaskar and her friend Bhavani Sundari Balasundaram got together and decided that they would pursue their social service in a more systematic and long-lasting manner.

Learning from past inadequacies

“Both Bhavani and I found ourselves thinking a great deal about how to start all over again. Should we revive the ‘Reclaim India Trust’? We had run this without putting any system in place. For instance, we didn’t have an operating bank account for the Trust and gave away sponsorship funds through personal cheques. We hadn’t properly documented any of our activities in the past. We sought help to understand the nitty-gritties of running this Trust and soon learnt that it would take a great deal of paperwork to revive it. So, Bhavani and I resolved to set up an altogether new organization,” she says.

“We needed to identify the issues we would like to work on. Should we focus on education? If so, should we start with early education programs? How about skill-development for youth or women’s empowerment or agriculture? We were teeming with ideas and I found myself unable to focus on any one issue over the others,” says Vani, “And that is when CSIM came in as a huge game-changer.”

While her friend Bhavani pursued her PhD in the Nutrition and Dietetics field with a leading organization in Chennai, Vani pursued the certificate course in Social Entrepreneurship at CSIM, Bengaluru. She says that the sheer range of exercises conducted by CSIM, broadened her thinking and gave her a real sense of direction. “I began to take a more pragmatic approach to my ideals,” says Vani, “I understood that in order to do justice to a cause, I would have to narrow my focus down to one or two issues that I could then research upon and fully immerse myself in.”

At CSIM, Vani says she learnt the importance of networking, mobilizing funds through formal channels, to put up specific services for the target-groups that we want to work with, as also to set concrete and realistic goals for ourselves to attain in a reasonable period of time. “I wanted to learn from my past

mistakes and to do better with my new venture, and CSIM has given me a whole lot of guidance in that direction”, she says.

Challenging, exciting times

In January of 2018, Vani Bhaskar and Bhavani Sundari Balasundaram registered a new company “Uthishta Foundation”. The duo wanted to carry forward the essence of ‘Reclaim India’ but now with renewed enthusiasm, shared knowledge and newly gained insight. “I look at underprivileged youth and think about the lack of opportunity. I can’t help but wonder, if some of the random acts of misbehavior of youth that is highlighted in the news, could be attributed to their inaccessibility to training and education directed at their growth. In other words, if the youth in question had been engaged in training and equipping themselves for their future, would they even have the time to take to the streets?”

With that thought, Vani and Bhavani have set out their primary mission – training underprivileged youth in vocational skills and helping with their placements in the job-market. “If one generation of an impoverished family finds a job, it might help their entire family to rise above poverty. At least that is our hope, with the individuals we work with,” she says. In February, Uthishta Foundation conducted a soft-skills training program at a Girls’ Home in Bengaluru, for girls who are about to enter the job market. Communication Skills and Interviewing Skills were imparted to girls in the final year of college. Another computer-skills training program was conducted for a group of boys at a government college.

Uthishta Foundation is working towards building an industry-interface such that an on-going program may be established for the eventual placement of all the youth who undergo Uthishta’s training programs. “What is the job-market today? What is the scope of the digital space in terms of employing skilled youth? Would an increase in online sales versus offline retail lead to a boom in the packaging and delivery side of business? Should we

be looking at training people for the logistics sector? Or would it be more sensible to train youth in actually creating digital content and try their hand at marketing their products and services online? Maybe the future lies in opening up the digital market to traditional cottage industries? These are some of the questions that come up during our research”, she says.

“There is no doubt that the road ahead is going to be full of challenges and roadblocks. Even as we speak, I’m struggling with the setting up of our bank accounts at a nationalized bank. The processes seem long and arduous, and because of the very nature of these banks, the time taken to complete a single step seems endless. Yet, we want to do the right thing”, she says.

With no staff to help them out with their everyday chores for the foundation, Vani is finding her own schedule busier than ever. “Attending to my two kids aged seven and five, juggling my other responsibilities along with those of Uthishta are a challenge at the moment,” she grins, in a matter-of-fact way. It seems she wouldn’t have it any other way. “When I had a full-time job, I had a lot of money but felt empty from within. Now, having quit my well-paying employment, I find myself running around to find the funds needed to run Uthishta Foundation, but it’s oh-so-fulfilling!” she insists.

In a reflective tone, she says that she feels a greater sense of responsibility with her new venture. I frequently asks myself: “Am I doing things right? Am I thinking right?” This self introspection while refreshing to hear in a world of self-important and over-confident individuals, is important and a great stamp of an individual’s ability to grow; and with them, their ideas and the beneficiaries of those ideas.

“We do want to reclaim India, by re-programming the youth towards their own development, by helping reduce poverty, by carrying forward the notion that productive engagement will lead to a responsible, conscientious society,” she signs off.

—*Archanaa Ramesh*

12. YUVANESHWARI

Setting the balance right



Volunteers have evolved into a strong and beneficial force, characterising trends in the development sector. From an individual level, some of them have managed to shed light on intricate issues, which were largely untouched by organisations before. Such is their focus and potential, encouraging many more passionate individuals to join the force. Ms Yuvaneshwari, Co-Founder of ‘Chotu Ki Education’ in Hyderabad, strongly believes that volunteering can help correct the imbalance in society. “One must start exercising social responsibility from the day they realise that they should do something for the society. It must be a part of one’s routine lives,” she says.

Yuvaneshwari has completed her Masters in Pharmacy from Chennai and is presently working with Dr Reddy’s Lab in Hyderabad. Having grown up with elders who always tried to help unknown people, she also wanted to follow suit. She began to identify opportunities in her routine life. As a student she visited homes for the aged and orphanages and organised many one-time activities. She also coordinated celebration of festivals in these homes along with her friends. These activities encouraged her to do more for the society on a long term basis.

Soon after studies, she joined the RK Pharmaceuticals as Scientist, where she worked for four years before moving to Hyderabad in 2016. The company also engaged her as a volunteer in their CSR programmes.

“I became the CSR point of contact for an NGO called Bhoomi and organised all the activities for them. I also taught Science to underprivileged children in shelter homes. Soon, I was coordinating projects across Tamil Nadu and other states, and I am also their Hyderabad City Coordinator,” she says.

Yuvaneshwari is grateful to Bhoomi for the skills it has instilled in her. “As a new girl in the city of Hyderabad, I was taken aback by the scale of child beggars I saw on the streets. I was very disturbed and wanted to connect them to social work organisations that worked for them. When I learnt that there were none, I got even more disturbed. I travelled every weekend to study about children’s lives and the possible support they could receive. This is a very challenging sector where no immediate results could be seen. Besides, the fact that interventions have to be long term, the uncertainty of outcomes was another impediment. With no other organisation working for this cause, I decided to start my own,” she explains.

Yuvaneshwari established Chotu Ki Education (CKE) in March 2016 along with Madhavi to support the education of child beggars in Hyderabad. She followed a complete volunteer-based model that would allow development at every stage, as needs presented. “Given the dynamics of life in urban slums and the desperation of parents to bring an extra rupee into the family’s earnings, CKE could only start with education for small classes so that it did not disturb their occupation,” says Madhavi, Co-Founder of CKE. The two of them invested a lot of time and energy in studying this community. After learning that the community they wanted to work with was not forced to beg and was not controlled by a mafia, the duo felt confident of penetrating into the communities.

Medical camps were used as an entry point and a predesigned questionnaire was used to gather information about children's lives. As expected, most of them lied about their children's schooling. With a survey tool helping them to identify the density of migrant population, they could complete an ethnographic analysis of the community concerned. With adequate knowledge about the community, they began to build rapport and soon influenced the parents to weekend classes.

The classes were planned early in the morning for children, when they had nothing else to do. While gathering the group was difficult at first, educating a heterogenous group was a challenge.

With the help of friends from other organisations, like Teach for India, suitable content was prepared and delivered in the sessions. The team experimented a lot with content delivery so that children are made eligible to attend age appropriate classes in mainstream schools. Children were assessed on the basis of structured observations and interactions, instead of standardised tests. Once the bridge courses were completed, children were enrolled in government schools that had a residential facility, so that the children did not drop out of school or get back to begging.

Five children from the Kokatpally Housing Board area were enrolled in a government school and follow up visits showed good progress. However, parents of the children wanted them to go to regular schools so that they could be sent for begging in the evenings. "We wanted to make sure that there was no way for the children to get back to begging, but parents could not manage with their meagre earnings. We were baffled. Fortunately, during the visit of Mr Donald Trump's daughter's visit an order from the City Corporation to remove all beggars from the streets came in. This was a breather. As parents feared that police might take their children away, they did not encourage their child to engage in begging in the evenings," says Yuvaneshwari.

Encouraged to identify opportunities that every such situation brought along, the team is now gearing up to engage Principals of government schools in Miyapur - their next area of operation.

“I owe it to CSIM for teaching me the process of cashing into new opportunities and scaling up to new areas. I enrolled in the Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Program to build new contacts and networks. This course changed my perspective. I began to think in terms of operating in a structured manner in order to achieve a strong impact. Besides the knowledge and skills that will guide CKE’s path, the bonding between passionate individuals is a gift from CSIM, which I will value for life. We help each other in every little way possible and that once again, emphasises the power of volunteering in setting the balance right,” says Yuvaneshwari.

–Shanmuga Priya.T

II. Inspiring Conversations

*Interviews with Inspiring Personalities
by Marie Banu*

1. DR. ADAM RICHARDS

“The value is in the eye of the stakeholder.”



Dr Adam Richards is an accredited Social Value and SROI practitioner and trainer, and has delivered training to individuals and organisations across the world. He joined SVUK in 2016 as Senior Researcher on the European Commission project SPRINT to apply the principles of social value to long-term care for frail older people across 11 European states. Before joining SVUK he lectured at universities for over 10 years and has a PhD from Liverpool John Moores University researching the legitimising effects of SROI in a social enterprise.

Adam has worked with a number of social enterprises to help them better understand, measure and manage their social impacts. He is also a member of SVUK’s UK Council and acts as a critical friend to the FRC Group, as part of their Social Value Sub-Committee.

In an exclusive interview Dr. Adam Richards shares with Marie Banu about Social Value, UK.

Can you tell us about Social Value, UK?

We are an organisation that changes the way the world looks at ‘Value’. We believe that for far too long, organisations have been focusing only on financial value and that has led to social and economic inequality and increase in environmental degradation. We want to change that!

We believe that accounting for value, in a much broader context, allows us to make decisions that takes into account ‘value’ in a holistic sense. We are a membership organisation and so Social Value, UK is owned by its members. We have a broad family of member led organisations.

Social Value, UK is part of Social Value, International which has members in 40 countries and networks in 20 countries. We are extremely excited and are looking forward to have India join our family.

It is working with capitalism; it is using the language that is familiar with decision makers; it is giving power and voice to the people that matters most. So, listening to people’s experiences, understanding what has changed in their lives, and understanding the importance and value of these changes improves decision making.

We deliver training in Social Value (Social Return on Investment) in a range of nations. I recently spent some time in Thailand and now in India at the moment.

We have got networks to be established in Greece, South Korea, and developments in South America as well. It is great to do work in an international context.

About Social Return on Investment (SROI)?

People often talk about SROI as a tool or a technique, and I

disagree with that. It is a framework of seven principles—involve stakeholders; understand what changes; value the things that matter; only include what is material; do not over-claim; be transparent; and verify the result.

What is fundamental is that we involve stakeholders to understand what has changed and we value those changes. SROI is that framework that allows us, which we believe, to — Measure, manage and maximise social value.

When we talk about social value, we are talking fundamentally about how important the change is to people's lives. The value is in the eye of the stakeholder. If you understand the value from the perspective of those people who are affected by change, or rather by the activities, or those who are likely to be affected – then you can make the decisions in a more meaningful way. Listen to the voices of people so that they have a representation in the decision making process.

I would say that SROI is a framework that provides consistency and flexibility at a global level. SROI in one organisation need not have to be the same as in another. It has the flexibility to adapt to certain circumstances or a particular project. We may use focus group technique in one, and in another use a creative method while conversing with younger children or parents. You can adapt it in the way you need it.

Do you think SROI methodology would maximise the NGOs impact?

Absolutely! The idea of Social Value has a broad conception of values. We talk about the economic, social, and environmental values forming the social value. It is about talking to the people who matter most.

NGOs and Social Enterprises around the world work towards empowering people. I believe that SROI adds to that empowerment. Actually, by NGOs asking the people, giving them a voice, and giving them the power to influence decision making is in itself an empowering exercise.

NGOs or Social Enterprises should not just want to be accountable to their people. It is about being accountable and to be accountable, is to maximise. It is not just enough to say that we have measured the impact and are happy.

I think all socially oriented organisations should look at maximising their impacts with people. Alternatively, what we are saying is that, within your resources – do the best you can; change people’s lives as effectively as possible. Why would you not want to maximise the positive changes you make in people’s lives? At times, we create unintended negative changes in people’s lives. Our activities do not always work for everybody. They do not work as effectively for some people. The biggest challenge is in acknowledging that.

I have seen this in my work. For instance, I have worked with Furniture Resource Centre at Liverpool. The organisation changes people’s lives. They take people from unemployment or careless employment towards sustainable employment. But, not everybody succeeds! We need to think about that. The reality is that some people felt even worse after they joined our organisation. Think about people for whom it does not work and think about their situation. Are they in the same situations they were before?

We have a moral duty to say how we can reduce or eliminate negative changes. It is not just increasing the positives, but also reducing or eliminating any negative impact that it might produce in people’s lives. It is only by understanding these two issues, can we really start moving beyond simply measuring. Measuring is easy, maximising is a challenge!

What are the similarities and differences in Social Audit Network and Social Value, UK?

I think there are more similarities than differences. Probably the only fundamental difference is the idea of using values, in terms of financial proxies by Social Value, UK.

So, Ten years ago, when Social Value, UK started as Social Return on Investment Network, we exclusively spoke about value in a financial sense. We were talking about value using the language of money. When Social Value, UK evolved, we don't just talk about financial perspective, but about value in the eye of the stakeholder.

We want to quantify the value so that we can put things in order of importance. As soon as you know a person experiences three changes and one is more important than the other two, our ability to gain insight has improved. We can start to focus where the stakeholder gains more value from. We can start to make decisions and focus on those areas where we can increase the positive changes in people's lives; we can start to be able to compare one way of running a project to another.

I think that Social Audit Network, UK and Social Value, UK will both agree that these are the core ideals of our organisations. I am extremely happy that these two organisations are going to work together in India. We both share a philosophy that our approaches will help organisations improve people's lives. That is what drives both our organisations, and its members.

Have you experienced challenges in implementing your SROI framework globally?

Yes, there has been challenges but we are growing in acceptance. There has been really positive changes. We have been in existence for about ten years now, and have seen a real movement. Social Value and Social Return on Investment is used by organisations

for sciences as well as in all sectors including public bodies, social enterprises, and private sector organisations as well.

One of the greatest challenge is organisations understanding that the ‘value’ is not just by measuring. It is not just a one-off annual exercise where you measure the social value. It is about making social innovation, making changes in your organisation, and continuing to work towards making changes that will bring about changes in people’s lives. When organisations see this, they will start to move from doing activities as an exercise, to imbedding it in their organisation, within their culture and system.

We do have social legislations in the UK. We have a Social Value Act which is in existence since 2013 and that requires public bodies and local legislations to literally consider having social value in certain commissioning activities in services. We hope that legislation evolves.

There is a growing movement now around the idea that we should be moving towards accounting for social value.

2. MS. CYNTHIA HELLEN

“India has an impressive and a great power to play the leader in Social Entrepreneurship.”



Cynthia Hellen is the Founder & CEO of SMPLCT Lab (pronounced “simplicity”) an innovation laboratory creating sustainable solutions for people and planet.

Hellen regularly gives keynotes, hosts lectures, seminars and workshops at conferences, corporations, universities, nonprofits, and community groups on gender equality, social entrepreneurship & storytelling worldwide. In 2013, she launched socentech, an online community where she investigates social entrepreneurship, and low-cost technology for poverty reduction. In 2012, she became the recipient of a Bloomberg Businessweek and Sandbox Network Fellowship for empowering women in a remarkable way. Her work has been profiled nationally and internationally.

She serves as Chapter Leader of New York Women Social Entrepreneurs (NYWSE), nonprofit promoting young women social entrepreneurs. In 2018, she became a prestigious scholarship recipient of Reality Impact Fellowship, a Schusterman Initiative. In 2017, she was honored with the “Mayor’s Award For Outstanding Civic Contribution” for her work in entrepreneurship and technology. In 2016, she was honored with the “Phenomenal Women Award” by Baruch College. In 2015, she was awarded The Coaching Fellowship.

She is a mentor at Harvard, Columbia, Princeton Universities. She is also an active volunteer at Project Sunshine, a nonprofit that creates fun activities for children living with medical challenges in hospitals.

In an exclusive interview, Cynthia Helen shares with Marie Banu the scene of Social Entrepreneurship in USA.

About the Social Entrepreneurship scene in USA and contrast it to what is happening in India?

In the USA, we are seeing some great examples of Social Entrepreneurship from students to even former corporate individuals who are fully focused on making an impact through business. These Social Entrepreneurs, may have the resources they need to launch, sometimes this doesn’t mean their idea will take off because at the end, you will need more than just having a solid idea, you will need dedication, execution, a team, and last but not least thorough understanding of the problem, and/or customers. This could also be said for the Social Entrepreneurs in India.

The Social Entrepreneurs in India that I have met, are aware of the problems that exist in their communities and are creating a business to tackle these problems. The fact that they have creatively found a way to launch even without any resources,

has been impressive to say the least. This tells me that the Social Entrepreneurship in India not only have solid ideas but are dedicated, believe execution and team is key to scale their idea into a startup.

I am inspired by the amount of love that each of these men and women Social Entrepreneurs in India have for their community. India has a great advantage to be innovative because when you have lived with the problem your whole life, you have a better understanding of it. No textbook or statistic will compare to real life experience of perhaps your own village lacking water or electricity. This need will not only motivate you to persist but become more creative until you have found a long-term solution. Necessity is after all the mother of invention.

Any cross learning opportunities?

India has an impressive and a great power to play the leader in Social Entrepreneurship, because in order to build a business that would make an impact, you need to have an understanding of the problems. This means engaging with the community and learning amongst them.

I believe, both cities, New York and Chennai, have their own strengths, and their weaknesses. Both can learn a lot from each other, from looking at the problems in their communities, cities, country from different lenses in order to come up with creative solutions to collaborating on these problems that may not only affect one city, but perhaps both.

You seem to have many social entrepreneurship projects focused on women. Has this being consciously done?

There is no doubt in my mind that women are as creative, if not more so creative than men. But it shouldn't be about who's better. It should be about how both genders can work better.

Certain projects I have developed may have started as an idea, but without my teammates, who are men and women, the idea wouldn't have fully developed into the projects we now have today. Some projects are for women but this does not mean men aren't playing a role in these projects.

We don't intentionally develop projects for women only, we intentionally develop projects that are sustainable and scalable.

Can you tell us about Social Entrepreneurship education in The US?

Now more than ever, we are seeing more and more programs on sustainability and social entrepreneurship. From organization, such as Young Women Social Entrepreneurs, (ywse.org), which is an international nonprofit that supports the next generation of women change makers, and I happen to be President and Chapter Leader of the New York Hub of YWSE, where the NY team develops workshops and talks on social entrepreneurship and sustainability to Universities like Columbia Business School's The Tamer Center for Social Enterprise, in New York, USA, which educates leaders to use business knowledge, entrepreneurial skills, and management tools to address social and environmental challenges.

We also have conferences like Harvard Social Enterprise Conference in Boston, USA (socialenterpriseconference.org) which brings people together to engage in dialogue around the field of Social Enterprise. As well as online platforms like Acumen Fund's (plusacumen.org) "Social Entrepreneurship 101" that anyone and everyone can log on and learn about Social Entrepreneurship.

About SMPLCT Lab?

SMPLCT Lab (pronounced "simplicity") is an innovation lab creating sustainable solutions for people and planet. We are a multi-

disciplinary team from diverse backgrounds with experience in developing innovative strategies, creating sustainable businesses and accelerating a product's path to market. We use human-centered, design strategy, fieldwork, storytelling, exploratory design, and prototyping - we deliver products, and experiences that change not only the way we tackle local and global challenges but break perception on poverty. We work with visionary leaders, Corporations, Government Agencies, Nonprofit Organizations, Institutions, Social Enterprises and Foundations worldwide, because in today's globalized world, it is essential to know how to collaborate with people from different cultures across a broad spectrum of industries, including education, energy, healthcare, media and technology to evaluate problems, spot opportunities, and create environmental and social change.

Founded in 2013, SMPLCT Lab is headquartered in New York, NY. In 2012, I returned to my native country, Peru with one purpose, to challenge myself and live on less than \$2 a day. For 3.5 months I lived in rural, urban communities and villages where I learned from my neighbors the value and simplicity of life. While living in Peru I collaborated with nonprofit ODS, PCP Bank of Peru, ALAS Peruanas Engineering University, and a for-profit recycling venture in Pisco, Peru, a community that was affected by a 7.6 earthquake. This inspired me to pilot SMPLCT Lab which focuses on creating cross cultural collaboration between communities, design low-cost solutions for those living on less than \$2 a day; and educate society on sustainability.

Our mission is to create cross cultural collaboration between communities between artists, designers, technologists, scholars, researchers, policy-makers, and citizens worldwide; design low-cost solutions for those living on less than \$2 a day; and better educate society on sustainable living.

We value culture, collaboration and creativity. We value a good design especially when it benefits the world's poor.

3. MR. S. DEENADAYALAN

“I incorporated the concept of ‘ISR’, meaning I am Socially Responsible.”



S. Deenadayalan, popularly known as Deen, is a HR professional who has been doing pioneering work in the field of High Performance Work Systems. By establishing CEO, an organization of his dream, he offers guidance in the areas of strategic and management development to various corporate houses in India and Multinational conglomerates.

Deen is a sociology graduate, with degrees in Law, Journalism and Post-graduation in Social Work. He has over three decades of experience in the field of strategic business processes and HR and has been trained in US and Canada on High Performance Work Systems.

He was formerly the Director (Business Services & HR), Dupont and has held positions like Vice President (HR) - ITC, General Manager (HR) - Titan, to name a few.

Deen has been consulting various organizations across the globe, including Fortune 500 companies. Through his innovative empowerment model, he brings in a change of mind set for delivering business value. Apart from business consultancy, he contributes his time and effort to develop and sustain community development initiatives in Social Service Organizations. His passion lies in Organization Visioning, Leadership Mentoring and Coaching, Developing Organizational Capability, HR Strategies & Systems Development besides Inspiring Young Entrepreneurs. In an exclusive interview, Deenadayalan shares his journey as a HR professional.

About your education and early career?

I studied Sociology in Annamalai University, which was more by default than design. I then pursued PG in Personnel Management at MSSW from 1972-1974. Those days, this course was called ‘Post Graduate Diploma in Social Service Administration’.

Mrs. Mary Club Wala Jadhav offered me a scholarship and was a great source of inspiration. Before my results, I was offered a job at Enfield in 1974. But, I did not accept it as the canteen coupon was offered only to me and not to my other two classmates, who had also appeared for Interview along with me.

I joined Prof. TK Nair for a project on Food and Agriculture Organization in Karaikal and did my internship on ‘Agrarian relationship in Pondicherry’. Here, I learnt the meaning of ‘social divide’. I went to meet the local land lord in Nedungadu. He did not allow me inside his home, because I had interviewed an agricultural worker before.

Later, Mr. P.M Mathew, a Director in Mettur Beardsell and part of my VIVA panel, remembered how I did my presentation and offered me a position at Mettur Beardsell. Ms. Indira Nooyi (that time Indira Krishnamurthy) along with the best of all Management

Trainees from Business Schools were working here and I was the only one from Madras School of Social Work.

Can you share your stint at NTTF?

Mr. T.S Gopalan, a leading advocate, advised me to pursue my career in Skill Building. It was another 7 years of outstanding learning at NTTF where I had the opportunity to conduct several social experiments. From offering 50% of seats to Municipal School Students to up-skilling the blue-collar employees to become entrepreneurs; from capacitating union leaders to become entrepreneurs to managing labor relations —each of them was a new experiment and a successful experience. The much talked about ‘Learn, Earn and Grow model’ was seeded here in 1985. NTTF is a role model in skill building for our country and Mr. Regruraj, the present Managing Director, continues to be my guru. I am happy to say that I am the uninvited ambassador of NTTF.

Your efforts to bring True value of asset building into practice? I worked for Fenner in Madurai for a short period of ten months. The management used to offer 500 rupees as Long Service Award to workers instead of one sovereign of gold (that costed 400 rupees and was awarded earlier). The Union Leader Mr. Kondal refused the cash award and insisted only on the gold sovereign. We all thought that he was a fool to demand an award of a lesser value. But, he told us that the gold will reach the family and will have more value in the coming years, while the cash given to the workers will be spent within the next day. He taught me the concept of ‘True Value of asset building’.

When I joined ITC at Mantralayam, we used to negotiate with employees and village leaders. Two village leaders, from opposing groups, would bring 100 of their men with guns and demand employment. Feudalism was high and we needed a lot of money to get things done.

The equity shares that ITC offered to its employees were taken away by Mr. Reddy, one of the village leaders.

After I learnt about this issue, I told the employees to pledge their share with the bank and purchase a home. This idea came from the learning I gained from Mr. Kondal—finding ways of enhancing employee assets.

What were the innovative programmes that you launched at Titan?

At Titan, I had immense opportunities to conduct various social experiments. We visited villages and recruited students from rural areas, especially girls. We set up transit houses wherein each house had a Foster Parent. All the theory that I learnt in Social Work, I could put into practice—like social care, peer counseling, group work, etc. While some succeeded, few failed. Mr. Kondal's thought of people having assets and not money had a huge impact on me. As Titan did not advocate for higher remuneration for team members, I suggested to the management "Own you own House" scheme which they accepted in 1988. The company purchased 100 acres of land at 1 lakh rupees per acre. 400 employees opted to purchase the land in instalments of 100 rupees a month. Today, it is the state of the art colony in Hosur designed by Mr. Charles Correa.

Titan also did a hobby inventory and had 10 cluster club activities like folk songs, debate, wall graffiti, etc. On the third year of my joining, I took all the employees on a picnic and started building fellowship. We mainstreamed nearly 250 differently-abled which no company has attempted till date. Today, the Dehradun Factory has 80% of hearing impaired employees.

Titan Assembly workers wear white uniforms while other manufacturing center workers wear Green color uniforms. We formed a Rural Women Society so that they could be engaged to wash the uniforms every week. Titan paid the society for their

services and this helped the rural women.

We also partnered with Myrada, ActionAid, and several other organizations for ancillary activities. Before the word CSR was born, Titan was into it. I incorporated the concept of ‘ISR’ meaning ‘I am Socially Responsible’ by having my team members participate in NGO activities.

Please tell us about CEO?

CEO has been registered as Centre for Excellence in organization. CEO was started in 1999 to pursue my passion as Socio-business entrepreneur, and till date we have made a significant impact at bottom of the pyramid. Very less attention is given to people working in this segment and I am proud that my team under Mr. Mahendran’s leadership has 140 members and have impacted people at all levels. We have created careers for several thousands of Municipal school students living in rural areas and organizations like GE, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Dr Reddys Lab, Strides, Granules, Corning, TAFE, Ashok Leyland, Titan, NTT, CEAT, Ray Chem, KEC Electric, Indofil have facilitated people at bottom of the pyramid grow.

We have also supported NGO’s like M.S. Swaminathan Foundation, CBN, Youth for Jobs, Enable India, CSIM and many NGOs.

4. MR. GIRISH BHARADWAJ

“If You Mind, You Can!”



Shri Girish Bharadwaj is an Indian social worker often referred as Bridgeman of India for building around 137 low-cost suspension footbridges of varying spans and dimensions in various parts of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and also Odisha. He was conferred the Padma Shri award in 2017.

Girish hails from Sullia in Karnataka, and is a graduate in Mechanical Engineering from P.E.S. College of Engineering in Mandya.

He is the Founder-Secretary of Sneha Education Society of Sullia, which provides basic quality education in Kannada Medium. In an exclusive interview, Girish Bharadwaj shares with Marie Banu his passion for rural development.

Your early days as a mechanical engineer?

After my graduation, in 1975, I was interested to work in a factory

and was job-hunting. I wanted to be a white-collar employee, but my father persuaded me to set up a workshop in my village, where I grew up, and serve the rural community. Although I was disheartened at first, I realized that the villagers needed my service.

I engaged in general fabrication and repair of farm machinery. In the initial years, I struggled for existence. Later, I ventured into gobar gas plants as I found that almost all farmers in my village and Taluk had cattle. This enterprise was fruitful.

What motivated you to engage in bridge construction?

While I lived on the Sullia, nearest town side of Aletty village, there were people living on the other side of the Payaswini River. They had only one boat, which could transport five people at a time. In 1989, some villagers approached me and showed a picture of Lakshman Jhoola and asked me to construct a similar hanging bridge for their village. They mentioned that their boat was beyond repair and they were finding it difficult to commute. I explained that I was only a Mechanical engineer and not a Civil Engineer and therefore could not assist them.

An elderly friend of mine, hearing about this, told me “if you mind, you can”. This motivated me to explore civil engineering and from then on there is no looking back.

Can you share your first experience in constructing a bridge?

I went to Mangalore, which is about 90 kilometers away from my village, to buy some civil engineering books. The cover page of the book had a picture of the hanging bridge in it.

I studied this book and understood the nuances of building suspension bridges thoroughly. The challenge was in simplifying the design and making a footbridge. I applied my mind to use indigenous material, and designed the bridge in the most cost effective way.

I handed over the design to the villagers and advised them to approach the local MLA and Jilla Panchayat Engineer for funds. At that point in time, the government did not have funds allocated for hanging bridges. Hence, the villagers returned disappointed. The villagers told me that they will collect money from every household and requested me to re-design the bridges so that it can carry 20 people at a time.

Seeing their plight, I offered to guide and construct the bridge for them without charging any fee. As the length was 87.00M, I designed it to carry 100 people at a time. In fact, when we design according to I.R.C specifications, the bridge should actually carry 400 people at a time.

I mobilized local materials, and took the help of my friend who was a civil engineer to advice on the size of the columns and reinforcement. We also engaged volunteers in the construction work with my guidance. In two and a half months, the bridge was ready!

It was a simple bridge and the villagers were very happy. We had over 1,000 people attending the inauguration. I took the first test walk across the bridge and was tensed. I took the risk on me, as I did not want any villager to be affected.

The villagers thanked me immensely and I was moved with their kindness. The happiness I saw in their eyes motivated me to work for more people like them.

Did you shift focus from mechanical engineering to civil engineering altogether?

I had to balance both – doing free service for the villagers and at the same time manage my workshop to earn my income.

At the time of inauguration of the 50th bridge, Villagers of Shishila released a book where I mentioned that this would be the last bridge that I have ever constructed. Sri. Harshendra Kumar was the Chief Guest of the inaugural event. He is the brother of Dr. Veerendra Hegde of Dharmasthala, whom we believe and respect as representative of God. He told me that and I should construct many more bridges to benefit the rural people. I was confused and did not know how to react.

On the same day, while returning home, I was listening to Anoop Jalotha's bhajans in the car. I heard Tulsidas where he quotes the story of Lord Ram crossing the river along with Sita and Lakshman. The story goes like this: Lord Ram offers the boatman Sita's ring to repay him for his service. But, the boatman refuses to accept it stating that people of the same profession do not charge each other for their services. When Lord Ram asked the boatman how he could be considered to be of the same profession, the boatman replied saying - while he ferries people from this shore of the Ganges to the other, Lord Ram ferries people across the ocean of Samsara (Bhav-sagar), through the journey of life.

Listening to this recitation, I wept. I realized that God is sending me a message and asking me to build bridges for the villagers. It is a holy profession! God has given me the ability and I have a good team to work with. I remembered my friend saying: "If you mind, you can!" Hence, I decided to continue building bridges.

How do you ensure that the bridges are safe for people even after 10 years?

Well, what was designed to last for 10 years has now lasted for 28 years. We are now using Ferro Cement Slabs, instead of wooden planks. Now, all galvanized steel sections and ropes are also galvanized and checkered plates are used instead of Ferro Cement Slabs.

I inspect the bridge once in two years and carry out necessary repairs if required. Two- wheelers can be taken over the bridges.

My son has done structural engineering and worked in Australia and Mauritius. He was involved in designing marine structures, and has returned to India now. He takes care of my workshop and also assists me in designing bridges.

Are you happy with the recognition you have gained for your work? Is there a growing demand for bridges?

I have taken a liking to work with the rural communities. The affection they show towards me is overwhelming. Nothing gives more satisfaction than when people in villages thank my team for the connectivity created.

The government started recognizing my work and the District Chief Secretary (Now C.E.O) visited our village. He appreciated the rural connectivity that was provided in the most cost effective manner and in a very short span. Many government departments have started to approach me to construct similar bridges for other villages.

Tony of Switzerland who builds Suspension bridges in poor countries came to see my works and treat me like his “Bridge Brother”. This was a proud moment for me.

I am really happy at this recognition and I share these awards with my team members. Though I design these bridges, it is my team that undertakes the complete construction work.

5. MR. JOHN ALEX

“Access to credit is the key link for economic growth.”



John Alex serves as Group Head-Social Initiatives- Equitas Small Finance Bank & Programme Director of Equitas Development Initiatives Trust. He started his career as a Gazetted Officer in Tamil Nadu Government and served as Extension Officer (Agri) & Block Development Officer in North Arcot District, Tamil Nadu from 1979 to 1983. He worked for about 26 years with Indian Overseas Bank and took his voluntary retirement as Chief Manager.

He joined the Equitas management team in 2008 and conceptualized and set up the team for Social Initiatives with a clear focus to address a larger spectrum of requirements of small clients. The major focus was in the field of health, education, skill development, food security, placement for unemployed youth, and an inclusive model for persons with disability & trans gender community.

In an exclusive interview, John Alex shares with Marie Banu about Equitas and its programmes.

Can you tell us about Equitas, it's philosophy and services?

Equitas was founded in 2007 and provided microfinance to women's groups based on the Grameen bank model. Our core philosophy is to provide financial inclusion for the un banked income groups in a fair and Transparent manner. We focus on serving those who are not effectively serviced by the formal financial sector and to improve their quality of life.

We presently serve over three million clients under this segment which constitutes to one percent of Indian households. After we obtained the licence as a Small Finance (Scheduled Commercial) Bank in Sept 2016, our Product offerings has expanded. We now offer Savings, Deposits, Remittances, all types of loans, customized payment solutions/ digital solutions, FASTTAGs, Internet banking, Mobile banking, Wallet, Payment gate way solutions, Pension products, Mutual funds, PMS, and Life & General Insurance. Our vision is to serve five percent of Indian Households by 2025.

Equitas has grown phenomenally, reaching out to 2.5 million active borrowers within 9 years. We now have operations in 7 States with over 400 branches and 12,600 staff members.

What recognition has Equitas received for its programmes?

Equitas microfinance program has been acclaimed by many international agencies. mfTransparency, a global initiative to promote transparency of MFIs has recognised Equitas as the most transparent MFI in respect of the rate of interest charged by them. Harvard Business School has written two case studies on Equitas process and technology innovations. CRISIL has consistently given Equitas the highest rating.

We have been rated by CRISIL under their Corporate Governance rating and we have received a Level 2 rating (on a scale of 1 to 8, 1 being best). There are only 6 other corporates in India who are rated Level 1.

In addition to being invited to present the case study on the Equitas model of Ecosystem in many National & International forums, I cherish the award conferred on Equitas at the UNO, Vienna in February 2017 as it is the most coveted for the Equitas Model of reaching out to over 20,000 women with disabilities, out of which over 4,000 are visually impaired.

What is the role of micro-finance in women empowerment?

Access to credit is the key link for economic growth, especially for women who belong to the low-income segment. Thanks to Nobel Laureate Dr Mohamed Yunus and his Grameen Bank model, the group borrowing concept helps women access credit. I remember, during my initial days at Equitas, when a single mother with two daughters approached us for a loan of 10,000 rupees in order to buy a sewing machine. She was confident to use her skill as a tailor and earn for her family. This is the power of woman!

I believe that if you lend a small amount of money to a woman within a framework, it creates a social pressure for her to repay the loan with interest and over time, she works her way out of poverty.

About Equitas Development Initiatives Trust?

As a mark of our commitment to ensure comprehensive development of our customer communities, we launched Equitas Development Initiatives Trust (EDIT), a not-for-profit organisation, in Feb 2008.

Equitas contributes 5 percent of its annual profits to EDIT. EDIT focuses on education and community development in areas where Equitas customers who belong to low-income groups reside. We plan to address a larger spectrum of requirements—schools for members' children, health care, placement for the unemployed

youth, and vocational training—for our members.

In what ways can NGOs associate with EDIT to jointly implement your CSR programmes?

At Equitas, we strongly believe in partnerships. This has been the key for the scale with which we have reached, probably the highest amongst corporates in the world. We work with hospitals, NGOs, State & Central Government agencies, and Rotary Club, Lions Club, etc.

We work with BPL women led families in slums and we will continue to work with them. We welcome organisations to partner with us. I strongly believe in the saying: “What you can, I can’t; what I can, you can’t. But, together we can bring in better transformation.”

You have been involved in other charities as well. Which of the social issues are you passionate about?

I am actively involved as Trustee of Exnora International, an environment club and use this opportunity to talk about hazards of global warming and how women can play a major role in mitigating the ill-effects.

I am also a Trustee of a Special adoption home in Chennai. My passion lies in creating opportunities and instilling behavior change for transformation among the underprivileged women. They don’t need freebies or charity, but opportunities.

6. MS. LAVANYA

“Women should have a social responsibility to empower other women.”



Smt. Lavanya Is the Additional Superintendent of Police, Special Investigation division, Crime Branch, CID. She hails from Chennai and has pursued her graduation in Computer Science and Public Administration.

Lavanya looks after special investigation—cybercrime in particular. She joined as Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) in 2009 and served in Vellore District as DSP Ranipet for three years. She then joined as DSP Cyber Crime cell CBCID in 2013 and was promoted last year.

She has completed all levels of courses on cybercrime investigation and is a regular faculty at TN Police Academy and Judicial Academy.

In an exclusive interview, Lavanya talks to Marie Banu about the need for gender equality.

What are your thoughts on HeForShe Campaign? What steps should we take towards achieving gender equality?

The United Nation's 'HeForShe' Campaign has been very effective as it invites people around the world to stand together to create a bold, visible force for gender equality. It asks men and women to take active steps in promoting gender equality and women empowerment. It aims to achieve equality by encouraging men and boys as agents of change and take action against negative inequalities faced by women and girls.

I believe that gender equality will be achieved in our country when women have equal rights in their home, do not experience domestic violence, and are represented at the highest levels of business and politics. For this to happen, we need the support of men.

Both men and women should know what they want for themselves as well as what they want for the society. They should also understand the field realities that prevail for women – not only in cities, but also in remote villages – so that they can come out and engage in activities that promote women empowerment. This should be gauged.

Campaigns should not be restricted to urban areas alone. Statistics reveal that most urban women are aware of their rights and are improving in a lot of fields. Government and non-government organisations must therefore organise campaigns in rural areas, focusing on education and sanitation for women. Once a woman is educated, she becomes aware of her role in the society.

What do you think is the role of women and youth in enhancing social responsibility?

A majority of our population fit into the youth category and women form a sizeable number. Women should have a social responsibility to empower other women.

Today, many women are coming out in the form of NGOs or

entrepreneurs and including women in their programmes. They need not have to go out of their village or city to engage in such acts, but can start working from their very own neighbourhood. Once a woman realises her responsibility to develop the potential of other women and children in her vicinity, she can definitely bring about social change.

During the Chennai Floods in 2015, many youth volunteered to help the affected people. We should tap their potential and streamline their efforts towards certain social causes, more specific to our State. All these will lead to a change in the role of women and youth in our society.

About cybercrime scene in TN when compared to other States? The cybercrime scene in our state is much better when compared to other states. As technology grows, and people carry one or more gadgets in their hand, the intensity of cybercrime also increases. It is not that someone has to hack or steal your data for it to be a cybercrime; a simple abusive message is also one. In Tamil Nadu, where we have less cybercrime cases reported when compared to other states, the number of affected people are on the rise day by day. Specifically, they can be categorised into two types – financial implications, and non-financial implications where the social media is involved. When we say financial implications, I mean cases where victims reveal their bank account details, OTP, PIN or CCV number to the accused. Although a lot of awareness has been created, people are still falling prey.

I advise people not to panic when they receive phone calls stating that their card will be blocked. They should immediately contact their bank customer care number or visit their bank in person. In my experience, banks do not generally call their customers and inform about blocking their card. They convey such information only in the form of a letter. Be careful while using e-wallets and the money you deposit in it. It is good to choose trustworthy e-wallets.

About non-financial crimes - like sending abusive messages, stalking, voyeurism, social media offences – almost 70 percent affects women and children. The usage of tabs and mobile phones are on the increase amongst women and children, even though there are age limits specified for certain websites.

What is your advise on use of social media?

Women and children generally believe that people around them are good. Criminals study about them from the social media before making contact. So, be careful while revealing your personal details on the internet. If you convert your details into zeros and ones; anything you post on the internet will stay for ever.

We are a conservative society, but as the social media is on the increase, we tend to disclose a lot of issues without understanding the ramification of it. It is like literally putting up a banner on the street about yourself.

As a parent, watch what your kid is doing and check their internet usage. The best suggestion is to spend quality time with them and notice their behaviour pattern. If at all they fall prey to cybercrime, don't blame them as they are too young to understand. Instead, help them to come out of the issue.

I will not say don't use internet or social media; I will rather say use it for the purpose of it. Never make technology use you; make use of the technology. Definitely it would create a social circle and you can learn a lot as it creates an international platform.

Make sure to whom you are talking, more specifically in chat rooms and social media. Be careful about what you are posting. Ask yourself: what am I posting? Why should I post it? Is it necessary? Is it hurting my sentiments or that of others?

What are the social issues you are passionate about?

Self-awareness is the key for any development. At first, one needs to understand who he is; his capabilities, capacities, role in the family, and role in the immediate society. More specifically, I am interested in issues related to safety and security of women and children.

7. MR. MADAN KARKY

“Not just Tamils, I want the world to learn Tamil.”



Madhan Karky Vairamuthu is a lyricist, research associate, software engineer and film dialogue writer. He is the son of Tamil poet and lyricist Vairamuthu. Born and brought up in Chennai, Madhan Karky completed his bachelor's degree in computer engineering at the College of Engineering, Guindy in 2001. In 2002, Madhan Karky flew to Australia to pursue his Masters in Information Technology in University of Queensland, Australia. He was awarded the degree with High Distinction and a full scholarship towards his PhD.

On successful completion of his PhD, Madhan Karky returned to Chennai. He worked as Assistant Professor in the Department of Computer Science, Anna University between 2009 - 2013. He has published numerous papers and research articles on Tamil Computing. Lyric Engineering is his pet area of research. He is a dynamic teacher and aims at inculcating originality in

research among his students. Later, he resigned from his teaching profession in Jan 2013 and became a full time lyricist, dialogue writer and part time researcher in Karky Research Foundation.

Along with his wife Nandini, Madhan co-founded Mellinam Education, a company that offers Education related products and services to Tamils around the world. He authored Mellinam's first project iPaatti 1.0, a collection of songs for the information era Tamil children.

He was won several awards for Best Lyricist including from Filmfare, SIIMA, Vijay and Vikatan.

In an exclusive interview, Madan Karky Vairamuthu shares with Marie Banu about his research foundation.

Can you tell us about Karky Research Foundation?

Language Computing and Artificial Intelligence are my favourite areas of research. When I had to quit my teaching and research in Anna University, I wanted to continue with research. With language literacy aided by language computing as the focus, Nandini and I founded Karky Research Foundation. We started the foundation in a coffee shop with two employees. Chezhan and Rajapandian used to sit in a quiet corner in the coffee shop and started building a few basic tools. We used those tools to aid to our further research. Today, we are a team of 15 working full time on Language Computing research. We have built an online lab (karky.in/labs) where all our tools are available for the public to use. We have around 12 web tools now to help one to learn language.

Being a not-for-profit organisation, what are the main social causes that you focus upon?

Language literacy is our main focus. We share our research outcomes as language tools and share them to public for free.

We are in the process of creating one of the best dictionaries for Tamil. We want to extend our tools across all Indian Languages. We want to have tools ready for the future technologies, for generations to learn.

What was the inspiration for the Tamil language app PiriPori and Chol?

Chol is our flagship tool. We have created three dictionaries for Amazon Kindle eReaders and apps. Chol, a dictionary with many unique features, is available in our labs. PiriPori is our morph analyser. It is a tool that we believe is going to be everywhere in the future but we cannot see or realise its presence. It can analyse 35 crore Tamil word variations and infinite compound word combinations. It can be plugged into search engines, ebooks and translation engines to make search and translation more efficient. Our word level translation accuracy is far better than what google's translation offers at this moment.

How do you plan to spread these tools globally?

We currently have over 50,000 users using our free tools. They spread the words. We talk via social networking platforms and media interviews. A few have also donated for our projects. So far, I have been funding this research via my movie projects. We have plans for the next 5 years. We are looking for funding from Public, Government and also looking for collaborations with giants like Amazon, Google, Apple and Facebook. We expect more people to use these tools and more kids to play our word games world over.

Do you think that the present generation Tamilians are not proud to speak their mother tongue? If so, what do you think are the reasons behind this? How do we break this mindset?

We need to think deeply about this question. The answer is a sad

yes. We do not have the world knowledge in Tamil. Government and huge bodies should come forward and set up a huge project of converting all scientific books in Tamil. All education should be in one's mother tongue. They can learn any number of languages, but any information that the world has, should be available in Tamil. School, college, higher education should happen in Tamil. PhD thesis in physics, chemistry or any field should be submitted in Tamil. This is my big dream. Not impossible. But, if happens, will make every Tamil proud. Not just Tamils, I want the world to learn Tamil. Schools in Germany, France and New Delhi should teach Tamil as a foreign language.

8. MR. M. MAHADEVAN

“I wake up every day feeling alive to my responsibilities.”



M.Mahadevan, fondly called ‘Hot Breads’ Mahadevan, has been in the hospitality and catering business for over three decades now. Hailing from Udumalpet, a simple town in Tamil Nadu located 65 kilometers from Coimbatore; Mahadevan has also served as a teaching professor at the University of Madras. Both his parents are doctors.

His passion for food led him to start Oriental Cuisines Private Limited (OCPL) in May 1994. He set up the first Hot Breads outlet in Chennai in 1989 and in Dubai in 1995. ‘Hot Breads’ success has been replicated and has now grown to over 30 locations in India and more than 40 abroad.

Mahadevan works with more than 252 partners across 18 countries, 476 eateries and more than 5,000 employees. He runs three banners — Oriental Cuisines, CC Fine Foods and B&M Hot Breads. The brands that he manages with his global partners are

Benjarong, Sera, Ente Keralam, Wang's Kitchen, Teppan, French Loaf, and Planet Yumm. Besides, he has set up 42 bakeries and restaurants in the USA, Middle East, Africa, Canada, France and London.

Mahadevan has also been helping create entrepreneurs by starting Winners Bakeries to help young bright people set up their own outlets. There are five in Chennai and four in Coimbatore. He also teaches bread making to prisoners in Chennai's Central Prison at Puzhal. Writer's café, his third venture on the social front, rehabilitate survivors of domestic abuse, acid attacks and fire accidents. A philanthropist, a social entrepreneur, his charitable deeds are endless.

In an exclusive interview, Mr. M. Mahadevan shares with Marie Banu his journey as a social entrepreneur.

What was the driving force for you to move from teaching to becoming a Food entrepreneur?

This was a journey I took to make money; there was no other motive.

I started my career as an Assistant Professor in the University of Madras in 1979 and taught Marketing Management and Accountancy to students. But, my fierce ambition was to be a part of the hotel industry and this drove me to satisfy my urge.

I took up a part-time night job with a hotel in the city where I started working for four hours at night to learn more about the industry. I juggled with many roles; from being a trainee, a bellboy, and receptionist - to almost everything. So, while I worked as a professor during the daytime, I also moonlighted as an apprentice with a hotel in the evenings.

At the hotel, I witnessed people who came and threw money on fancy dinners and drinks. They were spending my one-month

salary on their one night dinner. Here came the fire in the belly to become rich and that made me work hard to become a food entrepreneur as I had a passion for food.

I left my teaching job and moved to the F&B sector full time in 1982. I studied deep into the food and beverage business and acquired enough knowledge to go on my own.

About your entrepreneurial journey in the restaurant space?

My first step was a Chinese take-away at a restaurant in Chennai, which I launched along with a partner who I met in the hotel where I was working. We served food from 5pm to 11.30pm and it was the time when people had a craze for Chinese food. I took advantage of that!

Once, a customer of mine asked if I would be interested to set up a restaurant in a commercial tower that he was constructing. That's how I launched 'Cascade' where we served Chinese, Thai, Malay and Japanese cuisines as well.

Some three years later, in 1989, I launched 'Hot Breads'. This was a turning point! The idea was born during one of my trips to Singapore where I went to source ingredients like Chinese sauces. The dinky looking bakeries caught my eye and I decided to launch a similar one back home. Not many of my friends encouraged my move. They thought that I was crazy, but I had my own ideas. It was not just the bread and bakery that I was looking at!

I created some exciting concepts. For instance, we made curry bun and filled chicken tikka inside a croissant. I got the idea after seeing what the Japanese did to their bakery items. This was a huge hit! People used to crowd in our Hot Breads outlet at Alsa Mall in Chennai. From day one, we started to make profits as the concept was unique and our products were tasty. We broke even in the first year and since then we never looked back.

After three months or so, people from Kochi and Bangalore approached me to start Hot Breads units in these cities.

Soon, I came to be known as ‘Hot Breads’ Mahadevan!

I opened my first international outlet in Dubai in 1994, and recently launched a south Indian restaurant in Melbourne, Australia.

You have been setting up several ‘Social Enterprises’ like the Give Life Cafe, Winners Bakery, and Writers Cafe, Freedom bakery at Puzhal Prison, and Eddies Pop Corn. What has been the inspiration?

When I landed in Chennai searching for a job, I have stayed without food and proper roof over my head. With sharing accommodation, sharing food and going hungry I know what life without resources is!

When I had enough money, I remembered my mother’s brief talk on living and giving. She used to say: “If the Lord bestowed you with more than what you need, the extra he gives you is for the society and not for you.” Her advice and my struggle to conduct my day-to-day life in early Chennai days taught me to share what I have with the needy people.

Money is only a tool to live; it is not life. I began to see the poverty around me and realised that the more I expand my business, the more jobs I would be able to create for people. I wake up every day feeling alive to my responsibilities. I have earned enough money and am now in a position to give back.

I also believe in sustainability in Charity Projects and always had a clear vision – “I should never give fish, instead should teach them to fish.” This planned approach gave me all the above social enterprises, which provides empowerment to the poor people and takes them out of poverty by teaching them a skill.

Which of the social issues are you passionate about?

Two social issues are of highest priority for me – Home for the destitute men & women; and empowerment of abused & poor women.

My mother has been my instrumental force. If I am inclined towards women empowerment, it is because of her. She ensured that my sisters got a degree in either law or medicine and believed that when you educate a girl, you educate the family.

You have been organising Battle of the Buffet event in Chennai to raise funds for NGOS. Can you tell us about this?

Battle of the Buffet event is organized as part of India’s largest festival of giving – ‘Daan Utsav’, a unique fundraiser that supports worthy NGOs in Tamil Nadu.

I cannot BELIEVE that this idea of mine is a decade old, even my wife discouraged me (when I spoke to her in the first year) saying that no one will pay 5000 rupees for an evening of dinner and entertainment.

It is a fun-filled evening with great food, fantastic music, and the coming together of like-minded people – all for a social cause! Chefs of leading 5 star hotels and their teams put together a delightful buffet showcasing their culinary talent and throw it open to the people of Chennai, to raise funds for close to 100 NGOs across Tamil Nadu. The restaurants, the chefs and their teams cook up and serve this feast as their “act of giving”. Close to 3000 Chennaites are expected to attend the event by donating (Platinum -Rs.15,000 or Gold -Rs.10,000 or Silver - Rs.7,500) to an NGO they care and support.

The event organized by Chennai Mission, United way of Chennai,

and CIOSA, gives NGOs a lot of visibility among donors. It also networks various donors with newer and deserving NGOs. The registered NGOs will be present in person to share and show case their expertise and projects, thus providing a great platform for public interaction on social causes and action.

Here we are from 81 lac (for 32 NGOs) in 2009 to 6.7 crores that was raised last year from collective donation by over 75 NGOs. Now, it's time for me to handover this event to a larger organization, as in 2018 we have over 100 NGOs participating and have fixed a fundraising target exceeding seven crores.

9. MS. MP NIRMALA IAS

“The quality of our schools determines on the quality of our teachers.”



Smt. MP Nirmala IAS was the first lady Deputy Collector in Tamilnadu. She has 37 years of government service and has held senior positions in 25 departments of the State.

She is presently the Chairperson of Tamil Nadu Commission for Protection of Child Rights (TNCPCR). She was the Commissioner of Social Welfare and Nutritious Meal Programme Department thrice — 1986, 1996 and 2008. In 2011, she served as the Secretary of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries Department and was in charge of the Department of Environment and Forests.

In an exclusive interview, Smt. M.P. Nirmala IAS shares with Marie Banu her experiences in the Social Welfare sector.

Is the RTE Act effective in our State? What efforts have been taken by our government to ensure quality in education?

Even some of the private school children are not able to do basic mathematics. When we were young, we used to memorise tables and this really helped us. But, this practice is nowhere in schools. I feel that memorising tables is a must for children as it leads to logical reasoning.

I recently visited an institution and found a boy who could not do simple subtraction. When I enquired, I learnt that he did not know even the basic multiplication or decimals. The quality of our schools determines on the quality of our teachers—whether in a Government or Private school. We not getting the best teachers although we are offering the best salary to them.

Earlier, most of our teachers were spinsters. The present day teachers are very much stressed as they have to take care of their families as well. Therefore, they are not able to concentrate on their teaching profession to develop themselves and teach children better.

I learnt recently that Psychometrics has been removed from the B.Ed syllabus. The teachers therefore are not aware about the psychological attitude of their students. I believe that if teachers are friendly towards others, they would definitely be friendly with their students.

The Government is aware about the lack of quality in education. But, the issue is: “Where to start?” The government is now taking all steps to improve the quality of education, besides providing compulsory and free education for all.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is also working towards improving the quality of present teachers and focus on future recruitment so that people would like to choose the teaching profession.

What are the activities coordinated by State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR) in Tamil Nadu?

SCPCR's work is to mainly care for the children and protection of their rights—right to education, right to good environment, and right to live. We are in charge of the Juvenile Justice Act, and Right to Education Act and The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POSCO) Act. Whenever we receive complaints, whether in person or through the media, we take immediate action to resolve the problem.

In the case of child abuse, while people are angered and want to render punishment to the offender, our concern would be to also protect the abuser. In most of the cases, it has been found that the offender has been abandoned by the society, and denied education.

Can you tell about your experience in the Social Welfare Sector?

I have been associated with the Social Welfare Sector for 13 years and have also served in the Social Defence for over 7 and a half years. It was at this time the programme for Street and Working children was introduced by the Government to ensure that even a single child does not sleep on the pavement. We also launched a programme to eradicate child labour. I visited Sivakasi and other areas to understand the problems that the children faced.

During my tenure, the cradle baby scheme for abandoned infants and abused children was first launched in Tamil Nadu. I actively participated in these programmes and rescued over 400 children and given them for adoption.

You have held the portfolios as Secretary to Government, Food, Co-operation & Consumer Protection Department. Can you share any challenges that you have faced related to the free government schemes?

Working with the Food department was a challenging job in itself. I was in-charge of Co-operations and food distribution where I had to manage more than 75,000 institutions – Primary Cooperative Societies, Co-operative Banks, District Banks, Marketing Societies, LAMP societies for tribals, godown for farmers, construction of godowns for other people, urban banks, etc. These institutions ensured proper distribution of food and essential commodities, loans and other economic upliftment activities.

When I was the Food Secretary, we ensured that quality rice was provided all the time and also timely supply of essential commodities. We had to control to price of 33 essential commodities and so used to have a market watch. We had supplied essential commodities to the people through co-operatives and civil supply co-operative stores. In addition to this, vegetables were supplied to the Farm Fresh Vegetable Outlets by procuring directly from the growers. It was a win-win situation where the farmers used to get loans to cultivate vegetables and the same was sold through our Farm Fresh Vegetable Outlets.

We then offered nearly 60 crores to the onion growers for cultivation of bellary (big onion) in Thirunelveli, Pallidam and other areas so that when the price of onion in Maharashtra was higher, people in Tamil Nadu could buy at a reasonable price.

Likewise, we encouraged farmers to grow ginger in areas where they used to cultivate turmeric as the cost of ginger was at one point 400 rupees a kilo. We motivated the farmers to cultivate millets – Varagu, Samai, Kudiraivali, etc — as it was meagre in the outside market. Now, it has picked up very well. We also branded some commodities like honey, tamarind, turmeric and millets which are procured by the tribal people and made it available at a reasonable price.

The cost of rice in our State was on the increase and hence we purchased rice from West Bengal. We introduced rice at 20 rupees a kilo and this was a huge success.

Any inspiring moment in your career?

At the Town Panchayat Department, I introduced solid waste and liquid waste management in some areas. Once, Dr. Abdul Kalam visited by surprise our waste management project at Gandhi Nagar and appreciated the work.

10. DR. B. POORNA

“No rules or regulation is as effective as self-realisation.”



Shri Shankarlal Sundarbai Shasun Jain College for women in Chennai has been established with a generous contribution made by Smt. Sundarbai Shankarlal Charitable Trust of the SHASUN Family and Group.

Dr. B. Poorna is presently the Principal of SSS Shasun Jain College. A postgraduate in Computers, she has been in the teaching sector for three decades. She left her IT job to become a teacher, which she realised was her area of interest. She completed PhD in 2003 to ensure a good career in the teaching domain.

In an exclusive interview, Dr. B. Poorna shares with Marie Banu the USP of SSS Shasun Jain College.

About your education and your career path?

I did my schooling in Trichy at BHEL colony. The first step I took outside my colony was only to attend College, that too by traveling in a ladies special bus.

I did my UG in Physics and joined MCA in 1985 when computer education was just coming up. It was an eye opener for me. In a class of 36, there were only 12 girls.

My teachers fascinated me since my school days. Hence, I decided to enter the teaching profession after completing my education. I served for 12 years in Vaishnav College in Chromepet, Chennai and then worked as a Controller of examinations in MGR Educational and Research Institute at Maduravoyal. Later, I joined SRM Easwari Engineering College as Head of MCA department and then joined SSS Shasun Jain College as Principal in 2012.

I am passionate to always do something new and exciting. I also want to give back to the society.

Your thoughts on the teaching profession today?

One should evolve as a teacher; have a feel for it. At Vaishnav College, I underwent a rigorous one-month training on how to become a teacher - from interacting with students to holding a chalk piece. I was literally guided in the process of maturing into a teacher. This is definitely missing now!

Unfortunately, we find many teachers today who have chosen this profession by chance and not out of passion. In my opinion, around 80 percent of the teachers consider teaching like any other job. This is where all the problems arise – be it for a man or a woman.

I feel that the degree of compassion and affection is certainly more for a woman. I would therefore suggest having more women professors in co-ed colleges as well as in boys' colleges as it definitely would make a difference.

What is the USP of SSS Shasun Jain College?

SSS Shasun Jain College focuses on discovering, developing and drawing out the hidden talents lying dormant inside its students. From academics to co-curricular activities, a 360 degree development and grooming is of supreme importance in today's world. Our institution creates an environment for future leaders, entrepreneurs and professionals who possess skills and aptitudes. The USP of our college is values and technology in education. We push technology to our students' as they will have to face a world where technology is used for almost all aspects of life.

Recently, we have launched a Shasun app where the students and faculty can subscribe and network with their peers. It is like any other social media app. We encourage staff to share posts and update on events. We have an administrator who moderates the posts. Hall bookings for functions and feedback on services are all coordinated through this app.

We document the students' attendance on a tab, which is linked to our ERP. This saves a lot of time for our teachers. We also do profiling of students. The idea is to do a data analysis of student's academic credentials, psychometric analysis and understand their area of interest so that we can provide the necessary intervention. The college is consciously creating awareness on social issues amongst our students and has copyrighted a women's safety app 'Shasun Raksha' and an e-waste management app 'Shasun Swetch'.

Can you share with our readers about the Social Connect Programme?

In today's education there is a total disconnect between society and education. Even moral science and vocational courses, which were part of school education 30 years back, is no longer there. In a fast food world we are graduating pretty fast and retiring fast too. A medium pace growth, which is holistic, will do good for the society as well as the individual.

It is with this intention, that we launched the Social Connect Programme along with Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) in 2015 where students are encouraged to voluntarily enroll.

As part of this certificate programme, students are oriented on social issues and taken on field trips to charitable organisations. They are also provided one-month internship in an NGO to gain experiential learning.

This exposure has led to a change in mindset amongst our students. Many students have expressed that they are now able to appreciate what they possess. Many parents have lauded this programme and some have even mentioned that they find their children to be more responsible and humble now.

What steps have you taken to handle the present generation learners?

Children of this generation look around them to learn. I have consciously told my teachers to never raise their voice, keep a happy face, listen patiently, and talk to people with concern. I have also requested them to not restrict to academics alone, but to talk about values and social issues happening across the world. We also have a set of people who work with students on digital detox. Learners in the Internet age don't need more information. They need to know how to efficiently use the massive amount of information available at their fingertips – to determine what's

credible, what's relevant, and when it's useful to reference. We sensitise our students on how to use cell phones wisely and not become addicted to it.

Our students are around 17 years of age and they have crossed their formative years. For them, reasoning alone works. No rules or regulation is as effective as self-realisation. We keep reiterating and reinforcing students on what is expected from them.

Your advise for parents?

Do not fear about changing society.

We will all be learning till the last breath of our life.

Realise that things are much better now than it was for us when we were young.

We should give our children a healthy environment to grow.

Joint family system will strengthen one's mind.

Exposure is essential at every stage of the child's growth so don't be over protective. Of course, you will have to keep a watch so that your child does not fall back.

Don't help your child in taking decisions; let he/she make mistakes and learn from it - as long as it does not cost heavily.

That way your child will grow stronger and will know what is best!

11. MS. PRIYADARSHINI RAJKUMAR

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



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

Priyadarshini is also the Secretary of Saraswathi Educational Cultural and Charitable Trust, which runs many social initiatives and charitable programmes in Tamil Nadu. The Trust also

conducts the renowned Vasant Utsav - Annual Festival of dance - at Kapaleeswarar temple in Mylapore, Chennai during the month of May.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What motivated you to join the film industry?

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

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

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

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

What inspired you to participate in Mrs India World Classic 2018 contest? Can you share your experience?

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

Mrs Tabassum Haq and the choreographer Mrs. Bhumika Bhandari being women, and the event held in support of breast cancer.

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

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

On 30 September, we had the Introduction and talent round and I was lucky to top amongst other talented women in my age group. On 1st October, Dazzle Mrs India 2018 finals were held and it commenced with a glorious ethnic round. Three contestants were shortlisted from each age group and were asked to answer one common question for the group. The question was: “A woman has three births in her life, one as daughter, second as wife and third as mother. Of these, which is the most significant to you and why?”

My reply to the question was: “Motherhood is most significant in my life as I had a beautiful childhood, and my marriage came easily. But, I struggled to become a mother, and I was able to attain motherhood only at the age of 40. Therefore, I value this the most. Also, with motherhood I experienced unconditional love, a purity of connection, which I have never felt before. I realized that the ultimate purpose of womanhood is to nurture - not just in one’s own life, but also the society and the earth. I feel so blessed to be crowned Dazzle Mrs India World Classic 2018. The winning title is given to contestants aged between 35 and 45 years and I feel proud to return to my hometown as a winner.

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

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

I intend to connect with more NGOs to increase the breadth of our

existing projects, visit schools, colleges and other organisations to enlighten the masses about our work, and to fundraise for our existing and new projects that are coordinated by our Trust. I also have a desire to contest for the title of Mrs. World and other international titles so that I can reach out to more people across the globe.

12. MS. SONAL MANSINGH

“My Messages are through my Art”



Dr. Sonal Mansingh, is India's iconic personality, Cultural educationist of International repute & Living Legend. She is the recipient of highest civilian awards the Padma Vibhushan (2003) and the Padma Bhushan (1992) from President of India among many coveted national & international awards & honours. Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi nominated her as a NAVRATNA for Swachh Bharat Mission (Clean India Mission). She is proficient in several languages and their literature. She is unique among performing artists of India because of her training and deep knowledge of several Indian dance styles as well as the three prevalent classical music traditions of India, which are Hindustani, Oriya and Carnatic. Her unique contribution has been her lifelong work using her knowledge to address socio-cultural issues through chosen mediums of solo and group choreographies as also Naatya-Katha.

As the Founder-President of Centre for Indian Classical Dances, established in 1977 at Delhi, she has trained several thousand talented artists who are carrying the message of Indian culture all over the world.

Her book ‘Incredible India - Classical Dances’ in English published by Wisdom Tree and books on her ‘Devpriya’ in Hindi written by Yatindra Mishra & ‘SONAL MANSINGH – A Life Like No Other’ by Sujata Prasad have gained wide readership. She had also contributed number of articles on dance and Indian culture in prestigious magazines and newspapers.

Her tele-films DEVI DURGA and KRISHNA CHARIT commissioned by Doordarshan in 1993 and 1994 saw hundreds of re-runs. Prakash Jha made documentary on her SONAL which won National Award.

Currently she is serving a second term as Trustee of Indira Gandhi Centre for the Arts (IGNCA). She is now the Kalapeethadheesh of Kalayoga Peetham at S-VYASA University, Bangalore. She has served as Chairperson of Central Sangeet Natak Akademi and on several important official and cultural bodies.

In an exclusive interview, Padma Vibhushan Dr. Sonal Mansingh shares with Marie Banu how dance could be used to bring about social change.

What efforts should be made in order to make dance viewed as something beyond entertainment?

In the past two decades, especially ever since hundreds of television channels started, I have been asking, “what is the role of media?” The largest viewing is that of television. It even overtakes social media. Television channels are backed by corporate houses, who own 24-hours News and Entertainment channels. Where do they position Indian arts? I could name only one—DD Bharati. I do not know any other channel to be sensitive

to arts. Do they have CSR or not?

I would include the press in this list as well. Earlier they used to have plenty of space for book reviews, films, dance, theatre, music, and poetry. I don't see that now. The English print media like *The Hindu*, *The Pioneer*, *Asian Age* as also vernacular Press in Hindi and regional languages do try to have at least a weekly page or column. But, the English language magazines like *India Today*, *Outlook*, *The Week*, etc hardly ever give space for art news.

So, dance as entertainment is a 'yes', but what you are asking is something different. How can it happen if you serve Maggi noodles or burgers or ice cream every day and suddenly ask: "Why am I eating fast food and not nourishing food like roti, dal, chawal or salad?" Mental obesity is increasing day by day and people are just consuming whatever they see. They get habituated because they do not have good options.

I should also say that unfortunately artists don't protest about this. Apart from me and a couple of others, who else is speaking out?

Theatre lobby and film lobby are very strong, because they are group art forms whereas classical dance and classical music have their solo performance with their music groups. In recent years, choreography and group dance forms have come into fashion. Everybody is busy trying to get an inch in this crowded space. So who has time or inclination to speak out?

How can we use dance as a medium to bring about social change?

The social messages are inherent in most of our historical legend and stories. I will not include mythology in this because myths i.e. fairy-tales are not what we have in India. Whereas puranic is purana, purathan —which is something that happened long ago,

yet is contained in the collective memory and is what we should know.

If art forms are encouraged to portray such legends and stories, especially those that talk about social issues, the younger generation would become aware that these issues are not happening only now but had occurred earlier too. They will learn about the problems and how they have been addressed.

The society is divided today based on caste and class. As a social activist, how do you think we can overcome this?

Caste and class have existed in every society or rather in every civilization. But, they keep changing. During the Middle Ages in Europe, they had serfs who tilled the land and did all the menial jobs for the Landlords, Dukes and Counts. Women had no power. Several social issues and hierarchy existed. Slowly, they were broken after World War I and II. Europe went through a lot of seminal changes. Today newer issues with the immigrants are creating social problems.

In America too, there are racial problems. They do not want Mexicans, Vietnamese, Indians, etc. The aborigines in Australia and Maoris in New Zealand are finished. Every country has their own sets of issues and problems.

So, the point is what you call them: as issue with immigrants or social hierarchy or caste or creed. The way in which we understand these issues in India and the way in which they are seen across the world are different.

Human nature does not allow for a plateau. It is always shifting from one point to another. Our social psychology is built that way. India was a feudal country till 70 years ago ruled by several different people. Our society has undergone many changes and is still undergoing. It is never static. Today, it is a different situation than what was yesterday and therefore difficult to comment on

India as one social entity.

Even in the North East, Meghalya is different from Tripura and Tripura is different from Arunachal; Assam has a different social construction. I feel that these kinds of generalisations are never correct. In fact, they give us an incorrect biased view. Social, psychological, political, and economic situations keep shifting. Your thoughts on Swachh Bharat?

When Shri. Piyush Goyal asked if my name could be included in Swachh Bharat Mission's Navaratna list as our Hon'ble Prime Minister was announcing the names, I happily agreed. My work is through my art and my messages are carried through dance, music, katha, interactions, interviews and workshops.

I can give you examples of how symbolically river pollution is addressed. For instance, you would have heard about Samudra Manthan - churning of the Milky Ocean. For once, the Gods and anti-Gods came together to get Amrita. It was a selfish motive! See, this is what happens to all of us who want something and for getting something we have to undergo many trials, tribulations, problems and obstacles. What happened was that before Amrita came Haalaa-Hala (poison) and nobody could handle it. They had to plead to Mahadev - who is also known as Shambu, one who can solve and resolve everything. He comes and he drinks the poison.

The poison is all the negativities, the Cosmic Negativities. You can call them societal or personal negativities. But, He contains it in his throat as Parvati holds his neck so that poison does not go down. That is the role of a woman! Negativities have to be contained as they have to be treated as poison in which Woman's role of Balancing the Energies is crucial!

Keeping in mind dire need of Swachhtha in today's world for the betterment of our nation & society I insist on three things:

- Swachh Vichar: Pure Thought
- Swachh Vaani: Good Speech
- Swachh Vyahavaar: Correct Behaviour

This should be applicable at all levels in the society. It is a tall order but is necessary to keep talking about.

III. NGO Profile

*Inspirational stories of uncelebrated people
whose organisation strive to make a
difference in the lives of the deprived.
Writer: Shanmuga Priya. T*

1. CAMPAIGNING FOR CHANGE

Tharuni



In the context of women empowerment, the number of programmes, missions and the scale of their coverage go on to emphasise the significance of gender equity. The sub set of adolescent girls calls for a greater attention as that is the age when women mature physically and mentally. Besides, this is the time they succumb to many irrational social practices like child marriage. “This age group needs special and focussed attention in order to have a lasting impact on the situation of women across all caste and class groups,” insists Ms Mamatha Raghuv eer, Founder of Tharuni Voluntary Organisation in Hyderabad.

Mamatha and her journalist mother have always tried to help children of their maids. They felt that domestic workers needed support services to move beyond their struggle for survival. “Else, their girl children would follow the same path, in spite of going through all efforts to complete elementary education. That’s unfair and unjust,” says Mamatha.

Soon, Mamatha and her mother decided to do organised work to help as many girl children as possible. Thus was born Tharuni, in the year 2000. In her engagement with a World Bank project, she was shocked to learn that girls between 10-18 years of age were

not given the attention they required. “A crucial age group was not prioritised. That is the period to mould them in the right direction. Ignoring this age group comes with a huge social cost,” she warns. Her marriage to an IFS officer also allowed Mamatha to explore new opportunities to work for girl children. His tenure as the Project Director for Integrated Child Development Scheme gave the mother-daughter duo to gain experience through a World Bank project. “This was our foundation. We saw how multiple issues were dealt with simultaneously, on a large scale. While the scale amused us, we were impressed with the micro level changes it brought about in the target group,” recalls Mamatha.

Mamatha shifted to Warangal due to her husband’s transfer. She was taken aback by the extent of backwardness in the district and the resultant discrimination women and girls faced here. She immediately decided to start her work because she knew that reaching out to children of domestic workers will not improve the larger picture. She adopted 10 government girls’ high schools and started teaching children about reproductive health, life skills, communication, etc. Very soon, she was teaching 1000 girls in class 6 to 10 every year. Given the number of girls Tharuni reached out to and the diversity in these communities, she had to focus on other issues that disturbed the children from completing their school education. Advocacy and lobbying had to continue incessantly.

Anaemia among girls emerged as a grave concern at one point. Tharuni’s presence helped the local government distribute IFA tablets to a large section of the girls. The organisation also observed that girls were inevitably engaged in domestic work in their own houses and were seen as valuable labour pool during the agriculture season. So, the focus now glared on child labour. “Our strategy was the same - advocacy, awareness and sensitisation. We worked with a range of stake holders and all along our vision was very clear - we needed to nurture a society that accepted girls and women as equal citizens, giving them the space they deserved and needed,” she says.

Soon, the prevalence of child marriages came into focus. Apart from the regular strategy, Tharuni had to work exclusively with the girls to change the situation. The Balika Melas formed in the schools became very active in reporting about child marriages. In a span of three months, Tharuni stopped 40 child marriages with the help of these girls. A study revealed that 1500 child marriages happened every year and girls as young as seven years of age were getting married to older men.

“Tharuni, any day is a third party. Apathy from the police who do not seriously register cases and a legislation with little penalty that does not actually scare the communities, affected our reach. Therefore, we started our next campaign, this time producing a puppet show and organising street plays. We also conducted capacity building programmes to reach out to government officials. Different methods were used to reach out to every stake holder who was capable of improving the lives of these girls,” explains Mamatha, adding that Tharuni walked the extra mile to raise the issue in every platform possible.

While advocacy, campaigning did not yield results, Tharuni resorted to legal activism. Non-cooperation from the local police forced the team to approach National Human Rights Commission in New Delhi, with a status report of 60 child marriages that were going to happen in the next two months. The order from NHRC did not turn the tide as only eight marriages were stopped. The second level of interaction brought Tharuni to the doors of National Commission for Women. At long last, a Parliamentary Committee was formed, with Tharuni as a member, to revise the legislation on child marriage. “The Prevention of Child Marriages Act of 2006 was a big achievement for us. Besides the penalty and jail term, all our suggestions on rehabilitation of the victims were accepted. Child marriages that were executed in secrecy could now be declared null and void. Any community member who encouraged child marriage was also booked. Soon, work scaled to all districts and Tharuni was stopping child marriages in all the districts of the state. We prevented over 1700 child marriages. Our excitement

knew no limits,” reminisces Mamatha.

Tharuni became a resource organisation training different stake holders, organising capacity building programmes and also published IEC materials in different languages. Then came the idea of Balika Sanghas, i.e. girl child clubs. With about 10-20 girls in a group, it was designed as an entity in itself that allowed the girls to socialise, play, learn collectively about their rights at resource centres established by Tharuni. Soon it also became the ideal place for vocational training and engaging in village development activities. “Our girls became a collective voice who knew to represent themselves, their interests and also that of their communities. They stopped child marriages and also refused to succumb to the practice. They have enabled construction of village schools and also laying of roads that led to these schools. Our Balika Sanghas have reached out to more than 13,000 girls. Earlier our girls learnt to make incense sticks, tailoring and other skills. Today, they have upgraded themselves to repairing mobiles and other electronics. They are evolving and so has Tharuni in the last two decades,” adds Mamatha.

Tharuni has also impacted child labour in Warangal through similar efforts. Today, there is no child labour in the district of Warangal in Telangana. As is the journey of an advocacy organisation, Tharuni also had to refine its focus and approach all along, depending on the issue and stake holders it dealt with. With every issue reaching a new level of representation, Tharuni marched ahead intervening in another pressing concern. “I guess that is part of an organisation’s evolution. It is only natural that we move from one issue to another, so that all efforts culminate to provide an improved standard of life for our girl children. An isolated focus on an issue can hardly change the picture,” says Mamatha.

Campaigns on female infanticide, foeticide and child sexual abuse followed suit. Tharuni Ooyala, the cradle programme became a huge success and within a year 36 children were given in adoption through the Department of Women and Child Development. Medical audits of the diagnostic centres are also carried out periodically to check the unauthorised abortions. Mamatha feels

that Tharuni has a long way to go in realising its vision, yet she is content that legal activism has empowered Tharuni and other like-minded organisations to come together to seek legislative and institutional responses against social practices that have stalled holistic development of children, specially girls, for decades.

—*Shanmuga Priya.T*

2. CHILDREN’S LOVECASTLE TRUST *Teaching for the future*



Making lives better through education, in a nutshell, is what CLT India does. After all, the organization points out that UNESCO estimates teacher shortage in India to be about 3 million, with a requirement of 1.5 million teachers in the years to come. By ensuring that the least served gets access to teaching, CLT India helps bridge that gap.

Registered as the Children’s LoveCastle Trust in 1997, CLT India has spent the last two decades implementing several projects and reaping the rewards. “Our first program was a mid-day meal scheme for children in government schools,” says Bhagya Rangachar, Founder and CEO, CLT India, “We were the first in Karnataka to officially launch a school mid-day meal programme.” Back then, CLT India had launched the scheme in just one school. It impacted nearly 300 children. Today, Bhagya says CLT India’s reach spans 9,000 rural classrooms, impacting one million children in three States. “We achieve this by providing digital STEM resources with low-cost technology delivery models,” she adds.

The STEM content that Bhagya refers to, is academic material that is aligned to the syllabus and lets teachers use tools that inspire students to learn through visual means, which in turn leads to better engagement. Armed with a low-cost delivery model engineered by CLT India, the e-Patshale (as the module is christened) lets the solution have a built-in ecosystem without the need for high-profile infrastructure, electricity, internet or even unnecessary IT interface. As Bhagya says, “Developing curricula-aligned STEM content in regional languages and building a large repository of teaching and learning resources with 15,000 rich-media videos and e-Books, not forgetting robust, low-cost technology delivery models in off-line environments, has helped us scale our program.” But there are other benefits too. She continues: “The data analytics gives us real-time data on usage, thus bringing better insights about the intervention.”

The “devotion”, as Bhagya terms it, to contribute towards better educational opportunities had far-reaching benefits. Before long, CLT India had a number of teachers and subject experts signing up to work for the cause. Today, e-Patshale content is transforming several rural classrooms, with a noticeable shift in the manner in which teachers and students have access to resources at their fingertips. In fact, improving on this reach is one of the goals that the organization has set for itself. “We want to reach 20 million children to access CLT e-Patashale resources to learn better in the next three to five years,” says Bhagya.

Learning aside, the bigger picture for CLT India, undoubtedly, lies in ensuring the world that children inherit, is an inherently better one — especially for those in underprivileged sections of society. “Children miss out on life’s opportunities when they do not have learning opportunities in under-served communities,” says Bhagya, “Most parents of government school children do not have basic education; and the schools have severe shortage of schools. Our goal is to make sure that every child has a right to education and is connected to an ‘informed’ world, regardless of geographical challenges, gender and economics.”

Challenges, however, continue to exist and these largely centre on funding for quality education, especially when it comes to research and development. “We find that the research and development aspect of our work needs funding at a strategic and organizational level, rather than at the programmatic level,” says Bhagya. Despite the great work that organizations much like CLT India do, there is also much left to be desired from the outside world when it comes to children’s education. “It’s the collected efforts of many interest groups, including the government, to ensure that every child has rights to education, healthcare and social welfare,” she adds.

For its unrelenting work in the field of education, CLT India has clocked some mind-boggling stats. So far, the organization has claimed to clock 64 million hours of teaching, and has reached out to a million students while doing so. In achieving all this, CLT India has also covered 9,000 grades. Through these success stories, the organization’s flagship e-Patshale programme continues to be its mainstay, especially for schools that lack basic infrastructure for teaching.

Today, a diverse, international team heads CLT India and by its own admission it isn’t just all work and no play. After all, there’s a child in each of us and that’s no different for CLT India too. Even as it continues its mission of education for all, especially the underprivileged, the priority is crystal clear. Bhagya herself couldn’t put it better. “Children are the backbones our society,” she says, “They are the future. Our aspirations for a better world can happen only when our children are nurtured in a safe world, with education, health and family welfare.”

Education is indeed a noble profession. But in educating the underprivileged through new-world low-cost techniques, CLT India has successfully carved a niche for itself as an educator par excellence, and an institution with a difference.

3. CWDR *Representing Marginalised Women*



Women’s position as leaders represents a mixed scene in India. Politically, their representation has been varied over the years, at all levels. However, what this encouraged is their emergence as leaders in all other spheres. With a multitude of programmes and schemes targeting their ability to lead at the micro level, women’s representation has transcended new heights. And wherever there was a skewed gender representation, new entrants broke the stereotypes and paved way for gender balance. The Centre for Women’s Development and Research (CWDR) in Chennai narrates how women’s leadership evolved in the civil society. “Only two percent of NGOs were women-headed way back in early 90s. This resulted in a big vacuum in representation of women’s issues in forums available then. CWDR was established in 1993 to fill this vacuum,” says Ms Renuka Balakrishnan, Founder Trustee and Executive Director of CWDR.

Deeply concerned about the disconnect between the kind of work men-headed organisations did for women and what women actually needed, Renuka felt that a human rights based organisation exclusively focussing on women issues was the need of the hour to lay the foundations of a gender just society. According to her,

women's rights cannot be established in the absence of a women's movement. However, with lesser women active in public space, there weren't many role models for her to look up to. "Nor did I have family support. But I believed in my perspective. I wanted CWDR to make way for women's leadership in fighting for women's concerns," she adds.

CWDR started by training different NGOs and organisations on women human rights. In line with the belief that sensitisation was the first step to change, Renuka and team organised many training programmes but were soon disappointed to see that these trainings had no impact – not in redefining the vision of organisations nor in their efforts to reach out to women in their project areas. As this became more apparent, CWDR decided to engage with women directly through their projects. That was a time when Renuka herself was not aware of terms like domestic violence and harassment. "Out there, when we decided to explore women's issues, every day was as enlightening as the previous one. Some issues which we believed were cultural part of our lives, were actually social concerns rooted in patriarchy. Domestic violence is one such instance which emerged to be a grave concern in the five slums we chose to work in," introspects Renuka.

Soon the news about CWDR's work in counselling and facility arrangement for women affected by domestic violence spread and women from other slums began to approach Renuka's team. She believes that encouraging women to approach authorities and seek solution to their predicament was instrumental in triggering a wave of change that led to women come out and speak their stories. CWDR now had the responsibility of leading women from 20 slums. Their strategy was to form women's groups and empower them to act against cases of domestic violence in their respective slum. As women's voices began to come out, there was an increased incidence of violence, which further encouraged women to speak against the menace.

Now, the women were grouped into committees without men's knowledge and this committee began to act whenever there was an

incidence of domestic violence. “An elderly woman came out and cried aloud, inviting other women to question the incidence. We only needed a trigger to initiate action and this had to be invisible. If the idea of a committee was known, am sure community would have tried to suppress with new means,” she recalls. With domestic violence being addressed at different levels, it was now time to think of productive means of engagement for women that does not drive them back to dependence on men. CWDR’s evaluation of their skill training project in 2003 helped them choose new inroads. Some of the key observations from this evaluation led them to refine their engagement with women from the community. Having seen that all their efforts disintegrated into activities but failed to evolve into a process, CWDR decided to analyse characteristics of its target group.

Beyond the fact that they were all women, they realised that they were dealing with marginalised, unorganised domestic workers, who were hardly covered under government surveys. With this realisation began the new phase of CWDR as an advocacy organisation. CWDR’s first fight was to get domestic workers included in the list of Unorganised Manual Labourers recognised by the Ministry of Labour, Government of India. The achievement was no less than a milestone for CWDR and the women it engaged with. Tasting the fruits of advocacy, Renuka and team pursued more specific goals that could redirect the lives of women work force in the country. Trade union for domestic workers, welfare schemes and minimum wages for domestic workers, decent representation of women work force, including domestic workers in mainstream cinema and other such demands were pursued at all levels for over a decade.

In 2005, CWDR celebrated the establishment of Manushi Unorganised Women Workers’ Trade Union, the first of its kind in India. In 2007, CWDR succeeded in forming a separate board for domestic workers under labour administration. “Every stage in advocacy was a milestone for us. Our only demand that stands unmet today is the idea of minimum wages for domestic workers. As the nature of work varies with every worker, estimating minimum

wage for domestic workers is very difficult and hence the obstacle. As an organisation that was built to work as a women's movement, CWDR moved on with all other concerns," adds Renuka. CWDR not only represented the women it worked with but evolved to be the face of every marginalised woman in the unorganised sector. It was one of the eleven organisations that came together to present a memorandum to the Indian Parliament in 2009, in response to the then Labour Minister's apathy towards domestic workers expressed at the ILO convention. Consequently, Government of India became a signatory to the International Labour Convention 189 on domestic workers in 2012. "We fought for the convention to be signed. Now, we insist on its effective implementation. For unorganised women, who are doubly discriminated, nothing comes easy," she remarks.

While the years long advocacy efforts go on, CWDR actively manages four other sister groups looking at the concerns of specific groups of women.

1. Maitri —an association for single women that follows a similar advocacy model. However, no significant policy level changes have been achieved yet.
2. Snehidi, established in 2003, focuses on creating awareness on sexual reproductive health among adolescent girls. Snehidi has 12 recreational centres for girls who have dropped out of school after puberty. Since the programme resulted in all girls attending school regularly, these centres were closed in 2007.
3. Thalir was initiated in 2007 to work with girls below ten years of age and were vulnerable to incidences of child sexual abuse. Many awareness programmes have been conducted in schools and communities to enlighten the girls about good and bad touch.
4. Nanban was established in 2014 to reiterate the role of men in empowering women. Many sensitisation programmes were organised and the response shocked Renuka and team.

“We saw men telling us that they didn’t know women had an organ called the uterus. Some did not know that rape resulted in unwanted pregnancies. From such levels of ignorance, we had to help women with household work, stop men from causing physical harm to women. Every time women shared the changes they noticed in their families, we at CWDR realise that sensitisation is a multi-layered phenomenon, that might require different approaches at each level. And with each such learning, we continue to move forward towards a gender just society,” smiles Renuka.

—*Shanmuga Priya.T*

4. FREEDOM FOR YOU FOUNDATION

Freedom In-Step With Progress



“An individual can do well in any sphere of life, if only he/she is given the freedom of choice to do what they desire in life,” says Dr. Ravi S. Kumar, CEO and Managing Trustee of ‘Freedom For You Foundation’, based in Navi Mumbai. It is with this belief in basic human dignity, inclusivity and holistic, sustainable personal/ societal development that the organization was first established, in 2004-2005. Dr. Ravi S Kumar says, “During my 35 years of working in social welfare sector, I have seen well-funded welfare organizations being inconsistent with the delivery of their services, switching their focus from one program to another, chiefly because their leadership was constantly changing.” This, he believes, led to many communities still remaining poor, disease-prone and unprotected from disasters even after being visited by one or more of these organizations. In order to ensure consistent support to the communities served, a group of like-minded people began pooling in their resources and started offering medical diagnostic camps at urban slums in Mumbai and its suburbs. In 2010 this was formally registered under the Bombay Public Trust Act, in the name of Freedom For You Foundation. Since then, they have been supported by MNCs and social impact agencies alike.

Freedom For You Foundation works at three levels: the personal level, helping underprivileged and distressed individuals find help and resources to pull themselves off their current predicaments, the community level, providing welfare facilities such as health-check ups and skill-building programs, and at a “Big Picture” level, working on environment conservation, disaster preparedness and sustainable development. Their interventions are largely designed around AET or “Awareness, Education and Training”. “Freedom4U creates awareness programs, Educates and imparts necessary training to the target beneficiaries in the focus areas of Health & Wellness, Safety and Security, School and College education, Disaster Preparedness, Relief and Rehabilitation, by conducting capacity building and skill development programs,” says Dr. Ravi.

Bal Niketan Vidyalay is a playschool in Rabale Slums in Navi Mumbai that offers early education programs to children aged 2-5 years. These being children of rag-pickers and daily wage labourers, the play schools help take care of the children while their parents are away at work. “Children need to enjoy childhood by playing in groups, learning language, math and numerical skills, intuitive skills, etc. There should be a balanced mix of ‘play and learn’ activities in the early childhood education to develop their physical and mental faculties for holistic development.” Says Dr. Ravi. Through the SHEP project (School Health, Hygiene Project), Freedom For You Foundation provides basic educational infrastructure (drinking water, toilets, Science labs, Computer Labs, lighting/fans, play equipment, library etc. in the Zilla Parishad schools and other private schools in impoverished rural and urban areas.

The Women Empowerment Program includes health and wellness check-ups, skill-development program, microfinance and rights-based education. The highlight of this program is the proposed establishment of the Human Milk Bank, expected to open this year. It will help save lives of newborns, especially under-weight/preterm babies by procuring mother’s milk from the bank.

The Freedom Kala Vikas Kendra are skill-development centres located in several locations in Navi Mumbai as well as in rural Maharashtra. Currently tailoring and bag-making is being taught to women in these areas as an alternative livelihood option.

“More than 200,000 people die every year of sudden cardiac arrest only in MMR region (Mumbai, Thane and Raigad regions),” quotes the Freedom For You Foundation website, adding that “First-Aid in ‘Golden Minutes’ of an accident is almost absent due to untrained bystanders, as they are unable or unwilling to help the casualty.” The organization creates awareness on the importance of first-aid and encourages people to initiate immediate assistance if they encounter a person in need of it, out on the streets.

Freedom For You Foundation makes “Disaster Preparedness Education” a priority. They conduct capacity building training for disaster preparedness, first responder training, orientation in disaster relief and rehabilitation measures, and effective communication & coordination with various agencies at the disaster sites. They currently have an ongoing relief and rehabilitation team working in Kerala after the recent floods. Previously, teams had been sent to assist survivors of earthquakes in Nepal and Bihar, in April and May 2015 respectively, as also to help with the December 2015 Chennai floods.

In health-services, they have recently piloted a mobile medical van in the streets of Navi Mumbai, as recently as this month. They hope to expand the number of such mobile clinics in the months to come. They offer menstruation and reproductive health awareness programs, along with distribution of sanitary napkins. Their “Restore Dignity” camps raise funds for providing custom prosthetic limbs for persons with disabilities.

Freedom For You Foundation’s environmental conservation includes working on social forestry; large scale planned tree-plantation, watershed programs, rainwater harvesting, building

aquifers, wells, check-dams and other type of simple dams to store water in valleys and ravines. On the energy front, they promote solar and wind energy, and are currently in talks with the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) for simple energy solutions for rural students.

The CSR activities of this foundation include sharing of know-how through their bespoke CSR solutions program. Freedom For You Foundation provides consultancy/advisory services on the design and implementation of CSR projects for various corporate organizations. They work on employee engagement programs, safety and emergency response training and disaster preparedness. One of the guiding principles of Freedom For You Foundation is that, “Modern society MUST recognize the existential value of all beings in creation. Modern economy thrives at the bottom of the pyramid. A strong and empowered base can make super-powers of nations”

“The foundation serves as a one-stop shop for Corporates and grassroots NGOs alike for assistance with implementing specific projects in pointed geographical regions in fulfilment of their larger sustainable development goals. Indeed the footprint of the Freedom For You Foundation expands from Navi Mumbai, to several districts of rural Maharashtra, Goa and Karnataka even,” says Dr. Ravi.

–Archanaa Ramesh

5. GRASS ROOT FOUNDATION

Bridging gaps in teaching and learning



Education for all is a stupendous task in our country. In order to reach out to all children and ensure their fundamental right, multiple players have been encouraged to support the system of education delivery. Accessibility, affordability, equity and quality are the values that underlie every such effort. However, in this ecosystem of education planning, one must realise that layers of efforts are required to ensure that learning actually happens at all levels. There are various reports that enumerate the learning gaps that get accumulated from primary classes. Research also points to a disappointing skill acquisition in our graduates, questioning their employability in the world job market. While skill gap and employability have become the parameters of discussion on the quality of education offered today, Grass Root Foundation, an NGO based in Chennai digs deeper into that one aspect of education delivery that can start the chain of impact at all levels - learning, to be more precise learning to learn.

Mr Emmanuel Herur, Founder Trustee of Grass Root Foundation is basically a textile technologist who has held various positions in his forty years of experience. During his days with the manufacturing companies, he realised that the graduates trainees hired were not able to perform the tasks expected of them. In an effort to learn the

cause and ways of addressing the same, he decided to experiment with locally available labour. “Two things I observed. Rural youth are definitely talented but needed a platform to learn and perform. Efforts must be channelized in training them effectively. Secondly, the ability to apply subject knowledge to different cases was poor in most of the new graduate recruits I had come across. They were not able to apply the same principle to two different scenarios. Everything had to be taught to fresh graduates. Their communication skills were also poor. Over time I learnt that this was not the case with one or two cohorts”, explains Emmanuel.

With experience, training young students for application orientation became his passion. In 2013, Emmanuel Co Founded Grass Root Foundation with other friends and looked at strategies that can have a positive influence on the learning levels of children. Grass Root Foundation started working with the families at Slum Clearance Board Houses in Purasawalkam. They trained women in financial literacy so that they could run small enterprises and participate in house hold decision making. However, after a year of intervention, they felt that this may not help reaching out to children. Dialogues with stakeholders and engagements with other organisations emphasised that the root cause of learning gaps was ineffective teaching and learning. “We looked at cohorts entering into teacher training institutions and realised that many of them were students who had passed with minimum marks. Having travelled extensively, I realised it was the same situation everywhere in our country. In 2015, we did a programme in basic communication skills for the students in a teacher training college. Base level evaluation revealed their language skills were very poor, however, end line evaluation of the programme showed improvement, but this is just the beginning. We have a long way to go”, he asserts.

Emmanuel laments that learning levels is neither a concern for students nor is it for the teachers nor of the parents. “Their ‘keep going on’ attitude disturbs me. It cannot be the basis of the knowledge capital we all dream of. Neither widely practiced rote learning can be”. In such a predicament, his team believed that improving the quality of teaching/learning from an early stage can

make a big difference. Unless children were habituated to learning by concepts and principles, application of knowledge cannot be developed. “Having said that, we must also acknowledge that this is a marathon job. There is no quick solution in this aspect of education”, says Emmanuel, adding that the idea of learning must be understood differently.

Grass Root Foundation adopted the model of concept learning and prepared modules for class six to eight. The team decided to work with schools as this promised consistent attendance, unlike in the communities, where children were distracted easily. Teachers are trained by Grass Root Foundation to teach concepts through stories and activities, after which, children are equipped to answer the fundamental 5W-1H questions. These learning’s are discussed in a group and one representative presents their learning /comes forward to present their answers. The entire session is planned to allow a fourfold learning process that addresses reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. As Grass Root Foundation was strategizing the implementation of its model, it also got an opportunity to implement the STEM (Science-Technology-Engineering-Mathematics) programme of an international NGO for 8th class students in five schools across Chennai. Criteria for school selection was -“All these were Government aided girls’ higher secondary schools that catered to poor strata of society ,at least one section is of English medium instruction and had no smart class. With the school managements also eager to improve children’s performance in Science and Maths, one cohort with strength of twenty girls was chosen from each of the five schools. After the 2yearslong programme for 8th class, there was no follow up for 9th class by the international NGO or plan to continue the programme to see the impact-percentage of students who were in the programme would choose science group in 11th class. Grass Root Foundation decided to step-in in this space left by the international NGO’s STEM programme”, adds Emmanuel.

Their intervention started as an after school programme in Bentinck Higher Secondary School for Girls at Vepery, Chennai, teaching Science, English and Mathematics to twenty students of

class seven. Students were chosen after a preliminary assessment of parents' socioeconomical background, their interest in girls' education and their willingness to let them work in the industry after they complete their education, students own interest in their education and inputs from teachers regarding students attitude in the classroom / school. Base evaluation was used to assess their learning levels. They cleared class three portions, but not even one subject in class four. After one year of Grass Root Foundation intervention, the end line evaluation showed a better picture – the girls were now able to clear portions of class five, but not six. “So, the programme was making an impact. We had begun to bridge the gap in learning”, he smiles.

This year, Grass Root Foundation expanded its programme to classes six; seven and eight. In 2018-2019, class nine will also be covered. As the girls pass from each class, they go through the programme over a consistent period of four years. As the team plans to reach out to more schools in the next year, state government's circular to extend the day by one more period has come as a big blow to Grass Root Foundation. This circular came as a blessing in disguise, allowing the team to address quality of teaching. Having understood the gaps in teaching, Grass Root Foundation was in a better position to strategise its model to impact quality of teaching as well. The team has approached St. Christopher's College of Education to train and engage first year B.Ed students in teaching the target group.

It is a very complementary approach. By the time these graduates are ready to pass out, their communication skills will improve and they would have got practical hands-on experience in delivering concept based lessons to children. And Grass Root Foundation will have a pool of teachers ready to deliver its model to the school students. In line with its plans for expansion, Grass Root Foundation has formed a committee with school Headmistresses and Principals of teacher training institutions to work out a plan where in the after school programme can continue unaffected. “We are exploring the option of bringing in unemployed B.Ed graduates into the programme. They can undergo training in the morning

hours and go to teach in the schools in the afternoon. Our internal monitoring and continuous improvement systems will enable us to achieve the desired results”, says a confident Emmanuel.

-Shanmuga Priya.T

6. HEART BEAT FOUNDATION'S *Beyond Barriers and Boundaries*



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

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

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

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

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

While one artist relies on the dexterity of his two fingers alone, another makes do without the use of his arms altogether. K. Narasimhalu was brought into the care of the Andhra Mahila Sabha as an infant with cerebral palsy. He grew up learning to use his two feet instead, to do all the work that’s usually done using hands. He not only does his everyday activities such as eating, drinking, handling the phone, ironing clothes etc. with his feet, he creates beautiful paintings, embroidery works and greeting cards using various computer applications. A topper of his class in Class X and XII, Narasimhalu learnt each one of these crafts during his free time. He is an unstoppable force, as evident from the way he

speedily skates around, perched upon his wheeled plank that looks not very different from a skateboard. In a short documentary film about him, when asked what inspires him to do so many different things, Narasimhalu states in a matter-of-fact tone, “I’m very wary of wasting time. Every free minute I get is spent in learning a new craft or in creating new art. I do not need any specific inspiration. I just make good use of my time.”

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

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

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

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

Talking about future plans for the Foundation, Mr. Ramana says, “We are looking to set up a permanent art centre where art training and art therapy can happen. Through this centre, we hope to educate youth in disability-related issues and to conduct motivational

workshops for corporate staff based on the dreams, pursuits and works of our disabled artists. The artists' 'Never Say Die' spirit will hopefully inspire corporates to volunteer at our foundation. Along with all this, we are also going to float an online gallery and e-commerce portal to make it easier for interested buyers to access our artists' works. After all, our Trust has 80G certification and our donor receipts to buyers makes them eligible for tax rebates!"

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

—*Archanaa Ramesh*

7. MAHER *Haven of Hope*



Be it street children, mentally challenged, HIV infected, old men or women, irrespective of caste, creed or faith—Sister Lucy Kurien’s homes welcomes them all. Maher (meaning mother’s home) was founded in 1997 to provide assistance to children, men and undertakes community development programs in various villages near Vadhu Budruk in central western India. Maher has been granted ‘Consultative Status’ by the United Nations that allows it to participate in the work of the United Nations.

In rural India, women are facing rigid caste distinction, religious segregation, and poverty. Maher is a ray of hope for such women and offers a profound beacon of practical and inspiring solutions that are grounded in compassion and service.

“I witnessed a horrifying incident wherein a man burned alive his pregnant wife. This incident disturbed me and it was then I decided to start a home for the downtrodden, especially abused women and children,” says Sister Kurien, who belongs to the Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod.

Maher has 38 short-stay and long-stay homes in the Indian states of Maharashtra, Jharkhand, and Kerala and houses over 900 children, 85 men and over 350 destitute women. The children at Maher receive schooling, tutoring, nutrition, and meditation. More than 1000 Maher youth are enrolled in colleges and many have earned undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Talking about the most important concern in establishing an NGO, Sister Kurien says, “Our Indian society is still gripped by corruption scandals. At Maher, we ensure not to pay a bribe, and we never will!”

At one instance, when Maher refused to pay a bribe in order to obtain a permit, the local officials visited Maher’s home and pressurized them. “We showed them our premises. They liked our project but wanted a bribe to approve our permit. When the officials quoted a figure, I led them into our main hall where many women were busy producing crafts and cooking, and the children were busy in their study circles. I told them, “For that sum of money, I have to put out four women and six children back onto the street.” Astonished and incensed, the officials swiftly left the place. Later, within three weeks we got our permit,” says Sister Kurien.

Maher works on the philosophy of having faith in all religions and working for establishing harmony and peace around the world. They have conducted many peace camps in the United States of America, India, and Africa and does not receive any aid from Church or other religious institutions.

Maher’s board, staff, and residents belong to varied religions — Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam. Their community building programs include self-help groups, kindergarten schools, village libraries, street theatre performances and health and education initiatives.

Maher's focus is to empower, engage and elevate women to an amazing network that inspires and grows each other's efforts. The normal stay at Maher is 3 months, and the women are trained in vocational skills such as handicrafts and tailoring, enabling them to develop technical capacity, entrepreneurship, and business skills so that they can earn an income after they leave Maher.

In efforts to salvage the life of the destitute and underprivileged, Maher has facilitated many marriages. "Weddings at Maher are an institution and a continuing source of delight and joy for every Maherite. We are happy that weddings at Maher reached their 100th mark last month. I believe restoring the marital and the family bond is probably the last stage of rehabilitation and I am happy that Maher did it for 100 of its women," says Sister Kurien.

When talking about her observe in the philanthropy space, she added, "I would love to see many more people come forward and truly commit themselves to the vital work of building communities of healing and love. Not just in India but everywhere!"

In recognition of Sister Kurien's services, Pranab Mukherjee, the thirteenth Indian President awarded Sister Kurien with the Nari Shakti (women empowerment) award 2015 on the occasion of International Women's Day.

—*Mandira Srivastava*

8. MANONMANI TRUST *INCLUSIVE, INTEGRATED, INSPIRING*



Almost all homes for the elderly are merely what they claim to be — homes that house aged men and women, offering a life that has been laid out for them taking into consideration, their age. Seldom does one find experimental models where a home for the elderly goes beyond mere housing for a certain demographic, choosing instead to become an integrating force between the elderly and the youth. In a nutshell, that is exactly what Manonmani Trust does and has been doing in the last 12 years of its existence. In its relatively short time span, the Trust has also inspired many to realize that there is a great deal of potential that goes beyond being a mere shelter or a home for the elderly.

What began as an attempt at family counselling is today an institution that helps bring about self-sustainability for elders. In one sentence, that's pretty much the story of Manonmani Trust, established in 2006. Over the course of the last 12 years, the Trust has grown from strength to strength, catering to various strata of those in need — the elderly, families and children. “We began as a family counselling centre at the premises of one of our trustees, Saraswathi Varadarajan in Anna Nagar,” says Sudha Ramalingam, Managing Trustee, Manonmani Trust. “It was only after we moved to Perungalathur in 2007 when we started running a home for the

needy.” The project in question is the Anbagam Project (translated to mean: home of love), which is perhaps Manonmani’s greatest success story till date. Manonmani Trust runs Anbagam as an experiment towards making elders self-sufficient and cognizant of their self-worth. The shelter houses 20 - 25 men and women on an average, extending admission on a short-term basis to women and children who are victims of domestic violence. The Trustees initially struggled with finding premises to house an old-age home. They could not get any premises for rent since owners were prejudiced against shelter homes and also fearful that market value of their property would depreciate if an older person died on their property. They set up Anbagam in Perungulathur and were overwhelmed by the support of its neighbours. Manonmani Trust resolved that in addition to helping its residents, Anbagam will also give back to the neighbourhood and be an important resource to the community. “We ran a tuition centre for the underprivileged children in the neighbourhood and conducted free summer camps in the local schools in Perungulathur,” says Sudha.

While Manomani Trust may have only been around for a mere 12 years, its experimental with its model has made heads turn. An integral part of its experiment lies in encouraging interaction and engagement between elders and the youth, to revive traditions, culture and values between the two demographics. When aged persons are constrained to move out of their families and enter an institution or old-age home, they suffer severe mental and emotional distress and trauma. They feel stripped of their self-worth and dignity. Manonmani Trust’s experimental model has volunteers interacting with aged inmates, thereby helping their lives get a tad better while benefiting from what Manonmani Trust calls “wisdom of the aged”. Through sustained interactions with the youth, and engaging in socially productive activities, the aged residents gain self-confidence and regain self-esteem. Through family counselling, Manonmani Trust has also been able to help reconcile elderly persons with their families. The focus was clear: do not institutionalize the needy, but support them and integrate them through counselling.

In 2016, the Trust oversaw the construction of a new building, which saw Anbagam shift base. “We built a new building in the Thirukandalam and moved Anbagam to this facility on October 2, 2016. We continued housing senior citizens in these premises, alongside victims of domestic violence,” says Sudha. Thirukandalam is a lush, green village in Thiruvallur district in the outskirts of Chennai city - about 35 kilometres from Koyambedu. The building was made possible due to the generous contribution of individual and corporate sponsors and friends of Manonmani Trust.

Often, social organizations forget their responsibilities towards their neighbours and are unable to integrate themselves into the community. Manonmani Trust is cognizant of its footprint in the neighbourhood and has been devoting its time and energy to integrated community development. It has been conducting a demographic survey, with the assistance of trained social workers, to understand in a bottom-up manner, the needs of the village. Preliminary results showed that a significant number of middle-school and high-school students of the village drop out of school. To encourage such students to continue in school and inspire them, the Trust has been inviting college students and young professionals to the village to conduct talks and interactions with the youth. The Trust also has started a free tuition centre that around 40 students attend every day after school. In addition to a trained teacher, residents of Anbagam also volunteer at the tuition centre to help students in their academic endeavours.

Through all these exercises, especially the emphasis on integration, Manonmani Trust has made its focus clear: inclusivity. As Sudha says, “the main focus of Manonmani Trust is to ensure that the old and young interact together and care for each other and share their ideals and values.” This is again indicative of the trust’s conscious attempts to move beyond the usual and be different in its initiative.

Sudha sums it up quite aptly by saying: “Our goal is to ensure that there is a community living made possible for the inmates of Anbagam with the local villagers, share and care for each other,

create a model village atmosphere with primary relationship built in between the neighbourhood residents.” In striving towards that target, Manonmani will continue to do what it does best: create inclusive living spaces where various demographics of the under-privileged can be housed as part of one system. In the success of this model, also lies the possible testament that homes for the elderly or the under-privileged can certainly venture out to go beyond their basic purpose, and turn into communities of inclusive, integrated and holistic living.

In addition to Anbagam, Manonmani Trust conducts human rights training programmes for government school children across various districts in the State and conducts capacity building programmes for NGOs. The Trust provides uniforms and infrastructure support to Panchayat schools and continues to run family counselling centres at Thirukandalam, Red Hills and Perambur.

Donations to the Manonmani Trust are exempt from tax under Section 80G of the Income Tax Act. Manonmani Trust is also registered under the FCRA and is thus also allowed to receive foreign contributions. For more information, please visit: <http://manonmanitrust.org/>

—*JS*

9. SADHANA *Democratising Education*



Education is relevant as long as it allows children to learn age appropriate skills to grow as an independent adult. Learning levels determined by a syllabus that takes no effort in reinforcing local identities does more harm than good, believes Mr Chikku Murali Mohan, Director of Sadhana organisation in Hyderabad.

The story of Sadhana dates back to 1989 when Murali and his activist friends engaged in rehabilitating child labourers. The educationists in the team also enunciated the need for a creative approach that can build a symbiotic relationship between the processes of teaching and learning. This, they believed, was essential to retain children's interest in education and also equip them with knowledge/skills, bringing them on par with their peers in formal schools.

Given the history of child labour and bonded labour in Andhra Pradesh, Murali and team believed that their next task was to make child education a community's priority. In order to promote this vision in the community, they realised that it was important to make education locally relevant and suitable. "Our task was three fold. We had to introduce approaches that allowed children to continue their education in non-formal settings. We had to sensitise communities towards enabling children to learn through their life

worlds. To enable these objectives, we had to develop learning modules that suited local lives and train stakeholders who were responsible to take them to children. This is easily said than done,” admits Murali.

With the experience, Murali and team became more articulate about gaps in the education system. They felt that democratisation of education was the need of the hour and that, efforts to make syllabus relevant and appealing to indigenous population was an inevitable step in this direction. “A predefined curriculum must not be the pretext to ignore knowledge built by local cultures even before a child enters school. Prior knowledge must be built upon before new concepts are introduced to the children,” adds Murali. Thus, Sadhana was established in 1992 to carry this mission forward.

Sadhana’s first initiative was to train activists and educationists who were working with drop outs, out of school children and child labourers in Andhra Pradesh. With a clear stakeholder map, the team embarked on the task of encouraging a culture of critical thinking amongst rural and tribal communities in the state. After the success of their primer on child labour and the community’s response towards child friendly programmes, Sadhana soon introduced bilingual subject and language primers in two tribal dialects.

While encouraging the use of this learning material, Murali and team also felt the need for grassroot level volunteers who could strengthen the communities’ capacities to prioritise child rights. These Social Education Activists (SEAs) not only helped realise Sadhana’s objectives but also complemented the responsibilities of other networks and government agencies in protection of child rights. “We were trying to focus at the micro level so that further change and strategy could build from there. Synchronisation has to start from the bottom and that is something our education system needs to notice. As programmes began to be implemented on a regular basis, we saw an incredible change in communities’ attitudes towards child rights. It became our strength and helped us plan our next steps,” says Murali.

While the above efforts empowered children as learners, Balala Sanghams were formed in schools in the project area (Medak district) to empower children as equal stakeholders in protection of child rights. These clubs gave a platform for children to discuss issues in school and community pertaining to their rights and welfare. They also articulated issues in school and sought possible remedies. Their participation in these Sanghams and mandal/regional level consultations begets a remarkable development in the process of democratising education. With this culture of child participation and community involvement taking main stage, Sadhana decided to strengthen their resolve by establishing two child friendly resource centres in Hathnoora and Manur mandals of Medak district. Introducing a wide range of electronic, non-electronic literature, magazines and also a television set to watch news, these centres act as nodal information centres for adults and children from about twenty villages. “We have sensitised our stakeholders. We elicited their participation. Common goals have been established. Unless we all are updated about current developments, we would not be able to recognise the strength and relevance of our stand. It is a process of evolution that enables critical thinking. With the increasing number of users (85 children and adults per day) and the ensuing discussions at these centres, we are sure this was a timely move,” he smiles.

Sadhana has also opened mobile bridge schools for children migrating from the project area to Bidar district in Karnataka. This ensured that children never lost their continuity in education. Interventions also addressed the issue of employment of girl children in cotton seed farms in 99 villages of Kurnool district. 11 month non-residential bridge course programme was initiated for the rescued girls who were either drop outs or had never attended school. It must be noted that this bridge course also had an inherent monitoring system where every child’s profile was generated and tracked for assessing their development, even after they were enrolled in government schools. This monitoring system that began at the project level soon grew into a Community Education Monitoring Information System in Hathnoora and Sangareddy

mandals. Engaging a wide range of stakeholders, village level monitoring groups were formed to track the progress of every child in the community. Sadhana's volunteers, the SEAs and the Gram Panchayat office uses these records to supervise the quality of education and learning levels of children. More than 150,000 school going children are being tracked through this system.

Sadhana also has to its credit other slew of interventions like child friendly villages and remedial coaching centres in Kannada and tribal medium schools in Narayankhed constituency. Recently, a 32-member multi-stakeholder District Core Group has been formed to facilitate exchange of best practices in education. Covering about 150 schools in the district, the team has come up with school level development plans to improve the learning experience of children. An eminent member in various national, state and regional level networks on child rights, Sadhana remains a key resource centre for government and non-government functionaries.

Condemning the focus on skill development over mainstream courses for indigenous populations, Murali has consistently advocated for the Common Schooling System. Sadhana's interventions have time and again demonstrated the impact of teaching rights over values. "It is a long, tedious process. Sadhana's efforts are just a beginning. The mission is definitely on and I am sure children will play a significant role in this transformation," asserts Murali.

—*Shanmuga Priya.T*

10. SRUJNA CHARITABLE TRUST

Sheroes of Change



Riding the tides of change is never easy, but doing so in the midst of concrete financial pressures as well as intangible societal pressures would require superhuman strength. That is what the Sheroes of this story are undertaking, on an everyday basis. Enabling them, encouraging them and giving them the confidence to move on and create a new life for themselves, is Srujna Trust, an NGO that helps transform helpless young women into self-reliant, confident and financially secure individuals.

Srujna Charitable Trust was started in the year 2011, in Mumbai, by Vaishali Shah and Jyotika Bhatia, two dynamic young women, hailing from diverse professional backgrounds, united by a singular cause. As a student of vocational education working with rescued victims of human trafficking, Jyotika Bhatia realized that shelter homes did not have the wherewithal to provide these individuals with any sustainable livelihood solutions. She together with Vaishali Shah, piloted a jewelry making program with 30 rescued victims and helped sell the products through various channels. Encouraged by the success of this endeavor, they conceived Srujna as a

livelihood development organization that not only focused on skill training, but also in providing marketing platforms and networking opportunities for women from underprivileged backgrounds. Today Srujna is spread across India in all the major metro cities such as Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Chennai, and Ahmedabad, impacting lives of over 6,000 women.

When asked how Srujna identifies its beneficiaries, Jyotika says, “Srujna partners with grassroot organizations such as self-help groups, artisan groups and NGOs working with women in need. The partner organizations are more than willing to work towards identifying women whose economic, educational and social situations are particularly dire and select them for Srujna’s training programs. A rigorous screening procedure follows and eligible women are selected.” Apart from victims of trafficking and/or abuse, Srujna also identifies women with disabilities and those whose families have, for one reason or another lost their only means of income.

Srujna undertakes three major interventions:

Udyog- providing market linkages in the form of stalls at exhibitions, custom work orders, job opportunities etc. for those beneficiaries who can use them

Kala- skill training in tailoring, paper products and jewellery making to rescued victims of human trafficking residing in shelter homes

Aajivika- capacity building workshops on such topics as upskilling, quality management, inventory management, English speaking and digital literacy

Srujna has so far trained over 800 women in professional skills and has organized over 425 NGO Melas across India. It has provided market linkages to over 6000 women across the country, generating jobs worth INR 1.6 million.

“The major challenge in all this is to get continuous work for these women so that they can earn an income” says Jyotika, adding that, “we are constantly attempting to bring various stakeholders to keep up a regular source of income for our beneficiaries”

As if the efforts of training and market familiarization weren't complex enough, the challenges that pertain to chauvinistic mindsets prevalent within families are also very much a part of Srujna's everyday work in the communities too. Says Jyotika, “The perception that, even if they are ‘allowed’ to work, women are supposed to carry the entire weight of household responsibilities as well, can be particularly challenging to deal with. As their responsibilities double, it becomes difficult for the women to keep up with the training schedules”

However, according to Jyotika, the process of transformation also tends to be the most intense within the families. Once the revenue starts coming in steadily, husbands also change for the better, giving a hand in the household chores and in family duties. There are instances of families going from complete resistance in the initial days, to, later on offering complete support.

A classic example is the story of Laxmi Vishwakarma. Shortly after getting married, Laxmi and her husband had to leave her in-laws house and were left to fend for themselves on the streets. She resolved to earn for her family. She joined a local artisan group in her community which Srujna was supporting in terms of providing market contacts. Over a period of time she got promoted as the quality control supervisor of her group and has since been the sole bread winner for her family. She earns a regular income of INR 8000-10000/- per month and is putting her children through school. A short documentary on Laxmi is put up on Srujna's website, where she says emphatically, “Even though our family was broke, I was able to create a living for myself and my family.”

A lot of Srujna's beneficiaries not only become highly skilled, self-sufficient workers, but soon they engage in knowledge transfer and in facilitating this transition among even more women who have been through similar situations. Lalita Jadhav, another of Srujna's "Sheroes", took it upon herself to travel more than five hours everyday to a shelter home in Mumbai, where she trains women who have been rescued from trafficking. Kiran Badhe, a self-help group founder who got in touch with Srujna more than 6 years ago, is the sole earning parent in her family. She not only managed to put her daughters through engineering colleges, but also is on a mission to empower thousands of women in the areas of Vasai, Nalasopara and Virar areas in Mumbai. She has trained over 2000 women in her communities and has facilitated income-generation for over 500 women. She has her own NGO these days.

When asked about society's role in equalizing gender disparities, Jyotika ponders, "Today, India ranks rather poorly in several gender based indices, especially in the economic participation of women. As a developing nation, we ought to encourage women participation in economic activities. We as a society need to accept that the role of women extends beyond that of mother, wife and daughter."

What is your aspiration for Srujna's future, we ask. "We want to be India's largest platform for facilitating work for women in need," says Jyotika. Their contributions so far suggest that they may be well on their way to being just that.

– Archanaa Ramesh

11. TOOLBOX INDIA *Handyman for Social Enterprises*



Oftentimes the non-profit sector, especially in India, functions without one or more of the fundamental infrastructures required for any organization to run efficiently and durably. It is all too common for an NGO to start its operations out of someone's backyard, with little to no material or personnel resources to begin with. The founder's will to fight for their cause is what keeps its momentum going, gathering these resources along the way. Funding remains a visibly important factor in the ability of an organization to continue its activities for a prolonged period of time. However, does money alone guarantee an NGO/NPO's success? Arguably, it doesn't. There are very many grassroots organizations that prevail the test of time even with a paltry budget, compared to large multi-national NGOs that go under, despite finding patronage from some of the wealthiest philanthropists. Clearly the reasons for the endurance of an organization are many, not the least of which is the skillful management of the organization itself. Today we get an insight into the work of a non-profit company who have made it their business to help NGOs manage themselves better.

ToolBox India brings private sector skills to non-profit organizations, aiding in change management, with strategic management and operations expertise. We got in touch with CEO Vijaya Bhaskar, who explains that non-profits can see their impact ‘amplified’, if they were to leverage the skill of volunteers who have the expertise and substantial experience in the working of various departments of private sector enterprises. How did this idea come to be, we ask. Says Vijaya, “In 2002, a group of friends who had just returned to Belgium after studying or working abroad, notably in the UK and the US, got together to discuss the idea of providing management support to non-profits by sharing know-how and skills. Preliminary research into the acceptance or understanding of these different notions in Belgium quickly evolved into the founding of ToolBox in Belgium. With preliminary success in working with NGOs in the city of Charleroi, the founders were able to get large-scale funding and support from the King Bedouin Foundation and the Bernheim Foundation to further develop the initial concept and gradually establish a methodology for wider distribution. In 2009, ToolBox India was founded by Charles-Antoine Janssen, Managing Director, KOIS Invest and Sandeep Naik, Managing Director – Asia Pacific, General Atlantic Partners.”

“ToolBox India was formed with a vision to help non-profit organisations do significantly more ‘good’ with the same resources by improving their management expertise,” says Vijaya, “Our goal is to partner with non-profit organizations (NPOs) to integrate management and communication techniques of the private sector to improve their positioning and to ensure their sustainability.” When asked about their methodology of working, Vijaya explains, “The collaboration with an NPO begins after a thorough analysis of their management and internal organization structures, and an identification of the different work streams that need to be addressed. The range of services provided include: strategy, finance, human resources, communication & marketing, IT and legal advice, typically rendered through skilled volunteers.”

“Since its inception, Toolbox India has deployed over 300 Volunteers, who have helped more than 75 NGOs, spanning

the sectors of Education, Women’s Empowerment, Livelihood, Community Health, and Sustainable Community, by executing over 200 projects. Their varied backgrounds is what essentially allows Toolbox India to provide a diverse service offering,” says Vijaya. The ToolBox India website lays out the framework within which a collaboration usually takes place. The partnership with NPOs lasts for 2-3 years, meaning that ToolBox India takes on an equal sense of ownership in increasing the efficiency of their partner organization as well as in bridging the skills gaps wherever necessary. Toolbox India also tracks its NPO partners post project-completion to understand how the solution is being used and how it has been able to support the organization, thus monitoring the efficacy of their own work.

What are some of the challenges facing ToolBox India? “Skilled volunteering is not easy to come by,” says Vijaya, “for people to commit time over a specified period requires persistence and not just passion. The project management at Toolbox India is very rigorous which has been one of the factors that has led to the growth of the program.” She adds, “NPOs sometimes want a solution to a specific issue only and may not necessarily be interested in engaging beyond that. While Toolbox India would like to build a longer partnership, sometimes there can be a push back. We have realized that as long as we are fulfilling our mission of supporting the NPOs, we must allow for time to build the trust and then engage some more”. While fund-raising remains a constant challenge for many of the NPOs seeking out ToolBox India’s help, human resources, networking and leadership are some of the commonly addressed pain-points as well. Further through their impact assessment study, ToolBox India have developed newer interventions to take their services to the next level. “We learn that our partner organisations have a clear direction towards the fulfillment and achievement of their envisioned goals and milestones, when we have addressed some of the issues faced by them and have helped in bridging efficiencies through customizing solutions for them,” says Vijaya, adding that, “We try to minimize the time spent on “non-programs”, redirecting those hours and efforts into programs in alignment with their goals.”

ToolBox India boasts of a diverse list of high ranking corporate gurus on its advisory board. When asked what attracts such an eclectic group of people here, Vijaya says, “the social impact sector in India is going through one of the most exciting times with innovation, new systems and bringing in a lot of professionals who are crossing over from for-profit companies. As for the team, a lot of us came in after our respective stints in the corporate sector and found Toolbox India to be the perfect junction where our own passion for this work and some of the skills that we had picked up, met.” She adds humbly, “mostly it was the sheer inspiring work that was been done by so many charismatic committed people in the development sector that this turned out to be not a career-shift but a calling of sorts (for us).”

– *Archanaa Ramesh*

IV. Positive Energy

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

She can be contacted at bhuvaneshwari@teamthink.co.in for arranging Positive Energy training and Coaching sessions.

1. CLEARING THE PATH FOR YOUR BEST SELF

“The Clearing is an opening for action which has been previously unavailable -Lori Dorley.”



As we live life, we have learnt to accumulate. Equally important is the process of clearing. Clearing not only of tangible things, but also of the subtle—thoughts and emotions. The Clearing Process supports identification of closely held beliefs, emotions, and attitudes that often stand in the way of achieving desired results. It uncovers the hidden assumptions and conditioning that have influenced perspective, decisions, and relationships. The way to start clearing is to express vulnerably. It is in listening to the inner voice that restrains and calling it out. Are you willing?

Do not try to save the whole world or do anything grandiose. Instead, create a clearing in the dense forest of your life and wait there patiently, until the song that is your life falls into your own cupped hands and you recognize and greet it. Only then will you know how to give yourself to this world so worthy of rescue. — Martha Postlew

2. EXPECT OR ACCEPT OR BOTH?



“Today expect something good to happen to you no matter what occurred yesterday. Realize the past no longer holds you captive. It can only continue to hurt you if you hold on to it. Let the past go. A simply abundant world awaits.” –Sarah Breathnach, Simple Abundance: A Daybook of Comfort and Joy

Expect and Accept have a similar ring and yet are so different in their consequence in human life when not experienced together.

To me, expecting is creating a possibility, a future, tying my hope to a future happening. Accept means to receive what is there, the current, a happening in the present.

Often expecting without acceptance leads to frustration, as one starts to idolize the future because the current is unwanted. The gap makes expecting more compulsive. Though the capacity to expect keeps us moving forward, without exercising the capacity to accept, expecting becomes detrimental. It’s like trying to fit a square peg in a round hole.

The quality of expecting can be far more empowering and value

adding when it emerges from a creative spirit. This creative spirit is a blessing given by living in the clearing that acceptance gives.

We know when we expect, without acceptance we unknowingly create a “should” in our language, both when we speak and when we think. “Should” is limiting and pulls down the value of expecting. It conveys finality, whereas life is uncertain.

The “should” cements us to the expectation, giving little room for flexibility.

When we want to harvest the benefits of expecting, can we make “should into would?” Acceptance offers “would” to our language. Would you wake up early?; would you consider helping me? Versus you should be waking early; you should help me. Would as a word nourishes the expectation with the seed of willingness.

Acceptance creates acknowledgment. From here, expectations create positive shifts.

3. IF FINDING WEAKNESS IS YOUR GREATEST STRENGTH

“Imperfections are not inadequacies; they are reminders that we’re all in this together.”- Brene Brown



In a world that rewards perfection, leaders are tuned to finding weaknesses. Not only leaders, but parents, friends, family..... all share what is not working. If the words you are using often are “you should be better at..., you are wrong, you made a mistake and so on,” then there is need to pause. All this is necessary, however, dwelling in it all the time will only make the past stronger and future weaker.

One can say instead

How about... ? Have the courage to offer something better, rather than simply pointing out inadequacy.

You’re great at How can you bring your strengths to this challenge?

How might we make this better?

On the same lines, embrace imperfection

Develop imperfect solutions. 80% is good enough for most things.

Launch early.

Iterate: Test often. Adapt as you move forward.

In a world where it is very difficult to satisfy, would you like to spread positive energy by Noticing three strengths for every weakness you point out.

Say what you see when you see progress. Not always waiting for the end result or outcome to give your opinion.

Giving yourself permission to know that sometimes we must accept things as they are. Yes, strive for better.

“There’s a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.” ~ Leonard Cohen

It’s those imperfections that help navigate our journey, pushing us forward in new directions. Once you let go of perfection and embrace the imperfections, your heart will feel lighter. You’ll find being your most genuine self and living in an honest, realistic way will energize you from your core.

4. LISTENING GENEROUSLY



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

A service of generous listening which has no motive other than of being of service, giving a gift of one’s presence, is truly a generosity that every person in the world is aching and longing for. I can experience deep connection when I “just” listen; when i sit with others in their truth. To listen without even a need to understand is truly a gift to both the person telling the story and the person hearing it. Listening to understand is important, but there are some things that are beyond our understanding.

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

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

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

I am generously committed to listening generously!

5. LIVING IN AUTOPILOT



“Very often, human beings are living like on autopilot, reacting automatically with what happens. What interests me about the life of an explorer is you are in the unknown; you are out of your habits.” Bertrand Piccard

“Very often, human beings are living like on autopilot, reacting automatically with what happens. What interests me about the life of an explorer is you are in the unknown; you are out of your habits.” Bertrand Piccard

Autopilot makes it harder for us to make instinctively conscious choices. While living in autopilot, we just “go through the motions” of the day. Our need to accomplish, to be seen important, being safe, keep us in autopilot. Often reacting to external triggers, circumstances largely direct the way we live our life.

Living in autopilot is a kind of continuous partial attention and following set lines of thinking. We have very full schedules and ever-increasing responsibilities and we are surrounded with information and constant distractions. When we choose to live consciously, we can be present to the possibilities in the now. Staying in the now creates a chance to pay full attention which is more efficient and it

is much more respectful to ourselves and to those around us.

Our memories, past experiences, both successes and failures, switches on the “unconscious or autopilot”. We are driven by things that we are not aware of. When we are in crisis, autopilot is a way to survive the situation. However, trying to survive even when there is no crisis by being on auto pilot creates an energy deficit for us.

Therefore, making the unconscious conscious is a step towards empowering yourself.

What can you do?

Say no to distractions like checking your phone, responding to an email. Stay present and avoid the temptation to get pulled in multiple directions by many distractions.

Build in time for self-reflection. Instead of back-to-back appointments, set time for reflection and some “white space” after interactions. Build in, for example, just five to ten minutes after calls or meetings.

Practice affirming rituals. Identifying two or three things that will make today a success. This keeps the big picture alive and helps you steer away from the “small stuff” that don’t matter..

Challenge yourself. Set a goal of doing something that is exciting, motivating, and stretches you on something that you are aware becomes an interference in living consciously. For e.g.: practicing patience, fearlessness and so on

It takes awareness, it takes work and it takes determination—attuning your attention is a choice that will prepare you to seize the moment when opportunity presents itself!

6. LOOKING INTO THE UNCONSCIOUS



“When you were a monkey you did not decide “I’ll become human being.” Nature just pushed you on but now you’re conscious enough to decide “I want to evolve from where I am to whatever is possible.”-Sadhguru

Recently I was introduced to The Leadership circle, a model that can be used to develop leaders. The first conversation on the basis of a 360 degree assessment is all about discovering “unconscious” beliefs that create reactive behaviors and therefore impact creation of competencies that enhance leadership effectiveness. I could see the mental tug of war that each leader was going through while looking at their assessment. The conversation on beliefs that underlie habitual behaviors was a new pathway for most, albeit one they experienced with discomfort. The conversation could help them name their beliefs, make them more “visible”.

The beliefs could be like “I am good if I am liked” or “I am important because of the results I create”. None of these beliefs are so well articulated in our minds—it is unconscious. How is it that we do not inquire into the unconscious? I realized that the unconscious has given us desires like being good, being an achiever and so on. However, such desires masquerade as purpose. In other words, the beliefs “run” us. So, there is no reason why one would inquire.

One would begin to question it when one begins to tune towards causing greater good, creating an impact in the society--- in such a situation one can step out of “ I, me, mine” world and decide to change course. This is the first step towards questioning the unconscious. At this point, it is not abandoning our beliefs but to give it a larger context, a meaningful direction. One can still be good, not to fulfill a personal cause but causes that would make a difference to the world; one can still achieve results with drive, now with a vision.

We cannot see the unconscious directly, and so we need some kind of mirror with which to see the dynamic forces that operate within us. Mandala art is one of the ways to experience such a mirror. Mandala means ‘circle’ in the Sanskrit language, and mandala art refers to symbols that are drawn, sketched or painted in a circular frame.

There are many ways to create a mandala, but first we would need to draw a circle on a sheet of paper or on a canvas. We can fill the circle in spontaneously, letting the drawing emerge step by step in a creatively unpredictable way. Within the circle we can capture important scenes from everyday life, or objects of fascination from the world of nature. Filling the circle in is the first step. When the mandala is complete, we have an interesting, often beautifully wholistic snapshot of what is going on within us and of our present reality. We can then look at the symbol with curiosity and wonder, figure out what the structures, colors, and interacting elements mean and thereby gain an expanded view of how our lives are working.

While making a mandala or meditating does give an opportunity to touch the unconscious, suffering too makes us aware of the unconscious and urges us to make conscious choices.

Would we want external circumstances to cause the inquiry into the unconscious or would we want to evolve from unconscious to conscious with curiosity and willingness?

7. START LIVING

You start dying slowly

If you become a slave of your habits,
Walking everyday on the same paths...
If you do not change your routine,
If you do not wear different colors
Or you do not speak to those you don't know.

You start dying slowly

If you avoid to feel passion, and their
turbulent emotions;
Those which make your eyes glisten, and your
heart beat fast.

You start dying slowly

If you do not change your life when you are
not satisfied with your job, or with your love,
If you do not risk what is safe for the uncertain,
If you do not go after a dream,
If you do not allow yourself, at least once in
your lifetime,
To run away from sensible advice.

TheMindsJournal.com

-Pablo Neruda

It is time to wake up and start living! Do all that you have not done because you wanted to be safe, secure and certain. Stepping out of habits that I formed from what others told me is the biggest step I took to empower myself. I realised the word empower really means to turn on one's gifts without letting others define me. This is not rebellion. This is living with respect for oneself and others. Would you like to start living or start dying slowly.... This poem is a testimony of how most of us have begun to live life.

Habits, routine, certainty is relevant until you make it happen. No sooner habits, routine and certainty make you happen, you start dying slowly. Start embracing one new thing every day or

every week. Feel the lightness of being yourself. Don't hold your success, your expertise, your job, your relationships so habitually that you start dying slowly.....

Start living, now!!!

8. THE THREE LENSES



We can't change the way others treat us, but we can change the way we view the reality by using the lenses.

We all cherish to connect to our essence or presence. This is the space from where we experience freedom and creativity. There is serenity and true relaxation. However, certain situations or people trigger us and we move away from our presence. In those situations, if we can look at our experience and our world with these 3 lenses. Examining the situation through these “lenses” can yield important insights and encourage you to shift your thinking.

The wide lens. Using this lens requires asking yourself two simple questions when you feel triggered.

What are the facts in this situation?

What's the story I'm telling myself about those facts? What do I really want as an outcome?

The reverse lens. This lens requires viewing the world through the lens of the person who triggered you. It doesn't mean sacrificing your own point of view but rather widening your perspective. With the reverse lens, you ask yourself:

What is this person feeling, and in what ways does that make sense?

Where's my responsibility in all this?

The long lens. Unfortunately, sometimes you will not find a reasonable justification for someone else's actions, and no amount of understanding their perspective will help. The long lens perspective asks you to distance yourself from the situation.

When this occurs, begin with this question:

Regardless of how I feel about what's happening right now, how can I grow and learn from this experience?

Source: Tony Schwartz, a pioneer of human potential movement.

9. UNTYING THE KNOTS



Often, we have the feeling that we are stuck or immobilized. Something happens within that keeps us away from experiencing joy, bliss and freedom. This story beautifully illustrates how we are capable of experiencing liberation and yet are caught in our own ways of doing, which are the “knots”. Even in trying to untangle, we deepen our stuckness.

Once when Gautama the Buddha came to teach his disciples, he was carrying a beautiful silk handkerchief in his hands. Thousands of disciples were surprised to see such an article in the Buddha’s hand.

When the Buddha addressed the gathering he asked “what do you see?” and they said, a beautiful silk handkerchief. Then slowly the Buddha started to put knots on the handkerchief, one after another, until he put 5 knots. Then he asked whether it was the same handkerchief. His disciples answered that it was the same handkerchief, yet different, as it was in knots now.

The Buddha said that is what I want you to understand. You are all Buddha but you cannot see the silken fine fabric because you are in knots.

I am like the same handkerchief but without knots.

Then he went on to pull the handkerchief from both sides and asked whether the knots would open this way. His disciples said that this way the knots will in fact tighten and become more difficult to open.

Then the Buddha asked, why do you then try to open your knots by pulling? You are making it more complicated. He then further asked that if he needed to open these knots, what was needed to be done?

A monk answered that he would come close, observe and try to understand how the knots were formed. And if one saw how they were formed, one would be able to undo them.

Then Buddha said that is right and ended the sermon saying this is all he wanted to teach them. He closed by saying they needed to meditate upon their own knots.

Meditating on the knots helps us see what the knots are made of. These knots are doubts, resentment, fear, repressed anger, judgments, all of which keep us withdrawn and cautious and away from life. With this awareness we can find ways of dissolving the knots, not by pulling it but by paying attention to it.

V. Trendsetters

1. MR. CHAKRAVARTHY SARANGA PANI

“An Exemplary Life”



Our Founder and Mentor-in-Chief P.N. Devarajan, fondly known as PND, lived a life driven by a passion to serve. Throughout a brilliant career in industry and banking, he amassed a wealth of friendships with the who’s who of business, bureaucracy and society. He was often looked up to by his equally illustrious associates for advice and perspective. In his later years when he set out to establish institutions of excellence in service, he continued to touch lives of people in a profound way. His enormous networks and success in career were more than matched by his vision of a “healing society,” his belief in creating a skilled workforce/industry out of working-class individuals and his life-long efforts to find sustainable solutions to deep-seated social problems. His passing has left a void in our midst that is quite difficult to fill. We only hope to keep his mission alive by going to work with the same principles he lived by and his sheer drive every single day. In this commemorative first anniversary edition, Shri. Chakravarthy Saranga Pani, a close friend and confidante of PND, fondly recalls his many valuable memories and special anecdotes about the latter.

To begin with, a little about Shri. Chakravarthy Saranga Pani. Born in 1930 in Vellore (Tamil Nadu), an engineer trained at the celebrated Indian Institute of Sciences (IISc) and at the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Shri. C.S. Pani further studied at the British Electricity Authority Thermal Plant in the UK. Since the beginning of his career in the early fifties, he worked with various public undertakings such as the Central Water and Power Commission (CPWC), Bhilai Steel Plant, Hindustan Steel Ltd. and Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd. (BHEL). His grounding in engineering often took him on deputations abroad and led him to briefly take up teaching at the University of Delhi where he set up the Measurements Lab. By 1970 he gradually shifted towards managerial roles in the then nascent “Group-5” of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). “Group-5” would later become independent and be known as the Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI), where he remained for another 19 years until his retirement as the Executive Director. Since his retirement, he has served on the boards of various industrial corporations. He also generously donated his 9000 sq.ft. house in Bangalore to Siva Sakthi Home for children and adults with disabilities. Shri. Pani still works every day, attracting sponsors and volunteers aplenty for the Home.

“How did you meet PND?” We ask. “My first meeting with PND came about in 1974, quite by chance” he answers, “At the time, I was a manager at IDBI (Mumbai), handling projects in about every sector except in Chemicals and Textiles. A colleague of mine handled all the Chemical Engineering projects as he was a qualified Chemical engineer himself. When an application by the Gujarat Narmada Fertilizers Ltd., for assistance on a fertilizer project near Surat came his way, he coolly went off on a prolonged leave, forcing me to handle the process. Knowing nothing of fertilizers, I read the application end to end and still could not understand how to go about it. One day shortly after, while having lunch at a Matunga eatery, I saw a bus with the board of ‘Hindustan Organic Chemicals Ltd.’ (HOC) headed back to the HOC campus in Rasayani, Maharashtra. I asked the driver if I could take a ride with him to meet the chief there.

He obliged and later that afternoon I found myself standing at the door of the Managing Director's office. The name board read 'P.N. PND'. I walked in to the office, thinking here I had found someone who could help me with the task I was assigned. When I explained why I was there, PND had a hearty laugh. Imagine my surprise when he told me, fertilizers were inorganic chemicals! I sheepishly confessed to my ignorance on the subject, so PND sat me down, explained how plants require Nitrogen for growth but since atmospheric nitrogen cannot be absorbed easily by them, plants would need to be fed nitrogen through another source. Over the course of an hour, he gave me a basic understanding of fertilizers and then put me in touch with one Prof. Sharma, an eminent chemical engineer at the Institute of Chemical Technology in Wadala, Mumbai asking the latter to help me with the project. I went back to Mumbai, deeply thankful to PND for both his patience and for his resourcefulness. With this help, a potentially bad situation at my work was not only averted but my efforts were recognized and I was subsequently promoted, surpassing three more people in the process."

Shri. Pani describes how he kept in touch with PND through the next few years, "PND moved on to be the Chairman of the Indian Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Ltd. (IDPL) in Delhi. I would often visit Delhi on work trips and would run into him every now and then."

"PND was a walking encyclopedia," remarks Shri. Pani, "I learnt a lot from him. I would go to him for advice on any number of subjects and the man always had an answer. If he didn't know something himself, he would put me in touch with someone who did know. His connections in bureaucracy, business and in almost every other sphere amazed me."

"PND always came up with innovative ideas. He made suggestions to set up advisory committees for industries that needed multiple experts on largescale projects. He recommended SWOT analysis when the term was relatively new to the industry. He kept looking

out for technology experts to promote as entrepreneurs,” says Shri. Pani. “In an era where large businesses were exclusively run by dynastic families, PND wanted to introduce working-class technological experts into business,” he says.

Shri. Pani gets emotional when recalling some of his more personal interactions with Shri. PND. He says, “I lost touch with PND for a few years around the time of my retirement. PND had settled in Chennai post his retirement and I was living in Bangalore with my ailing wife and mother. To be closer to medical facilities for my wife, I had moved away from the house I owned in the suburbs to an apartment in the city. Shortly after my wife passed away in 1996, so did my mother, in 1998. Suddenly finding myself all alone, I was enveloped in grief and felt miserable. Yet again, by chance, I met PND at the Chennai Airport, where as luck would have it, our arrival times from different flights had coincided.”

“PND remarked at my apparent loss of form asking me why I looked so forlorn. I told him the reason for my sorrow. He said, ‘Come with me’ and took me to Siva Sakthi Home for the mentally challenged, in Valasaravakkam, Chennai. There, a child with multiple disabilities came towards me and sat on my lap, caressing my hair. In that moment, I felt so comforted that my misery seemed to have faded away into thin air. It was an out-of-the-body experience!” remarks Shri. Pani, adding that, “I continued to visit this Home regularly. Over a period of time, I noticed that the Home was getting cramped and crowded. It suddenly occurred to me that I could put my house in Bangalore to good use. I offered to donate it to Siva Sakthi Homes, if they should find it suitable to move premises.”

“PND thought I must be joking,” laughs Shri. Pani. “Are you sure?” he asked. “I assured him that I would be delighted to donate the house for the sake of the special children. Thus, on 15th January 2000, after a fair share of struggles to re-possess the house from a deviant tenant, on the death anniversary of my wife, Siva Sakthi Home was successfully inaugurated in Bangalore.”

Today, with a dedicated fulltime caretaker taking charge of the premises, the Home houses 25 persons with varying degrees of mental disabilities, five full-time staff, and has a beautiful garden with ducks, hens, dogs and cats. Festivals are celebrated with gusto and visitors and donations are flowing steadily. “I have no worries today,” claims Shri. Pani, “I have no anxieties about the Home and its future. It is in safe hands. Being involved in this gave me a community that I never thought I’d have. I can now happily kick the bucket.”

“While I was working in the corporate sector,” recalls Shri. Pani, “we always had the necessary resources to solve problems that cropped up every now and then. One could always access the right infrastructure, monetary or material resources as and when required. When you start a social enterprise, you have to improvise with the little that you have.” He further adds, “PND and I discussed many problems. These discussions were a tremendous learning experience for me. They enabled us to take up the challenges of starting a whole new institution. It is through these discussions that the idea for Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani (MSDS) and CSIM came about.”

“PND’s out of the box ideas include the Dal-Oil-Sugar Scheme, by means of which hundreds of families help feed hundreds of others through donating everyday ingredients from their pantry. This creates an attitude of giving and sharing among people. PND used to say that Corporate Social Responsibility ought to be more than mere financial contributions from companies. He often mentioned to me that employees of Corporates should be given sabbatical to go out in the field and work at the grassroots level,” says Shri. Pani.

When asked what in his opinion is the greatest accomplishment of PND, Shri Pani says, “Throughout one’s life, one accumulates baggage - either in material terms or spiritual. It is not often possible to shed this baggage before passing. PND was an exception to this rule. He never hesitated to provide monetary

help to his friends in their time of need. Though he led several senior positions in his career and accumulated a lot of wealth, once he decided to dedicate his life to social work, he let go of all his material possessions, led an austere life, redirecting any material possessions of his for the benefit of charity. This in my opinion is his greatest achievement.” In continuation of this Shri. Pani says, “PND was absolutely insistent that cultivating social entrepreneurship skills and honing them from time to time was the way forward, for non-profit institutions such as Siva Sakthi Homes. His mission was to identify caring, passionate people like Vijayakumari (founder of Siva Sakthi Homes) and build their skill-set specific to the cause they were dedicating their time to. He mainly started CSIM to attract young, talented individuals to learn the ropes of instituting and managing NGOs that focus on a single social issue of their choice, to make major advancements in that focus-area, in the long run. CSIM today has a wide reach in several places such as Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Coimbatore and so on. Apart from Social Entrepreneurs, CSIM is also creating a band of social-auditors who conduct social audit of CSR programmes, for-profit and non-profit social enterprises, and NFBCs, develop methodologies for quantifying programmes, which are not easily quantifiable. This is leading to a shift in thinking in terms of impact, rather than output. This is a major accomplishment that can be attributed to PND. He had the creativity, the skills, the knowledge and the conviction to convert his ideas into working institutions.”

In parting, we asked Shri. Chakravarthy Saranga Pani “How do you think PND would have liked to be remembered?” He thinks about it for a bit and says, “I guess he would much rather like for there to be more PNDs in the world – people with a vision to impact the lives of all those who are unfortunately challenged with some problems; to wipe out the avoidable tears from the faces of such people. Fortunately we have a good working model in the life of PND. We need more PNDs in our society to make a change.” We couldn’t agree more.

–*Archanaa Ramesh*

2. DEESHA FOUNDATION

Encouraging One Last Act of Kindness



Desha Group and Deesha Education Foundation is an NGO based in Amravati District, Maharashtra, that focuses on educating the general public about organ donations, particularly eye donation. Their mission is to eradicate any form of preventable/treatable blindness in society. This organization is the brainchild of Swapnil Arun Gawande, who is also its Managing Trustee and Secretary.

Finding one's calling is no mean task. Some people spend entire lifetimes looking for purpose, while some others find theirs, early on. Swapnil found his life's calling at the tender age of eight, following the tragic death of his childhood friend, who had corneal blindness. Swapnil's friend had been in a prolonged waiting list for an eye-transplant, when he fell ill with dengue and soon passed away. This incident left a lasting impression on Swapnil, who did not waste any time finding out more about both corneal blindness and dengue. He learnt from doctors that both of these conditions were curable and that with timely intervention, his friend could have been saved. Upon learning that more than the disease itself, and it was the lack of infrastructure and awareness of available

medical procedures that led to his friend's losing his life, Swapnil decided to do something to prevent this from happening to other families.

Swapnil began giving speeches at his school from 6th grade, laden with information about eye care and more importantly eye-donation. He persuaded his family to pledge their eyes for donation and even when struck with a second tragedy of losing his cousin, convinced his cousin's parents to donate the eyes of the deceased. However, that is when he realized that while there was a family willing to donate eyes, there were no eye-banks, in his home town of Amravati, that engages in harvesting these eyes. As eyes can only be donated within six to eight hours of death, having the nearest eye-bank more than four hours away by drive made it impossible for the donation to happen.

Swapnil thus resolved to set up an eye bank in Amravati district. Throughout his teen years, Swapnil routinely dedicated his time, talking at schools, colleges, and various other platforms to encourage people to donate their eyes. He consulted with several doctors and requested them to join his organization to set up the necessary infrastructure to make eye donations and eye transplants available to people in every corner of the state.

In 2013, after years of hard work and tireless research, the first Deesha Eye Bank was opened in Amravati. Since then Deesha Eye Banks have opened up in Yavatmal, Washim and Buldhana districts of Maharashtra. All four eye banks provide 24/7 eye donation services in their respective regions. Deesha has also started an eye-transplant centre in association with Dr. Totey Eye Hospitals serving people from five districts around Amravati Division. Till date, Deesha Foundation has facilitated more than 3,500 eye donations across the state of Maharashtra. Around 700 of these have been directly donated to Deesha Eye Banks. "Roshani Zindagi Mein", the awareness and sensitization drive by Deesha has led to more than 4.5 lakh people to pledge their eyes for donation. In order to remove the various misconceptions about eye-donations, Deesha organizes eye-camps for different target groups such as rickshaw

drivers, local policemen, students and so on. On the whole, Deesha Group today serves a population of 12 lakh people and counting.

Deesha's eye bank services are largely managed by their enormous network of young volunteers who are located all over the country. While emphasizing on their commitment to the cause, Swapnil says, "Our group runs on donations and none of our trustees or senior management members are paid any honorarium. The entire money from these donations goes directly to the cause." Around 1800+ people are actively volunteering in Deesha regularly.

At a policy-making level, Deesha Foundation's recommendation of establishing a Cornea Distribution System for Maharashtra (CDSM) has been adopted by the Maharashtra state government. An online portal has been set up to facilitate the eye distribution across the state through online waiting list. A national eye-donation helpline-989-989-8667 was recently set up, inaugurated by the chief minister of Maharashtra, Shri Devendra Fadnavis. This helpline number connects with the major eye banks across the country, thus making eye donation process hassle free for the deceased family. It also enables organizations like Deesha to respond promptly to families who are interested in donating eyes of their deceased kin. Through their eye-donation anthem, Deesha actively popularizes the helpline number in their campaigns.

Says Ashutosh Lakhe, an eye-transplant beneficiary, "When I was in Class 10, I started losing my eyesight drastically. I could barely see at a distance of one foot through one eye and would just about manage to read, through the other. I was lucky I got a corneal transplant and that my eyesight was restored. Whereas earlier I was afraid to even take two steps on my own without my eyesight, now I'm travelling hundreds of kilometers across the state, fulfilling my dreams, independently. The fact that I'm able to see the bright colours of this beautiful world due to one person's seemingly small but significant decision to donate their eyes, amazes me."

Deesha Group has garnered the appreciation of several key people in education, engineering, management, business and in governance. As Kiran Paturkar, a notable industrialist and President of Vidarbha

Industrial Association, observes, “While blood donation has long gained social acceptance and people are unafraid to voluntarily give their blood to those in need, eye and other organ donations are still looked at with some trepidation. Deesha Foundation, through their excellent work in Maharashtra is making sure that Amravati becomes a model for the rest of the country with respect to making eye-donation just as simple and widely accepted.” As a testimony to this paradigm shift, increasingly families have shown their willingness to donate the organs of their loved ones, with some donors being young children who sadly met with an early end.

Deesha is currently working on a chain of mobile eye-care units in Maharashtra and are working towards expanding the number of these low-cost units for easy access to eye care in rural areas. Work is also underway for the launch of Deesha Netralaya a multi-specialty charitable eye hospital in Amravati by 2021. Deesha Foundation has also started promoting and facilitating organ donations across the state.

Deesha Foundation has been awarded the GuideStar India’s Transparency Award for their transparent services.

–Archanaa Ramesh

3. EXNORA GREEN PAMMAL *Rules of Disposal*



Mangalam Balasubramanian moved from Delhi to erstwhile Madras in 1991. Back in the national capital, she worked for the Denmark Embassy as a development professional under the Bilateral Grants Project. “When my husband was handed a transfer to Madras in ’91, I had the opportunity to coordinate another project titled Women in Agriculture,” she says. What Mangalam did not expect though, was a culture shock of sorts when the garbage-lined streets of Madras wore a contrasting look to Delhi’s serene avenues. Having settled down in Pammal, on the outskirts of the city, Mangalam began getting to know the women of the locality, and that spurred the need to make a change. “I began by telling the ladies I met that we could do something to keep the locality clean and tidy.” At first, meetings would take place on Saturday afternoons. “Intitally, there was resistance,” Mangalam recalls, “But after five meetings, ten women agreed that there was urgent need to improve the hygiene of our surroundings.” That was how the baby-steps for Exnora Green Pammal were taken, which began on May 1, 1992.

“I was keen to play on the oft-spoken phrase, ‘Cleanliness is Godliness’. We began by inviting Mr M B Nirmal, Founder of Exnora International, to be the chief guest at one of our cleanliness drives,” says Mangalam. This meeting was in Sankar Nagar, which would soon become at the core of Exnora Green Pammal’s operations in Chennai. Today, Mangalam Balasubramanian is Founder and Managing Trustee of Exnora Green Pammal. But the organisation itself had humble beginnings. Back in the early 1990s, the number of households in Sankar Nagar, for instance was only 330. “The ten women who were associated through the Sankara Magalir Mandram (the organisation’s initial name) took charge of all streets, with each woman responsible for 25 – 30 houses,” Mangalam explains. “Our slogan was ‘Segregate of Organic Wastes at Source’. This was long before MSW Rules were formed.” At the start, the members contributed from their own pockets to procure a cycle rickshaw and hired hands. The Pammal Town Panchayat supported the initiative. “We charged 10 rupees per month from each household,” Mangalam says.

As part these civic initiatives, the exnora also opened a vermin-compost shed, which helped process organic waste collected from 330 households in the locality. “This was the talk of the town,” says Mangalam, “Several government functionaries like the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), Agriculture Department, Town Panchayat Department and the Pollution Control Board sent their officials to visit the site.” While several corporate entities were also aware of the vermin-composting initiative, only one reached out to Exnora Green Pammal, to offer support. “Mr Nirmal had placed an advertisement in newspapers requesting corporate firms to fund composting initiatives like ours, in Chennai city — by then, Madras became Chennai,” Mangalam recalls, “Surprisingly, only one company responded and wanted to know more.” The company in question was Pepsico, known worldwide for its signature soft-drink, Pepsi. “Mr Abhiram Seth, Executive Vice President, External Affairs and Agriculture, Pepsico India visited our vermin-compost shed on his way to the airport, in May 2004. When I was explaining how our operations work, it seemed like he was impressed with our initiatives, and asked me to send out a proposal.” No sooner

was one sent, Abhiram Seth sent an SMS to Mangalam, saying that Pepsico India would be willing to partner with the organisation, in its waste-management initiatives. Three months later, formalities surrounding the proposal were ironed out, and Sankara Magalir Mandram received approval for a grant of Rs 17 lakh. “We faced a tiny hurdle, though,” Mangalam reveals, “Sankara Magalir Mandram is not a registered entity, and on account of this, Pepsico India could not send the grant to us. This meant the company had to send the amount through Exnora International.” In May 2004, a tripartite agreement between Exnora International, Sankara Magalir Mandram and Pammal Town Panchayat was inked with Pepsico India. “Exnora International received the grant, and we at Sankara Magalir Mandram became the implementing authority, along with the Pammal Town Panchayat,” Mangalam explains.

The Pepsico India grant played a key role in shoring up infrastructure at the organisation. Cycle rickshaws, tools and tackles, two colour-coded dustbins for each household, uniformed workers and second transport was procured. Over time, other initiatives were also planned so as to propagate the message of source-segregation. “This included awareness programmes for residents of Pammal, spreading the need for social accountability and setting up what we called ‘green ambassadors’, and we maintained a regular complaint register with provisions for complaints to be addressed in just 30 minutes,” says Mangalam. But the organisations share of challenges was also ever-present. “Collecting subscriptions from 330 households was easy. But to collect it from 20,000 households covering 21 wards was quite the task,” she concedes, “Thankfully Pepsico India understood this problem and started giving us “missing gaps”, which was indeed a great gesture from them.

Today, despite challenges — mostly political — Exnora Green Pammal is still continuing its journey in other parts of India. “Our entire objective is source-segregation and reduction of waste,” Mangalam explains, “If these two practices are focused, we do not require centralized dumping yards and huge investments.” Mangalam points out that at present source-waste management falls under the ambit of ‘Engineering’ in the Corporation, whose role

has been reduced to a mere “contractual agreement”. “But source-waste management is a public health issue,” she insists. “Hence, the Sanitary Staff should be adequately trained in line with SWM Rules 2016. Experts like Exnora Green Pammal should be utilized for training, monitoring and good analytical documentation with social perspective, to bring change in the attitude of people. Our strength lies in community mobilization and capacity building.” She adds, “If the government could utilize such services, litter-free India would not be a dream too far.”

–JS

4. FOUNDATION FOR EXCELLENCE

Academic Advancements... with a little help



In a country of nearly 1.7 billion people, brilliant minds are never hard to come by. The problem usually arises when academically inclined individuals don't have the means to further their academic skill and stay in an institution. Oftentimes, the lack of financial support is the main cause for this factor. And that is precisely where organizations like FFE have come to the rescue of such students with their scholarship programme.

A publicly supported, not-for-profit organization, The Foundation for Excellence is focused on funding higher education for academically gifted students, with low-income backgrounds. In other words, it funds for students who can't fund for themselves, financially, when it comes to academic advancement. The organization was established by Dr Prabhu and Poonam Goel as part of the Indians of Collective Action established in Santa Clara in 1994. "FFE has established an organization in India called the Foundation For Excellence India Trust (FFEIT), which is recognized as a charitable trust under section 12A(a) of the Indian

Income-tax Act, 1961,” says Ms. Sudha Kidao, Managing Trustee, FFE, “FFEIT is a member of Credibility Alliance, Mumbai. Credibility Alliance is an initiative of voluntary organizations in India that seeks to enhance accountability, transparency and good governance within the voluntary sector. A Board of Trustees under the overall guidance of the FFE India Advisory Board manages the Trust.” The Trust’s registered and administrative office is located in Bangalore, Karnataka.

While FFE’s mission in India is to transform the lives of academically accomplished students who have no proper financial means, it has managed to successfully accomplish this through its primary methodology of awarding merit-cum-means scholarships. Since its inception in 1994, the NGO has already helped over 17,400 scholars across India, awarding more than 47,000 scholarships totaling to a whopping 98 crore rupees. The organization selects top performing students based on national and state entrance examinations. “These students usually come from constrained backgrounds and are sure to be benefited by the programme,” says Sudha Kidao, “Once the financial need is verified by FEE’s facilitator, the scholarship is awarded.”

The prime focus areas are Engineering, Technology and Medicine. The scholarships provide financial and other means of assistance to qualified students pursuing degrees in these fields. “The assistance provided is irrespective of the caste, community, gender or religion of the applicant,” says Sudha Kidao, “The only criteria is academic performance and family income (or the lack of it).”

There are a set of qualification criteria that the organization goes by. The first of this is that only professional courses (BE/BTech) or integrated five-year dual-degree MTech or MBBS courses are eligible for scholarships. Then of course, only first-year applicants in the academic year 2017-18 are eligible to avail of these scholarships. “The applicants should have passed their Higher Secondary/Pre-University/Intermediate/ CBSE/ISC or equivalent board qualifying examination not earlier than 2016,” Sudha Kidao adds, “The applicants should have scored not less than 70% marks

in the qualifying examination.” Another key factor is the applicants’ admissions to professional degree courses or institutions should be on the basis of the open/general merit rank awarded at the state or national level entrance examinations or through a counseling process conducted at the state level (as in the case of Tamil Nadu). “Diploma students admitted to BE, B Tech courses on a lateral basis, B Arch, BDS & B Pharma students are not eligible,” says Sudha Kidao.

FFE’s scholarships are applicable to families whose gross income does not exceed Rs 1.8 lakh per year. “In addition to family income, the education and occupation of parents and family members including elder siblings and living conditions are also taken into consideration,” says Sudha Kidao, “The approximate total expenses being incurred by the family on the applicant’s education will be taken into consideration for determining the financial eligibility of an applicant.” A crucial factor in determining eligibility has to do with applicants who are first-time graduates in a family who receive preferential treatment over applicants who are the second or third children to graduate from the same family.

In the last 23 years, FFE has helped over 18,500 scholars across India, with over 52,000 scholarships worth Rs 115 crores being awarded so far. “Our scholars come from families of agriculturists, weavers, coolies and lorry drivers,” says Sudha Kidao, “In the past, children belonging to this economic and socio-economic strata had to quit school and start working to support their families. However, our scholars have been blessed with parents who understand the importance of education and who encourage their children to dream big.” FFE’s scholars, he adds, are known to be hard-working and determined to succeed. As a result, scholarship based on the eligibility of merit alone is not hard to come by.

A crucial factor in FFE’s scholarship programme is its alumni. As Sudha Kidao says, “They (alumni) are the pillars of our strength.” He adds: “The support we receive from our alumni plays a key role in expanding our network and touching more young lives.” While this propels the trust towards self-sustainability, the alumni

network also extends support by referring FFE to individual CSR programmes. “Our alumni also go so far as to pledge support to at least two scholars whenever and wherever this is possible, ensuring that what we call the ‘Circle of Giving’ continues, unabated,” says Sudha Kidao, “This also ensures longevity of the programme and its mission.”

So, with more students opting for professional courses and a thorough vetting process that aims to provide scholarships for those with an academic proclivity, molding young minds just received a major shot in the arm. And therein lies the key to academic growth, especially among the financially marginalized.

–JS

5. KATHA

For the love words



Geeta Dharmarajan has a rather interesting take on books. “A good storybook is like a piece of chocolate that you just love,” she says, “And in our culture, when we have something good, we share it. Stories are a bit like that.” In a nutshell, that’s also the story of how the founder and president of Katha started getting children to read. “Kids are curious and creative, and know a good thing or two when they have the opportunity to explore,” Geeta adds.

In 1988, when Geeta founded Katha, she sparked off a revolution that would go on to touch the lives of nearly 10 million children. But given that she began writing from the 1970s, that number could well go higher. “Children need good books in their native languages,” she says, “And that is what Katha provides.” Since its inception, the NGO has published nearly 400 titles, across 21 Indian languages and 12 foreign tongues. “Books need to be fun and wrapped in gorgeous colours and alluring language,” says Geeta. “If my books reach even a handful of kids who end up getting hooked to them, I am happy.” By her own admission, Geeta gets a kick out of seeing a child who cannot take their face off a book.

But for an NGO who got children to read more, Katha is now getting ready to infuse a whole new set of ideas through books, apps and websites. The target, Geeta says, is 300 million school-going children. “According to present estimates, it would seem that than 50 percent of our children cannot read at grade level,” she says, “I would like, with like-minded partners, to ensure that good, colourful, fun e-books reach as many children as possible.”

That’s why the NGO will launch over 60 titles this year, alone, for children who Geeta describes as “diffident readers” and run the “risk of dropping out of school”. Given that reading is perhaps the greatest skill there is, academically, Geeta thinks it will stay that way well into in the 21st Century. “Whatever the profession the child chooses, technology — especially mobile technology — is our lever for reaching out to more and more children who would love to read but presently do not get good books at school or in their homes,” she says. The organization has set itself a timeline of three years to achieve this.

Getting this done involved launching an app, and the first of Katha’s apps had a hundred stories tested on 10,000 families. “From these learnings, we brought out our gender app,” says Geeta, “Now we are working on a more ambitious digital project through the Katha Digital Lab or the KADL.”

Today, releasing titles in Hindi is Katha’s priority. “With 45 million children in the Hindi speaking belt, this is our first priority,” says Geeta, “We have published in Hindi since 1988. The other language we publish in is English. The Katha English Language Arts for India (KELAI) is a whole educational framework for teaching English to children who do not grow up with much spoken English. This is something I have honed at the Katha English Academy, since 2001.”

Katha has started releasing books in Telugu and it plans to move to Bangla and Tamil in the next two years. “But culture-linking is important for children,” says Geeta, “Katha translates stories from 21 Indian and foreign languages. I believe strongly that translation

is the non-divisive force for nation building for young Indians, to link diversities, forge identities.”

So, what is the main focus of Katha in the next few years? Does it involve increasing the number of children it reaches out to, or releasing more titles than it has today? “It’s our 300 Million Challenge,” replies Geeta, “India has 300 million children in schools today. Of this, 150 million.

children can read, while the other 150 million can’t. So, we bend over backwards for children, be it in publishing for or taking good content to children living in poverty through libraries, schools, public spaces. The Katha App will enlarge the reach in the next few years, making books and enhancing the joy of reading for all our children.”

But the real game-changer, Geeta says is access — access to good books. “Over the more than four decades that I have worked with and for children, I find most children are plagued by five poverties — social poverty like caste, class, colour; personal leadership, intellectual and imaginative, cultural and environmental poverties,” she says, “They need the knowledge and the skills to find their own SPICE Route out of poverty. Katha books enhance that moment of self discovery — helping readers think, ask questions, discuss and act — for themselves and for their community.”

Katha’s focus is to get all 300 million children reading for fun and meaning through an ECTC (Each Child Teach a Child) approach. “Hence the Katha Libraries — Community Owned and Operated Libraries or COOL, as we like to call them,” says Geeta, “We now operate in over 60 under-served communities in many states, including Jammu and Kashmir.”

The main challenge that Katha contends with, though, is inequality. “Lack of kindness to people and planet,” as Geeta explains. But there’s a way to get around it, and that’s imagination. “We in Katha dream of our children being GEEKs in the very large sense of the

word. Our books celebrate kindness and equality for girls and planet earth,” says Geeta before adding, “We talk of global climate change, population genetics, empowered girls and kind hearted boys who like animals and who are not scared of crying.”

Presently, with about a lakh of volunteers — children, youth, women — Katha is ringing in three decades of existence. “Continuing to help children to grow up to be reader-leaders, ethical, social and tech entrepreneurs who live fair, free and fearless lives, helping bring their families and communities out of poverty, is what we will strive to keep doing,” Geeta signs off.

–JS

6. KATHA ON RATHA

Local Learning



When Rajashree Natarajan, her husband Sairam Kumar Jayaraman and friend Sudha Yagna Narayanan began Katha On Ratha around two years ago, they had little idea that it would soon expand to 36 schools in just over 18 months. When they began, the focus was rather simple. “The language children use at home and the books in their mother tongue which they are expected to read are quite different,” explains Rajashree, “Most of the reading for these children is limited to prescribed text books, which compel them to memorize and write even before they acquire skills to read and comprehend fluently. English is not taught phonetically in most of these schools, which makes it challenging for these children to grasp. This instills the fear in reading & lowers their confidence to even try!” The solution: a bilingual approach to learning English. The basis was the belief that learning a new language – like English becomes easier and faster with transliterated reading aids. “Things get easier if these transliterated reading aids are based on familiar native language scripts like Tamil,” Rajashree says.

That focus led to the formation of the trio’s initiative, Katha on Ratha or KOR. Out of the 36 schools that KOR is practiced at today, 17 are run by private trusts or NGOs, while 19 are government or government-aided schools. “What started off as a pilot project at

Sai Sankalp School with 230 children has enabled over 80 reading coaches that reach more than 3,000 students with the support of 18 partners,” Rajashree adds.

“Being a parent ourselves, we observed that most of the children who pick the habit of reading books early, have either parents or elders who would have read out a book during bed time,” Rajashree says, explaining the premise on which KOR works. She adds: “Through such bed time stories, children not only learn to read books in one or more reading languages, but they also learn to comprehend different situations, express emotion and develop imagination.” However, with shrinking family sizes and prevalence of TV and digital media, this practice is on the decline. In some cases, Rajashree explains, parents themselves lack reading skills. “We wanted to provide such children an opportunity to learn to read through stories, which motivated us to start the KOR programme.” And that was how KOR hoped it could instill “passion and confidence” in reading and learning among children.

At KOR, teaching methodology is the key. Factors like choice of native names for characters, associations with local flavor like food, flowers and festivals are supporting acts in the initiative. “In one of the NGO-run Schools, a simple story of the hare and the tortoise is narrated through a puppet show where the hare is named ‘Rani and the tortoise, ‘Pandi’”, says Rajashree, “The race happens through local hills.” The strategy, according to KOR, has doubled up as effective training for teachers too. “A typical KOR session is centered on reading aloud, a bilingual book in English and Tamil in an engaging way. These sessions are enriched through appropriate role play, storytelling techniques and through conducting activities to improve phonemic awareness, language fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, critical thinking and creativity,” says Rajashree explaining what a typical day is like, at Katha on Ratha. “The important skills that need to be developed in a child are the skills required to analyze and interpret messages conveyed in a book or other media. Children also need to build the skill to articulate their thoughts and opinion clearly and creatively.” Building attitudes is also part of that process. And hence, Rajashree explains, reading a

story and analyzing it from different perspectives goes a long way in fostering a sense of plurality among these children.

Challenges, however, are aplenty. The biggest challenge that KOR faces on the ground is to do with confidence. “Sometimes children find it difficult to pronounce full words and struggle to comprehend anything out of what they attempt to read,” says Rajashree, “This naturally lowers confidence and creates a barrier towards progress in reading and learning.” Breaking this barrier has called for an approach that helps children read phonetically. “A short reading duration helps to read simple 3 or 4-letter words and sight words, thereby helping them to read simple sentences,” explains Rajashree, “This entire cycle runs multiple iterations innovatively using flashcard-driven games.” These flashcards support activities conducted in a class that aim to improve listening, reading, comprehension, vocabulary, critical thinking and creativity. “We have also started to provide AVcontent to teachers to aid in preparation for KOR sessions,” Rajashree adds.

The future is bright. KOR wants to reach out to over 10,000 students by the end of this year. “We need to work with 50 to 60 more schools and scale up partnership with like-minded institutions,” says Rajashree, detailing the NGO’s strategy. She continues, “We have been working with partners to implement this programme. To achieve our goals, we are reaching out to multiple partners including CSR groups, Education Officers, NGOs with shared objectives.” This of course, even as KOR is also complementing its efforts by reaching out to government and government-aided institutions and other trust-run schools catering to the underprivileged across Tamil Nadu. “We have invested in a dedicated team of four professionals who bring rich experience in the field of education,” says Rajashree.

Today, KOR sessions have become part of the regular curriculum in every school that that has successfully come on board. Rajashree and her team has hand-held these schools for three months before ensuring some degree of self-reliance. “KOR is two hours per week,” Rajashree says, “To drive consistency in implementation and to accelerate outcomes, we also developing a teacher’s

handbook which would provide detailed guidance on how to plan KOR sessions and conduct various activities that are appropriate to the learning level of children.”

–JS

7. MOBILE CRECHES

A Call to care



“A beaming young face with scrappy hair and a missing tooth looks out at you from the first folder that Mobile Creches put out in 1970. The few words that go with it are: Every Child’s Birthright - Nutrition, Education and a Happy Childhood. These words tell you a lot about Mobile Creches, what we believe in, what we set out to do. Of course, we have learnt a lot more about early childhood since then, about what a happy childhood means and how complex it is! But that has not deterred us or deflected us from the course,” says Devika Singh, Co-founder, Mobile Creches.

The Mobile Creches Model of providing crèche services for children of migrant construction workers has gone into “folklore” of the NGO world.

It was a first in many ways – the target population was migratory, children ranged in age from birth to 14 years, the programme ran in partnership with the construction industry – where one challenge reinforced the other. Delhi was in the throes of its first wave of urbanization and, very soon, the programme spread from construction sites to slum settlements.

Since 1969, the organization has impacted 8.67 lakh children and trained 6,500 women as childcare workers; this it has done in addition to facilitating 1,000 day-care centres, to have them up and running. They have partnered with 250 builders, and developed 100 network partners. Today, MC reaches out to children in need through the provision of day care services that include health, nutrition, learning, care and protection for eight hours a day, six days a week.

In the last year, MC has reached out to 10,828 children through its day care programme at 72 urban construction sites and slum centres. Of these, 9,632 were children at construction sites in Delhi NCR, and other cities, (Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Mohali and Chandigarh), while 1,196 were children in the slum settlements in Delhi.

When it began, what Mobile Creches successfully managed to do was initiate an intervention in the lives of children when there was no awareness surrounding malnutrition. MC developed a model for childcare, for young children of marginalised communities, in the form of day care centres at a place of work, a construction site, in a settlement, or in an urban slum. It bore fruit when the organization's efforts resulted the Planning Commission announcing the first-ever Creche scheme in India, in 1974. This was an important first step for the creche movement.

In 1989, MC co-founded a national network - Forum for Creche and Child Care Services (FORCES) - to lobby for childcare and maternity support for poor working women.

MC has been involved in the formulation of policy through participation in committees and working groups constituted by various ministries and government bodies to formulate programmes and policies for the young child. MC was also actively involved in the landmark discussions for the formulation of the Early Childhood Care and Education Policy, which was approved by the Government in September 2013, following which the amended Maternity Benefit Act in 2017 made crèche facility mandatory

for every establishment employing 50 or more employees. Unfortunately, this Act only covers 2% of the working women, who are employed in the formal sector, leaving out the other 98% who work in the unorganised sector.

The MC Day Care model comes to life in different ways – MC sets up a crèche and staff deliver childcare services, MC helps set up a crèche, trains others (organizations or individuals) to run it and makes an exit, MC helps set up a crèche, trains the service provider, and continues to provide supervisory and quality inputs, and lastly: MC guides others purely in the capacity of a technical resource.

Through its journey, MC partnered with policymakers and civil society organisations to create awareness about early childhood care and development. As per NFHS-4 data, the national average of children under 5 years who are underweight has reduced from 42.5% as reported in NFHS-3 (2005-06) to 35.7% in NFHS-4(2015-16). Similarly, the figures for children who are stunted has come down from 48% to 38.4% in the same period.

While MC started its daycare centres at construction sites initially, reaching out to urban slum communities was also part of the plan. “Now, we are replicating these models of crèches and daycare centres through Business Transference Mode to other civil society organisations spread across Delhi NCR, Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Mohali and Chandigarh,” says Sumitra Mishra, Executive Director, Mobile Creches.

The organization has expanded to Lucknow, Chennai and Madurai. In its training capacity, MC is running programs in the following states, partnering with state governments and local civil society organisations – Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Telangana, Gujarat, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Maharashtra, Assam, and Odisha.

Mobile Creches is also in the process of taking the next big leap by expanding to other work settings that have crèches as a mandate. “Thanks to generous support from Grand Challenges Canada for our Transition to Scale project, we will be taking our knowledge and experience in early childhood development to rural areas, tea plantations, factories, and brick kilns over the next three years,” says Sumitra. “Under this project, MC will partner with employers, government, local community groups, and civil society organisations to provide access to quality crèches and day care centres in vulnerable areas and nurture many more young lives.”

India has committed to the SDGs of health and nutrition security for all its citizens. In order to meet its target, several initiatives have been taken – like the Poshyan Abhiyan and other interventions to tackle malnutrition and child mortality in defined aspirational districts across India. Various programmes and schemes are now also focussing on IYCF (Infant and Young Child Feeding) norms to create large-scale awareness on exclusive breastfeeding for infants below six months of age. Sumitra admits, however, that the challenge lies in ensuring that these initiatives do not exclude the most marginalised sections of India – Dalits, tribal, and the disabled children. “Therefore, a lot more is required, than flagship schemes, to ensure no child is left behind,” she adds.

–*JS*

8. NARASIMHAN RAJAGOPAL

Vision for Humanity



Shri. Narasimhan Rajagopal is a chemical engineer with over four decades of experience in Chemical Plant Operations, Engineering, Project Execution and has held managerial positions. He has travelled across Asia, Europe, Middle East and USA in connection with business and in development of new projects.

He is an active member of Rotary Club for over 40 years and has maintained his association with the club even while moving to different cities as work demanded. He is now associated with the Rotary Club of Chennai KK Nagar since its inception and is keen to work on community based projects.

He got to interact with Shri PN Devarajan during his teenage days and after many years of working with him, he still remains spellbound at the man's vision for humanity.

"I first met PND during my college days in 1956 at my father's office. It was PND who inspired me to pursue Chemical Engineering. His narration of significant national and international developments that led to the production of various chemicals not only interested me. It helped me see the change brought about in

people's day to day lives. His knowledge of different chemical processes made me wonder if he was a walking encyclopaedia. He was an excellent teacher, who always endeavoured to open up students' minds to new thoughts, ideas and possibilities. A zealous reader, he was all ears when students wanted to discuss any subject and his contributions enriched exchange of thoughts. I have always wondered how he gets to know so much about, practically, everything," says Narasimhan.

Narasimhan was not only inspired by PND's expertise in his field, but was also touched by PND's concern for the common good. The way PND engaged with communities and different social activities encouraged him too. As fellow members at the Rotary Club of Mettur, they worked together in many initiatives. He fondly recollects a project from the 1970s, in which both of them worked together to mobilise resources and support to lay pipelines for supply of drinking water in a village. "The villagers were moved to see water flowing in the pipes. PND was then working in a company that manufactured PVC pipes. In six months, we completed the work and the villagers are still enjoying the result of these efforts. Even today when I think of that experience, I feel overwhelmed. I will forever cherish such moments," he says.

Narasimhan and PND were always in touch with each other, in spite of working in different cities. "I would contact him whenever I needed his advice. He made himself available for many enthusiasts like me. The clarity I used to feel after talking to him has been a positive force behind all my decisions," says Narasimhan, still in awe of PND's dynamism. Success in the industry never disturbed PND's interest in the community. The great motivator he is, all associates were driven into social service. His vision for the community grew richer by the days and he dreamt of a society where working class was in the fore, leading the process of development.

PND has always emphasised contributing whatever is possible from one's position. "Help people till it hurts you," he would say. Driven by his passion for service, PND's appeal to his friends

was never turned down. “You can never say no that man,” laughs Narasimhan. PND once introduced him to a visually challenged person in Thiruvannamalai and asked Narasimhan if he could help the young man in earning a sustainable income, through the Rotary Club. Efforts materialised and the young man, trained in tailoring, used the sewing machines provided to train women from the nearby villages. Today, it is a handloom that weaves sarees with in house, authentic designs. “It is such entrepreneurship that PND wanted to promote on a large scale. His ideas and thoughts are so compelling that all of us get drawn to it,” he adds.

Narasimhan and PND together visited the Siva Sakthi Kakkum Karangal regularly. It is a home for intellectually challenged children and adults. Mobilising contributions for this Home through the Rotary Club of Madras was a commitment they had made to themselves and Narasimhan feels very proud about this endeavour. “All that PND initiated had a long term perspective and is relevant even in the changing maze of poor people’s needs. Whether rights or welfare, PND insisted that vision for future must direct all efforts undertaken now”, recalls Narasimhan, while mentioning about PND’s collection and redistribution of staples programme. The Dall-Oil-Sugar scheme, as it is known, intended to collect these staples from willing individuals/households and consolidate the collections to be distributed regularly to orphanages, homes for aged, rehabilitation centres, etc. With his family still being a part of this scheme, administering the collection loop, he believes that it is programmes like these that inculcate the value of giving in the younger generations as well.

PND founded the Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) to train unemployed youth, both men and women, to earn a sustainable income through social work. Narasimhan feels that PND’s idea was just in time to promote social entrepreneurship on a large scale, drawing interest on socially responsible/inclined business models. Also engaging differently abled persons and drop outs who could not access education for different reasons, PND once again proved that it was ideas that always prevailed, irrespective of

where they came from. Social entrepreneurship was a channel to give life to these ideas, which may otherwise go unheard.

- Shanmuga Priya. T

9. OASIS INDIA *Bottom-up Rescue Mission*



In its 11-year-long journey, Oasis India has tried pulling off the near-impossible. It has persevered to tackle the widespread problem of trafficking, and in doing so, has rescued thousands of women and children across the country. “Trafficked women and children rescued and assisted back to wholeness – 1224 in the past 11 years,” says Matthew Nathaniel, Regional Head (South), Oasis India.

Confronting, tackling and solving a problem like trafficking, for Oasis, can be quite challenging owing to the complexity involved. The main issue is simply that the victims of trafficking haven’t quite been accustomed to a world beyond it. Tackling that issue has become part and parcel of solving the problem. “Many young girls born to sex workers have not seen the world beyond a red-light area. They are confused and distraught to make a decision and step out,” says Nathaniel, “Oasis India works towards equipping those who leave the Red Light Area to reach their potential. Oasis’ Nirmal Bhavan is a home for rehabilitation through counselling, aftercare and training. Jessica Gunjal, Nirmal Bhavan coordinator has worked with these women for many years.”

Ask Jessica and she tells you that the most stunning aspect of

trafficking is that irrespective of age, the vulnerability remains. Added to this is the problem of the red-light area becoming a world of their own. “We have girls who are very young and also women in their 40s. They all have no general knowledge whatsoever,” she says, “All they know is what they have seen and heard in the Red Light Area.”

So, the question of ‘how can we help them?’ arises. One of the answers is Oasis India’s Livelihood programme. In a nutshell, the programme aims to make these women and children self-sustainable. It is long-term, focuses on growth and is a bottom-up approach towards rehabilitation.

“Oasis India’s Livelihood Programme helps them to learn, grow and become self-sustainable. Although it’s a long-term goal, they take it one day at a time,” says Nathaniel, “They learn how to sit, eat, talk, travel and self-groom. Some of them have not held a pencil in their lives.”

Jessica adds, “We had an 18-year-old who cried every time we asked her to hold a pencil. It took her four months to learn just that.”

The programme also focuses on some of the basics: like teaching the children to read the time, remember the days of the week, and names of fruits and vegetables.

“This entire process leads up to finding their interest and directing them to the right training,” says Nathaniel, “And at Oasis, our training is as diverse as can get: we have a Vocational tailoring course, a hairdressing project, cooking and Home-based nursing care.

He explains that the ultimate goal is to create a leap of faith – into the real world with confidence and the necessary skill to succeed. But there’s another key ingredient that Oasis has deemed necessary

for the women and children to make the shift. And that is awareness programmes.

“These are awareness programmes for the community people through FGDs and street theatres, establishing Anti Human Trafficking clubs in schools for children, creating Community Vigilance Groups that comprises of people from the community who will monitor the safety of the community and respond appropriately if and when needed,” explains Nathaniel. While he explains that the situation with respect to trafficking has improved to a vast extent, there is still a long way to go, because the core problem continues to persist. “The issue of trafficking rapidly takes different shape,” Nathaniel explains, “Our ultimate goal is to make the communities we work in safer for women and children, and ensure protection from abuse and trafficking.”

Through its journey, Oasis India has racked up some impressive numbers. But its goals are even more interesting. The NGO plans to rescue nearly a hundred children every year through its early-encounter programme – the key target area being railway stations. It also plans to rehabilitate 45 women, paving a way for them to leave the red-light area in a year, and find other livelihood options. “We also hope to support 30 children of women involved in sex work,” says Nathaniel. So far, nearly 25 boys have been given night-shelter in a year, while 15 women have been rescued from red light areas and rehabilitated, in a year.

Nathaniel admits that it is hard to imagine a world without trafficking, but says that it is possible to reduce the problem. “It’s important to remember that trafficking is regarded by many to be a kind of modern-day slavery. But it’s much more complex than we think it is,” he says, “It requires bottom-up approach as well as top-down approach when it comes to combating it.”

Given the effort and the initiatives that Oasis India has taken to reduce the problem, through prevention, education and awareness, it isn’t hard to imagine that these goals may be just around the

horizon. However, the key is to persevere and try harder with every passing day. Like Nathaniel says, a bottom-up approach could well make the difference between the scourge of trafficking, and a near-trafficking-free environment.

–JS

10. PIPAL TREE



A sustainable development model centred on climate justice, environmental rights, gender sensitivity and participatory democracy is what Pipal Tree is all about.

Founded by Siddhartha in 1984, Pipal Tree is today a hub for social and ecological innovators across the world. “Humans are today ‘advancing’ at the cost of humanity itself. While industry has made our lives easier it has done so by putting our very survival at stake, through its overuse of nonrenewable resources. In considering the earth as a boundless resource and exploiting the land ceaselessly we have brought much harm upon ourselves. Climate change will force many communities to become climate refugees. The prevailing global system is only adding to the problems we already face by promoting a homogenous culture of production and consumption,” says Siddhartha.

Over the years, Pipal Tree has focused its efforts on developing leadership among adivasi women and small and marginal farmers, promoting local food systems with an emphasis on dry land food

crops like millets, ensuring access to quality education for adivasi children, motivating cultural and religious traditions to be socially and ecologically engaged, and working with university students and professors to create awareness of sustainable development practices. “Every thing we do begin with and involves dialogue,” says Shabin Paul, Executive Trustee and Coordinator at Pipal Tree. “We do this through workshops and conferences held in our campus, Fireflies, at Bangalore and through our rural field programmes based in H.D Kote Taluk of Mysore district, Karnataka,” says Shabin.

Pipal Tree’s annual international conference, The Fireflies Dialogues, explores sustainable dimensions of cultures and religions that foster sustainable futures. Its campus, known as Fireflies Intercultural Centre, is also an art village with socially conscious sculptures, paintings, stained glass and metal work. “Our Art at Fireflies is an attempt to re-interpret myths and symbols, religious or otherwise, along social and ecological lines,” says Shabin, “Each of the art pieces at Fireflies has a story to tell, and speaks of our philosophy and vision, that every human being has the potential to become more caring and centred, integrally connected to other human beings and the earth.”

Working towards social and environmental justice is atop Pipal Tree’s list of priorities, as is empowering adivasis, women, small and marginal farmers. A key requirement to making Pipal Tree’s work, count, lies in the sensitization of mainstream communities on the impact of climate change. “It is high-time the notion of ‘good life’ changed, and we move towards embracing a more holistic understanding of life on this planet,” says Shabin “There is little awareness in the country that climate change will progressively reduce food production, particularly in relation to rice and wheat.” Effective adaptation is something Pipal Tree helps the rural population, with. “Emphasis on millet cultivation will contribute to food security as well as intensify dry-land agriculture, which represents 65% percent of the agricultural surface in India. So one of the major things as part of adaptation we have to do in India is a shift from rice to millets,” says Shabin “Since millets can largely be cultivated without chemical fertilisers, they represent

an important contribution to reducing carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide emissions from agriculture.”

In the past several years, Pipal Tree has initiated awareness on self-reliance for food, revival of millet-based farming, and a campaign for introduction of millets in public distribution. The campaign saw its result when in 2014 the Chief Minister of Karnataka, Mr. Siddaramaiah, announced that millets would be introduced in the Public Distribution System in a systematic and structured basis for the first time in India. Lakhs of farmers in the driest parts of Karnataka thus received a bonanza, with the procurement price going up and their efforts and labour finally being recognised and rewarded. “Millets will improve the general health of the population as they are rich in protein, fibre, calcium and other minerals,” says Shabin.

Promoting sustainable agronomic practices is another goal that the organization has set for itself in its work among the small and marginal farmers. “Small and marginal farmers are extremely vulnerable to the changes in the natural environment since their livelihood is dependent mostly on the yield from the small land holding. While meeting food requirement of the household, they also need to ensure that sufficient income is generated from the land to meet their economic needs. Hence the challenge lies in the effective utilisation of the available land while maintaining the productivity of the land,” says Shabin.

Its next focus area is to do with Adivasi community: Adivasis constitute 10% of the population at its field programme at HD Kote. “Displaced from the forest, for over twenty years, the adivasis have struggled to push government to give them land through mass struggles. Eventually about 30% of them got land, but the vast majority is still landless. The Forest Rights Act of 2006 is not being implemented in its spirit and the government is dragging its feet.” Pipal Tree has thus helped mobilize efforts to get this community its due. “Our education programme on ‘environment, gender and health’ reaches out to about 1000 adivasi children from 25 tribal hamlets. The educational programmes among these children are

focused on the need to negotiate between “critical modernity” and “critical tradition” to contend with social challenges”

There are concerns that need addressing too: “the socio-economic and political marginalisation of adivasi communities further lowers their adaptive capacity. The resources that would have helped improve the resilience of these communities are often not being obtained due to various reasons including lack of knowledge,” says Shabin, “A strong and functioning interface needs to be built for systematic and coordinated efforts from all stakeholders.” The next challenge: Adivasi children. “Ashram schools and the one-room one-teacher village schools meant for them are inefficient. Lack of qualified teachers, high teacher-student ratio, and a curriculum that doesn’t factor in their cultural values and traditional knowledge/learning system are the challenges here.” Shabin points to the large number of adivasi children drop out of the schools before completing elementary schooling. “These children then become vulnerable to child labour, alcohol abuse or child marriage. This vicious cycle of poverty and marginalisation needs to be broken in order for their socio-economic and political empowerment.”

—*JS*

11. PUSHPANATH KRISHNAMURTHY

Walking Beyond Tokenism



The link between Fair trade and climate change is complex but interconnected. By subscribing to the former, you help alleviate the effects of the latter. Pushpanath Krishnamurthy has taken 30 million steps in support of climate justice and the fairtrade movement. Read about his remarkable journey so far.

I am so moved by the heart wrenching impact of climate change across the globe, where women were hit first, worst and hardest.

It made me question my own personal responsibility. I was, as always inspired by Mahathma Gandhi, as to what he said about “being the change you want see to in the world.” Much like his famous “Salt March”, in the winter of 2009 as the world leaders were assembling, yet again, this time in Copenhagen to agree on a global climate treaty, I decided (a regular guy), to walk to the conference. Of course, as I did not live locally, this meant from Oxford to Copenhagen, a total of 595 kilometers.

My job at Oxfam at the time was as a global Campaigner and a popular mobilizer. For the purpose of this walk, I had managed to convince the management in Oxfam that I will take my annual leave to do this walk.

“I will gate crash the summit if need be” I thought, as I walked on the frozen, windswept, sunless days. I have walked before and have gate crashed meetings, I believed, like Gandhi, that I have a right to serve and I don’t think anyone can take that away from me.

I walked, slipping and falling periodically and at times, I was lost and felt scared, reciting the powerful poem by Tamil/Indian poet Bharathi, “Even if the big blue sky falls on your forehead, walk fearlessly, fearlessly, fearlessly” to keep my spirits high.

Originally, I was just thinking I would be walking and would hopefully meet a few people, but I could not believe how much of an impact it has had, with many others deciding to take action themselves. I was also so blessed with the friendship, support, generosity of communities, all that a product of historical goodwill that Oxfam had garnered and which, I shamelessly harvested in good faith as I was sheltered, fed, connected and cared.

The power of stories that I carried collected through Hearings, came in handy as I connected from parliamentarians and priests to postwomen and passenger train drivers.

My mobile was called from across the world: India, US, Africa, East Asia and even Iceland! I had by the virtue of this walk, gone from being an unknown to a global climate campaigner.

This first walk led me to think that I now needed to connect to significant growers, business entities and different societies. A thought that I took to Oxfam and moved to India, working for a small outfit like “Central For Social Markets”.

A partnership with a very large Growers Federation led to me to undertake my next walk and the mobilization of all stakeholders, business, and policymakers, the national/state government and across sections of the Western Ghat society.

The movement is led by the grower's leadership and the effort is a work in progress. As many experiments on adaptation and mitigation is undertaken along with efforts to Brand the Coffee.

As the world leaders were discussing in 2015/2016, yet again, in Paris, for a FAB (Fair; Ambitious; and Binding) deal, a last ditch effort by Obama and the European leadership, with big players like China and India coming to the table willingly, I was walking furiously on the red earth soil kicking up a shower of vermillion up to my body. As always my power walk (to show time is running out) left the handful who managed to keep step, gasping while we left behind scores to saunter at their own pace.

This 450 kilometers walk along the seashore, across the plains of Tamil Nadu and up to the Mountain from the union territory of Pondicherry to the peak of the Blur Mountain, could not have happened without the marvellous support, energy and inspiration of the first generation business leader,

Anjali Schiavina, of the famous Mandala Apparels.

It was also very surprising and poignant every time I set out to walk, the climate and the weather seem to wreak havoc at the starting point. This time, the city of Chennai (formerly Madras) was under a deluge of unprecedented proportions. My wife and elderly parents in a ground floor apartment slowly swallowed by rising water, but everyone including them still supported me to continue the walk with my fellow walker, Natesa Iyer!

This walk felt so complete because it was the initiative of businesses joined by household consumers, professionals like doctors, farmers, lawyers, organic growers, mothers, teachers and students. I met more than 8000 people directly and easily a couple of million through Radio, Broadsheet, TV and social media.

Since the walk, the idea of making South Asia's first Fairtrade town was born and is flourishing now. Furthermore, the movement

towards sustainable production and fair trade is slowly blossoming in India (e.g. tea, coffee, groundnut, cotton) is encouraging. Furthermore, schools and consumers are taking a prolonged, robust interest. In addition, fashion revolutionising activities are leading to innovative collaboration. In my opinion, the single most important outcome was the widespread influence the walk had on workers, housewives, school children and of course, farmers who swamped me wherever I went.

I have taken 30 million steps and have met approximately quarter million people. People say it is worth a book! Almost all of this, I have done within my own small pension, to carry on the good work, a small donation would be most appreciated. But for me, more people joining and making a fairer, sustainable world is far more vital. My one ask, to all readers, cynics and supporters alike, is that fair trade is definitely one way we can make a sustainable business. The link between Fair trade and climate change is complex but interconnected. By subscribing to the former, you help alleviate the effects of the latter. Growers, consumers and businesses all have their combined role to play, to make a significant impact for a sustainable world.

Please visit my blog: www.gopushgo.co.uk and support me with your words and experience too, donate via the portal and do invite me to speak at your events to raise awareness in your organisations

*—Pushpanath Krishnamurthy,
Global Consultant and Campaigner*

12. SAATH

Urban Upliftment



Urbanization is growing at a fast and unstoppable pace. In 2004, UN-Habitat estimated that 940 million people—over 30% of the world urban population—were living in slums. Since the population currently grows faster in slums than in other urban areas, this figure could reach 2.8 billion by 2030 (Lopez Moreno, 2003). This rapid urbanization has brought in its wake increasing poverty, informality, and exclusion. As per the Census of 2001 by Government of India, it was startling to note that more than 40% of urban Indians live in areas classified as slums. These are the people involved in daily supplies, transportation, sanitation, etc. playing a crucial role in making of any city.

The term ‘urban poor’ has been one of the more telling indicators of how poverty has seeped into the confines of advanced, urban societies today. In large part it involves migrant and inhabitants of informal settlements. In other words: a segment of population whose members go about in search of livelihood from city to city, playing a crucial role towards day-to-day functioning but ironically remain devoid of settlement, themselves. As a result these workers

remain one of the most neglected and marginalized sections of modern society.

Since its inception in 1989, Saath has worked with the urban poor. Working on a need-based intervention model, Saath initiated operations as an informal youth group in Behrampura, Ahmedabad. “Saath’s founder Mr Rajendra Joshi used to visit the area and engage with the youth in sports,” recalls Niraj Jani (Executive Director), while tracing the early days of the organization, “One of these days, while enjoying a conversation, he learnt about the critical aspects of the community that needed to be worked upon. This is the way Saath has involved in understanding the needs of the community.” Joshi would then identify community leaders, who would then be instrumental in facilitating the process of service.

Issues like health and sanitation were the most relevant in the 90s, but later on youth empowerment, savings and education gained more relevance. “As a result, irrelevant programs ceased to function and the new relevant ones were introduced,” says Joshi. Gradually, trust developed between Saath and members of the community. Another segment of the same community resided in an area called Vasna, which became the next area of intervention. “During the 1990s, in collaboration with Municipal Corporation, corporates, other NGOs, state government departments, Saath implemented its flagship program called Integrated Slum Development Project (ISDP). As the name suggests, it looked beyond infrastructural improvements of the slums and started adopting an integrated approach. The activities that were conducted with the communities included non-formal education, livelihood, health, savings and credit, and housing to name a few. It aimed at identifying the community leaders who would act as change agents for different developmental aspects. It was done through forming Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and Self Help Groups (SHGs).” Joshi explains.

Until the Bhuj Earthquake of 2001, Saath had presence in Ahmedabad before it began work at Kutch where it began relief

work, focussing on the epicentre of the earthquake. After the Gujarat Riots of 2002, Saath started working in multiple areas for rehabilitation and largely in minority dominant area, which required intervention at multiple levels. “Immediately post riots, Saath got an opportunity to work with Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) across the city. This was the largest expansion within the city,” Niraj explains.

In 2005, Saath began a journey to pioneer another programme named ‘Udaan’, which aimed at providing formal training to the youth belonging to the informal settlement. The objective was simple: placement in formal job roles. Inspired by the model, The Gujarat Government joined hands with Saath to implement it in eight major cities. “Simultaneously, the Rajasthan Government also adopted the model and Saath trained over 55,000 youth with more than 75% of placements,” says Shikha, “All the programmes of Saath, including affordable housing, rehabilitation and financial inclusion have branched out through crucial needs of the community at the particular time.”

During the implementation of any program, the community is an equally responsible partner for its success and sustainability. “This requires handholding support and capacity building of members, who in a way plays a major role in decision making process. Through empowerment, new social enterprises have developed. Based on the need, the program innovates itself at the next level ensuring win-win situation for all the partners,” says Joshi, “Any programme that Saath has undertaken has served as a means to achieve the vision of integrated development and not an end.” This includes programmes surrounding livelihood, education, microfinance, governance or housing.

With Government schemes like Skill India forming great opportunities for formal livelihood, informal livelihood has been neglected. “This is an irony as 80% of the country’s economy is dependent of informal sector which consists of micro-entrepreneurs, construction workers, electricians and plumbers among others,” points out Niraj.

As it steps into the future, Saath envisions the need to focus more on education, informal livelihood, and shelter — largely focusing on migrants. It plans to achieve this through a four-pronged process.

- Implementation: as per the needs of the community
- Facilitation: through possible linkages
- Partnership: for wider outreach, strength and accountability
- Data collection and information dissemination: for influencing existing policies

“Saath will follow a systematic approach to scale up in next three years,” says Niraj, “We have been exploring the avenues where scaling can be done.” The organization is now looking at the following approaches:

Successful models that are proving to be effective can be replicated to the new geographies considering its local context and needs

- Existing programs can be strengthened through rigorous monitoring emphasizing on quality and exploring innovative scopes.
- New areas of work will be explored either based on the needs of the communities or existing partners may wish to expand in other regions or sectors.

In last two years, Saath has expanded to Bihar (Madhwapur) and Jharkhand (Ranchi & Deoghar) for livelihood programs in collaboration with government. It also implements Financial Literacy Program that is aimed at facilitating affordable housing to informal settlement dwellers in Rajasthan (Jaipur), Uttar Pradesh (Varanasi), and Jharkhand (Ranchi). It is going to implement the same project in Chattisgarh (Raipur) and a few other cities of India.

“By utilizing Saath’s three decades of experience working with the communities, its market and need based innovative approach within multiple sectors, its reach and engaging with the stakeholders Saath will be able to empower two lakh vulnerable families by 2020, by working for their livelihoods, housing (R&R), financial inclusion, community leadership and education,” says Niraj, explaining what the future might hold. But to succeed, Saath will work towards building capacities, increasing its team in terms of members and community leaders. But that’s not all. “We need to use technology for bringing quality, cost-effectiveness monitoring, bring accountability, expand its current reach, leverage inter-linkages and bring in more funds by taking new approach and tapping new sources,” says Niraj, signing off.

–*JS*

13. SNEHA

Healthy Woman, Healthy World



Today, we have the pleasure of exploring the work of an NGO, one of the Great Indian stories - one of resilience against injustice, one of purpose in the face of chaos, one of transformation within fortresses of superstition.

The Society for Nutrition, Education and Health Action (SNEHA), Mumbai was formally founded in 1999, but the seeds for it were sown much earlier. Founder, Dr. Armida Fernandez, in her long years of working as a neonatologist in Mumbai's largest public hospital, Lokmanya Tilak Municipal General Hospital, identified the need for improving health seeking behaviour in low income communities, particularly of women and children. Says Hamsini Ravi of SNEHA, "The hospital is located close to Dharavi, Asia's largest informal settlement (colloquially known as slum), a densely populated area. Seeing a large proportion of newborns succumb to various illnesses, Dr. Fernandez pioneered several low-cost innovations within the hospital to increase their chances of survival. However, she observed that many of the children died once they were outside the safety of the hospital, and many

developed chronic cognitive and physical disabilities. It was at this point in time, she realized that in order to make a lasting impact in the health of children who hail from vulnerable communities, she should take her ideas outside the hospital, closer to people's homes.

So, Dr. Fernandez and a few of her colleagues began to regularly visit the slums, educate women on: the benefits of breastfeeding; care during pregnancy; nutrition of infants and young children; besides other essential health messages that they hoped would help the women and children lead healthy lives.

“SNEHA follows a two-pronged approach,” explains Hamsini, “We work closely with public health systems (to build capacity among public health workers and enable the system to deliver high quality public health services), as well as with communities (to build health-seeking behaviour, thereby helping them demand high quality services from public systems). SNEHA is focused on building evidence-based models of health interventions for the health and nutrition of women and children living in vulnerable areas, focusing on Maternal and Newborn Health; Child Health and Nutrition; Adolescent Health and Sexuality and Prevention of Violence against Women and Children.”

“In India, more than 289,000 women die from pregnancy and childbirth-related complications each year. Most of these deaths are preventable with adequate prenatal care and education,” says Hamsini. How does SNEHA tackle this problem? By establishing a maternity referral network. SNEHA partners with local municipal corporations to strengthen maternal and newborn referral processes. The aim is to reduce the load on over-burdened health facilities and to ensure that high risk pregnancies receive timely critical care.

SNEHA works with the staff of Primary Health Care to develop effective processes, track efficiency, and to build awareness on the issue. They also facilitate the formation and skill-building of voluntary women's groups that can address health needs and promote healthy practices, particularly for mothers and

newborns. These groups come in particularly handy in the event of emergencies.

SNEHA's flagship nutrition programme, "Aahar," works to treat and prevent malnutrition in children under 3 years of age. They partner with the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and their work covers 150 anganwadis (child care centres) across vulnerable settlements in Dharavi and Wadala.

Recognizing the need for discussing sexual behavior and sexual health during early years, SNEHA has developed programs for young people between the ages of 10 and 19 years. Their Resource Centres offer a non-judgemental and safe space for adolescents to come and share their questions and concerns. The centres house a multi-media library on Sexuality, Gender, Health and Human Rights. These centres engage with parents and Community Gate-Keepers as well.

Women are particularly at risk of encountering violence. Through their Crisis Centers, SNEHA provides counseling for survivors of violence and facilitates access to medical, legal and police services. Women volunteers monitor the safety of women and children in their area, providing emotional support, also connecting women to Crisis-Intervention services. SNEHA trains and sensitizes police, staff of municipal hospitals and legal aid lawyers to deal more effectively with cases of violence. They do advocacy work including but not limited to the effective implementation of the Protection for Women against Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and Protection of Children against Sexual Offences, 2012.

"Our biggest challenge in working with urban slum communities is the constant geographic mobility and migration," says Hamsini, "Many of our beneficiaries tend to move halfway through our intervention, and that compromises the quality of care and level of intervention that we can offer them. The other challenge is the inherent heterogeneity in urban slum communities, that makes community mobilization a challenge. Varying cultural practices

within communities present unique challenges with respect to standardizing our group education strategies and content. Doing home-visits to provide customized care helps us be mindful of cultural beliefs of each family and ensures continued cooperation from their end to our services. Also, making our data collection processes more robust and real time helps us keep track of our communities movement patterns.” A glance of the individual cases handled by SNEHA, available on their website, best illustrates these challenges.

SNEHA continues to look at newer areas of intervention with their other initiatives such as the Mahila Arogya Samiti, Sanjeevan Mobile Health Clinic, Romila Palliative Care and their Nurse Aid Programme. CEO of SNEHA, Vanessa D’Souza is prominently quoted as saying that her vision for SNEHA is that she hopes that in the long term there is no need for SNEHA to exist. When asked what brings about such a counter-intuitive thought, we are told, “Rather than growing our programs exponentially, we are focused on creating and testing programmes that can be replicated by either other NGOs in different parts of the country and by the Government. If our programmes were to be replicated and institutionalized by the Government, and if such institutions catered to an informed community that is empowered enough to demand services from public systems, our field-level services would no longer be needed,” she signs off.

–*JS*

14. SOUTH INDIAN POSITIVE NETWORK

Noori Saleem



Noori Saleem, a 68-year-old transwoman, is an inspiration for transgenders, especially those living with HIV/Aids. She was the third person to be officially declared HIV-positive by the Indian government in 1987. She was born as the second male child in the family, followed by a younger sister.

Despite the progress made in recent years, India still has a long way to go in acknowledging the rights of transgenders. If such is the scenario today, it definitely wouldn't have been easy for Noori about 30 years ago.

“I was born in Ramanathapuram district, and the pressure from my community when they learnt that I was a transgender was dreadful. They said that they would have killed me if I had born in their family. My neighbours blamed me for things that I didn't do and my parents tortured me due to societal pressure. I had to discontinue my studies and was insulted in my school because of my mannerisms and way of expression. I was therefore forced to leave my home when I was 13 years old,” she says.

Noori came to Chennai as she had nowhere to go. In a city full of strangers, and with all the things she had gone through, she was clueless on what to do next. “I met a transgender person in the Chennai railway station who advised me to be a bar dancer or a sex worker. I requested for domestic work instead and worked in a house for over three years,” she says.

When Noori heard about her father being very ill, she rushed back home. Sadly, he passed away a few days later. Her mother coaxed her to marry a girl and fixed her wedding too. She left her house yet again and this time went to Mumbai to live in a commune and earned money for three years.

“I returned to Chennai, underwent castration, and married my close friend. As time passed, people looked at us with disgust and hatred. I survived all of this because of my husband who was there to support me. I was forced to become a sex worker due to lack of employment opportunities. In July 1987, I was diagnosed for HIV/AIDS. I visited the hospital for treatment and when I mentioned my gender in the registration form ‘female’, the hospital authorities demanded me to write as ‘male’. Although I refused, I was asked to stand in the queue for men. This again was a problem as men did not allow me to wait in their queue. We are always fighting for our recognition! I finally managed to get the treatment. I did not inform my husband as he was working in Sri Lanka as a guard and died in a helicopter crash in 1993,” she adds.

People Living with HIV/AIDS face stigma, and this is severe when they are transgenders. It is difficult for them to get first line ARV treatment as it is not provided free of cost by the government.

“I am now undergoing second line ARV Treatment. I hope that transgenders are provided free treatment and they are also recognized equally as men or women. Even animals have rights and are covered under insurance. Are we worse than that? We are not recognized by our own families or societies or government. We

do not need charity but recognition as equal to men and women as we too need a lead a life with dignity,” she says.

Noori started working as a social activist and launched a ‘South Indian Positive Network’. Her aim is to serve all people who are affected by HIV/AIDS. The organization offers support to HIV positive people, besides funeral services.

In 2005, she started South Indian Positive Network Memorial Home in memory of her three close friends who died due to HIV/AIDS. This home is running successfully and has 40 children now. “I have a lot of friend at UNAIDS who offer free treatment to those affected by HIV/AIDS. I owe my thanks to them for making me who I am today, and fighting for those who are affected by HIV/AIDS,” she says.

Noori has received a number of awards from the Tamil Nadu government, including the Life Time Achievement award. She has also been recognised as the best woman social worker by Raj TV. Noori has travelled to over 26 countries like Canada, Japan, Australia, and Thailand as a public speaker on AIDS-related issues.

Noori Saleem is the newly elected APACHA International Board member. “I am very happy to be the Executive Member of such a large alliance. I hope I will be able to contribute for the growth of the alliance and together make a difference in India and Asia,” she says.

15. VAISHNAVI CHARITABLE TRUST

Health and Nourishment, the ancient way



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dr Sangeeta explains how Ashwagandha (*Withania Somnifera* Dunal), along with appetizers and carminatives which enhance the Agni (digestive fire) like long pepper, black pepper, cardamom, dried ginger, cinnamon, clove with palm sugar is often credited as a rejuvenator, growth promoter, immune-modulator, increases haemoglobin, anti-depressant, anti-bacterial, increases RBC and improvement in hair melanin. She then explains that milk is the best vehicle to get medicine absorbed by the body. "Out of the eight milk sources, cow's milk is considered as the best according to Ayurveda," says Dr Sangeeta, "Chemically speaking, milk is a complex fluid in which more than 100 separate chemical compounds have been found. Its major components are water, fat, lactose, casein, whey proteins, and minerals (or ash) in amounts varying with the milk of various species of animals."

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

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

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

Deepa adds, "Even when they were affected it lasted only for a few days and the potency of infection and symptoms were much lesser. Skin issues are rampant in hostels like these due to hygiene conditions and the habits of the children themselves. Out of the 250 students, 180 students had skin issues. Now only 50 children have them and that's solely due their hygiene habits."

The key contributor to this improvement is the simple fact that Ayurveda focuses on the Etiopathogenesis (cause of the disease) of the disease and the subsequent elimination of these factors. "That is the reason why we have appointed Ayurveda physicians at every centre for the complete examination of the child," says Mohan, "They focus on teaching them Dinacharya (Daily proper regimen

to be followed by an individual), Ritucharya (do's and don't's to be followed in every season), Swasthavritta (healthy and hygienic habits) and Sadvritta (ethical and moral development) which are the important aspects for a person to live healthy.”

The Vaishnavi Charitable Trust has outlined its vision — that every child grows up learning and inculcating the principles of Ayurveda, which will bring a sense of wellbeing and can completely eradicate malnourishment not only for themselves but also future generations. While the trust itself may only be four years old, it has already impacted 1,000 young lives and is currently working to support 560 children across six different locations. The Jeevani Milk Scheme continues to be its main project. “We have a panel of doctors with one doctor from each district. The next step would be teaching and training on simple principles of Ayurveda to the teachers and student community. We are also getting into formal documentation and facilitation of research works by Ayurveda doctors as well,” says Deepa.

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

–*JS*

This is a book that you will want to dip into rather than read from cover to cover. It is divided into five sections: talk from CSIM Alulmi; inspiring conversations with celebrities, profiles of NGOs, short articles on positive thinking, and trendsetters.



Each section contains articles to inspire the reader. They are thoughtful stories about what ordinary people are doing on a day-to-day basis. It is humbling to read about how people and organisations have developed and changed when addressing some of the most tricky social and community problems of our time.

Alan Kay

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