

# Conversations

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## From the Editor

Dear Friends,  
For how long have you dreamt of being, having, and doing what you really want? Think big, as when it comes to your goals, the size of your ambition does matter.

The profound differences between successful people and others are the goals they choose to pursue. Individuals with similar talents, intelligence, and abilities will achieve different results because they select and pursue different goals. The nature and direction of your

life change the instant you decide what goals you want to pursue.

Each and every change maker featured this month had a dream and a goal. They have been instrumental in making others dream too. Let us all emulate them!

**P. N. Devarajan**



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# Delhi Calling..



In this times where scams have overshadowed all other news, it is imperative that we have some method of tracking where all the tax monies gets distributed. Social Audit has become an important tool that could help us in this area. CSIM is incubating the Social Audit Network (SAN), India which will promote the concept of Social Accounts and Audit amongst organizations/projects

working for the welfare of our society. Last month, Banu and I were in New Delhi where we had the privilege of meeting individuals who were keen on implementing pro active measures to improve transparency within the government. Our first meeting was with a group of around 20 auditors and officers of the Comptroller and Auditor General Office who were involved in auditing various Government schemes.



We oriented them about the Social Accounting and Audit framework that SAN was implementing. These professionals were very keen to adopt the social audit framework and voiced an opinion that this would be an effective mechanism to track government spending. While we were in Delhi, Social activist Anna Hazare was on a hunger strike demanding changes in the Anti-

corruption Lokpal Bill, an Act to create effective anti-corruption and grievance redressal systems at the centre so that effective deterrent is created against corruption, and effective protection to whistleblowers is provided. Banu and I witnessed the solidarity amongst the general public and the organizers to find a solution to end corruption in our Country.

—Latha Suresh

ADD SPARKLE TO THE SEASON WITH A TOUCH OF THE ORIENT AT **China Town**  
 A SIP OF SCINTILLATING SPAIN AT **Zara**  
 A TINGE OF EXOTIC THAILAND AT **Benjarong**  
 A MESMERISING SENSE OF NORTH INDIA AT **COPPER CHIMNEY**  
 A SPLASH OF COASTAL FRESHNESS AT **Kokum**  
 A MÉLANGE OF SPICES AT **ENTÉ KERALAM**  
 AND VEGETARIAN GOODNESS AT **Cream Centre**

Rubina Mazhar is one such participant of the 8th batch of SEOP in Hyderabad, whose idea gained ground and took shape while she was doing the course with CSIM. Rubina's Magic Carpet project is about empowering economically backward women of the Muslim community without disturbing their cultural ethos. She chose to adopt a strategy that will help build trust among the community and then deliver the goods.

Rubina's firm conviction that women are agents of change for future generations, led her to start SAFA Society targeting Muslim women in Hyderabad. A personal insight of the dynamics of the community helped her to crystallize intervention plans for these women.

Magic Carpet is a project that provides economic support to families below the poverty line by introducing a work-from-home model. The women are taught embroidery and tailoring, and produce mats, bags, pouches, and dresses from their homes. 225 women have been trained and 52 of them are part of the SAFA core production group who has started the production. SAFA provides market liaison support to sell these products. Rubina actively networks with professional design institutes to offer training to these women, which makes their work elegant and professional. SAFA is adapting the MOVE program—Market Oriented Value Enhancement program—that has been successful in Karnataka, to motivate the trained women towards entrepreneurship.

“Any skill training given without the value addition of motivation, vision setting, and



# THE MAGIC CARPET

Magic Carpet project is about empowering economically backward women of the Muslim community without disturbing their cultural ethos



market orientation is a waste of NGO resources. Even our *henna*/tattoo design team of young girls customizes their craft, and are now armed with a design book and rate card,” says Rubina.

The Magic Carpet project is about getting the women to do value addition on handloom mats sitting in the house. The carpet is used predominantly for religious purpose and the profit earned by its sale is shared with the women. The earned income is channelized towards the education of the girl child in the family. “This two-pronged strategy helps in addressing the problem of today as well as the future. Besides, as the women of the house need not have to go out to earn that income, it fits well within the community's norms. As she contributes to the family's income, her respect and self-esteem is bound to grow which will help her in taking bolder and progressive decisions for the family,” adds Rubina.

The product chosen is extremely sensitive and attractive which is sure to appeal to the religious sentiments of the community. The

carpets are targeted for the prayers in local mosque, exports, and as corporate gifts. Rubina is working toward seeking support from funding agencies and corporate houses for taking the initiative forward. As it has an income component integrated in the enterprise, she envisages making the project sustainable in a period of two years.

“Over a period of two years we are also producing yoga/prayer mats which are now designed by a NIFT designer. Besides, we also make unique jute and other cotton products too,” she says.

Realizing that education is a tool for sustainable development of children SAFA has launched two programs and two projects. Roshni club is a weekly club based activity program for women to educate them on common diseases, women's hygiene, and low cost nutrition; Awaaz is an interactive and comprehensive program for children on health, hygiene, sanitation, interpersonal relations, and general awareness. As the dropout rate amongst Muslim girl children is very high, she has also launched ‘Neenv Project’—a sponsorship

program to ensure continuity in education for the vulnerable children. Till date, around 140 children have benefited from these programs.

Rubina is currently working on starting an online and stand alone store for the SAFA products in Hyderabad. She proposes to launch a sanitary napkin unit to generate income for 20 homes. She also plans to reach out to 250 girl children and ensure that they do not drop out from schools.

Ready for launch on 1st of May 2011 is a

campaign called ‘Bleed Green’ based on promoting environment friendly carry bags at retail outlets. The main objective of this campaign is to create an income generating activity for 20 women (who sew the bags) and add no to plastic them.

A true social entrepreneur indeed, Rubina wants to replicate her model in many slums of Hyderabad and in other cities too!

—Latha Suresh

“  
The product chosen is extremely sensitive and attractive which is sure to appeal to the religious sentiments of the community  
”



# Victims, Volunteers, and VOLUNTARY-VICTIMS

Anantapur is one of the 17 districts identified as centres of human trafficking in Andhra Pradesh by the state

Neeta (name changed) lived the typical life of an average village woman in the Kadiri mandal of Anantapur. Her poverty-stricken parents married her off at an early age. She endured two difficult pregnancies and an abusive, alcoholic husband. One day, after brutally beating her up, her husband pushed her out of the house. Her parents offered neither solace nor shelter. As far as they were concerned, she now 'belonged to her husband'. Alone, frightened and with nowhere to go, she travelled to the Tirupati temple. Her prayers were answered perhaps a bit too soon. At the temple, she met a man who brought her back to her parents' house and married her. A few weeks after the wedding, she found herself abandoned by him at a brothel in Bhiwandi, near Mumbai.

Anantapur is one of the 17 districts identified as centres of human trafficking in Andhra Pradesh. Extreme poverty, dis-empowerment of women, lack of education, heavy migration, and unemployment contribute to the steady trafficking of women. Mrs. S. Shanu, Program Coordinator – Society to Help Rural Empowerment and Education (STHREE), a commendable anti-trafficking NGO working in Anantapur says, "People in this district are extremely poor. When times are particularly bad, young girls often come forward and volunteer to work as domestic labourers or factory workers. In most cases, these girls are duped and taken to brothels in Delhi, Mumbai, and Pune. But, in some cases, the girls knowingly enter the sex-trade."

Promises of jobs or marriages in middle-eastern countries lure several young women from Kadiri. Their 'agents' take them to Mumbai or Delhi for a Visa and sometimes dump them at one of the brothels in the city. There are times when they are sent to the promised country to work in the sex-trade there. Alarmed at the increasing rate of international human trafficking, the state government established a Passport Office at Kadiri, last year. "Here, every woman applying for a passport is counseled and informed about the possible consequences of going abroad," says Ramramanjanyul, Assistant Sub-Inspector of Police. But many women are still adamant. "They make up stories about relatives living abroad," he sighs.

"It's a very lucrative business," says Ms. Hema Bedi, Director, STHREE. "Law enforcement agencies, politicians and local *goondas*—all are making money out of it. Initially, the local police was also involved to a certain extent. Now, their level of corruption has come down considerably, especially on this issue," she adds as an afterthought.

Amongst the more backward classes of Anantapur, although women too work, the finances are controlled by the men. The absence



of satisfactory work or income results in high frustration levels. A lot of these men are alcoholics and fritter away their daily wages on alcohol. So, in actuality, it is the woman who has to manage the house on her meager income.

Mrs. M. Krishnaveni, Director, Uravakonda region, Rural Development Trust (RDT), an NGO working towards village rehabilitation in Anantapur says, "These men come back home at night, stone-drunk and demand non-vegetarian food for dinner. On being served a simple meal instead, they beat their wives mercilessly. Sometimes, they sell their wives; more often, unable to cope with the domestic violence, the women themselves run away. Several agents and middle-men, all over the district, lure these exceedingly unhappy women into brothels."

For the first two years in a brothel, these women are locked up; they aren't allowed to visit their families and are made to learn Hindi. The 'tricks of the trade' are beaten into them. Occasionally, a peeved customer would complain about her impertinence to her *sethani* (brothel keeper). Every complaint had one result for her: physical abuse. But, that was only in the beginning. After two-three years, a bond of trust develops between the women and the brothel-keepers, and the women are allowed a considerable amount of freedom and mobility.

This is when some of them, usually with the help of a compassionate customer, contact their

families and are rescued through combined efforts of the NGO and the Police. However, several of them fall into the rhythm of the work. Compared to the miserable lives they led back home, the pathetic conditions of a brothel seem luxurious. They begin to feel like mistresses of their own domain and find it splendid. The clothes that once looked vulgar begin to appear fashionable. "They

**They eat fancy food, start drinking alcohol and chewing gutka. Once they return to their villages, they aren't able to adjust**

eat fancy food, start drinking alcohol and chewing *gutka*. Once they return to their villages, they aren't able to adjust. They miss their freedom and lifestyle. They don't want to work here. A lot of them go back to the brothels, taking other troubled women from the villages along with them," says Mrs. Shanu.

The government provides a relief of Rs. 10,000 to every rescued woman. This money is used for rehabilitation. "It takes a few months for the money to come through. Until then, the local police hands over the rescued women to shelters through the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) or Swadhar homes—shelters provided by the government," says Police Constable H. Obulesh.

Neeta was rescued last year. She's living at STHREE's rehabilitation centre for now. As soon as the relief money is processed, the NGO will shift her to a suitable accommodation. "I want to go back to my village," she firmly states. She cannot go back home, her family refuses to accept her. "I'll do some coolie work," she says uncertainly. But there is a dearth of employment opportunities in the district. Neeta can only hope for the best.

The treatment meted out to the women who have returned depends on the community to which they belong. The Sugalis are a backward, semi-nomadic tribe in the region. Large numbers of Sugali women are trafficked. Mrs. Shanu explains, "It's a part of their cultural tradition. The Sugalis are a sexually violent community. Since there is a lot of money involved in sex-trade, they have no qualms about getting into it. Once the women return, they are married off within the community. There is little or no stigma attached."

But, most other communities aren't so accommodating. Very few families accept the girls when they return. Most women are isolated but not expelled from the villages. In poorer communities where the families were involved in the trafficking process, the women are accepted but disrespected. Food becomes a major issue; they are given meager portions and are asked to fend for themselves. The need for money draws them back in the loop of sex-trade.

"It's not about the money. Freedom governs the principle of not coming back to the villages," says Ms. Hema Bedi. "It's the level of freedom, good times – the chicken, mutton, *daaru*, *gutka*, *tambaku* – a seemingly easy living that these girls get used to," she adds disdainfully. "The moment they are caught, they are in a system and they feel restricted." As far as the limited employment opportunities are concerned, she feels that many facilities and opportunities are available. "It's just that they don't want to work hard. It takes a level of thinking and effort to take an NIFD course, a beautician's course, or to undergo factory training. They have no concentration, no discipline," she firmly states with the authority of someone who has been attempting to mitigate trafficking in this area for nearly a decade.

"Overall, human trafficking from Anantapur has decreased considerably," explains Ms. Hema Bedi. Part of the reason was HIV. "It scared the living daylights out of everybody. Some families are too scared to send their daughters to cities now," she adds. "This in turn, affected the legitimate employment opportunities available in the cities. Nobody knows where the girls will be working when they go to the cities. So, in some communities, people now avoid sending their daughters and wives for work," says Mrs. Shanu.

Mr. B. Sirappa, Director Health, RDT has a slightly different take. He believes that although HIV has reduced human trafficking, it isn't a considerable difference. "A lot of parents and husbands are still selling their daughters. But, awareness is increasing and sex-workers are using condoms."

—Saudamini Jain  
Asian College of Journalism

# Ageless touch



**A National revolution was led by one Jayaprakash Narayan during the 70's, and now in 2010— JP of Bangalore leads a new revolution**

The Dignity foundation, founded in year 1995 in Mumbai by Dr Sheilu Sreenivasan and having a chapter in Bangalore addresses the very important societal need of the elderly (50 years or above) living their post retirement life with peace and cheer in their lives. Over the course of their journey, the Dignity foundation has taken numerous initiatives towards addressing their needs.

These include:

- **Social Support Cell:** Providing social support to seniors who have no one to care for them by accompanying them to hospital, lab, temple, etc.
- **Second Careers:** Enabling post-retirement career opportunities for seniors who want to contribute to society but have no channels of doing so. This also provides them with earning opportunities.
- **Recreation:** Organizing cultural activities like dramas, music festivals, etc where senior citizens can participate as artistes or as audience.
- **Companionship:** Dignity Foundation volunteers visiting the depressed or lonely elderly people house and spending time with them for a couple of hours on a need basis.
- **Counseling:** Providing professional counseling in the areas of Legal, Financial, Health, Insurance, etc.

## Emotional Compatibility

Companionship is a simple concept wherein anyone who has a few hours to spare can take part with minimal effort. Engaging in a meaningful conversation or empathizing with the person's perspective makes a huge difference in the life of a senior citizen, whose sole affliction is often an

eerie loneliness throughout the day.

To make the companionship initiative more effective Dignity foundation has identified volunteers and senior citizens who live within the vicinity of each other and also people who share a mutual interest.

However, of late the Dignity Foundation has taken to address an even more fundamental

requirement of people—food—the lack of which afflicts uncountable number of senior citizens primarily belonging to the lower economic background. This new initiative involves distribution of ration for needy senior citizens.

There are myriad reasons why many elders end up in such a situation. This includes a heart

wrenching story of widows with a well educated daughter, albeit a drug addict, or even worse a man with grown up sons, both having abandoned their father. There are yet others who have severe eyesight problems, and having exhausted their wealth in medical expenses can no longer afford their food expenses.

Irrespective of their background, Dignity Foundation has stepped in and embraced them with open arms. The first 25 beneficiaries have been identified from in and around Bangalore.

## Corporates partner—May that tribe increase!

In this initiative, Tata Elxsi has stepped in and agreed to support 10 people on a regular basis.

Two large hearted volunteers at the Dignity foundation have gone one step further and have sponsored the PUC education of the daughter of one gentleman who is invalid.

## Another JP

The fact that the Dignity Foundation has been able to progress this quickly in the newest of their various initiatives is largely due to the ingenuity, passion, and dedication of the Bangalore Chapter head Jayaprakash, affectionately known as JP. However he feels that 25 needy people is barely a drop in the ocean of needless suffering, and wants this initiative to expand further to reach a much wider audience.

A National revolution was led by one Jayaprakash Narayan during the 70's, and now in 2010— JP of Bangalore leads a new revolution.

"I would feel greatly honored if some of the readers could step in to expand this initiative in the way they can in their personal capacity," says JP.

It is not out of place to say, that JP is one of the proud alumni of CSIM!



—Avinandan Deenadayalan

# Creating New Horizons

A group of children were playing in one of the bylanes at Bawana, a resettlement colony 20 kilometers away from main city of Delhi. Although the lanes were bordered with open drains, the stench did not seem to deter these children from play. While Nisha stood in the middle singing a song, the others went around her in a circular form. When she paused from singing, the rest formed groups of two or three based on her instructions. "This is how they learn mathematics," says Sunny, coordinator, Navjyoti India Foundation.

Navjyoti India Foundation, formerly known as Navjyoti Delhi Police Foundation, is a voluntary organisation formed under the leadership of Dr. Kiran Bedi IPS. Navjyoti has been running several interventions in the area of education, women empowerment, health care, vocational training, rural development, environment, and counseling besides others.

"There are around 70,000 families who live in Bawana and 3,000 children study in 102 Gali schools (bylane schools) and remedial education centres coordinated by Navjyoti. Most of these families have been relocated from Yamuna Pushta slums during 2004. The government having provided each family with only a barren piece of land measuring 18 square meters, the family had to construct their own tenement. As this community lacked access to basic services, Navjyoti started its work here," adds Sunny.

Gali Schools were started by Navjyoti to impart education at the child's doorstep. These supplementary centres apart from offering regular tuitions also help in identifying the hidden talents of the children through its various skill building programs. While some families offered their tenements to conduct the Gali School in the evenings, few schools are run in open terraces as well. There are 47 full-time teachers who teach in these schools. Besides education, children are also taught music and dance.

Noor Syed, a past student of Gali School is now employed as a teacher here. She says: "I studied in Gali school for ten years and started working here after completing my tenth standard. I will be appearing for the 12 standard examinations next year and would like to continue working here."

The children are prompt in attendance as the teachers ensure that there are zero drop-out rates in their class. Play way method is used for teaching and besides education, children are also taught extra-curricular activities like music and dance.

"I am proud of my teacher. He is the best teacher I have ever had and I wish he teaches me every year. I have been studying in the Gali school for the past three years. My teacher encourages me a lot. I aspire to become a doctor and would like to say 'thanks' to all my teachers at Navjyoti," says Neetu a student.

At Bawana, Navjyoti also coordinates a health programme that is managed by two Allopathy and two Homeopathy doctors. It is learnt that the common ailment amongst the children is worm infection. Every child undergoes a health check up once in three months and they are sensitized on health and hygiene practices. Baseline and endline tests are conducted for each child and their hemoglobin levels are assessed. Iron fortified biscuits are provided by Britannia to over 2200 children who benefit from this programme, and vaccination is provided through Max India foundation for all these children.

Mobile health camps are organized to reach out to people living at Bawana industrial area and monthly health camps are also conducted in Sir Gangaram hospital at Delhi. Besides, Navjyoti coordinates a family counseling centre to address issues such as domestic violence and family disputes.

For over 22 years Navjyoti has been bringing children into the 'school-fold' through acceptable and need based programmes such as 'Gali Schools', 'Primary Schools', mainstreaming them into municipal schools, and identifying the talented children for scholarships. Presently, Navjyoti coordinates 102 Gali schools and remedial education centres in 13 blocks of Bawana resettlement colony benefiting 3000 children.

"We now dream to move on from Bylanes to Buildings, to bring all scattered education programmes under one roof, called Navjyoti Gurukul and let the model become replicable for those in similar situations," says Dr. Kiran Bedi.

Navjyoti has launched a community college registered with IGNOU in June 2010 which offers certificate as well as diploma courses to the youth



There are around 70,000 families who live in Bawana and 3,000 children study in 102 Gali schools (bylane schools) coordinated by Navjyoti

of the community around Bawana and Karala village. Amongst their vocational training programmes, computer training and spoken English have the highest enrollment rate. The college is equipped with computer labs and each class room is connected with multi media. "Navjyoti Community College (NJCC) aims to encourage the learners to reinforce their dreams in their heart and soul by providing a lifetime of learning to the diverse community it serves. We teach our students to be courageous, to overcome the impediments and barriers with integrity, and to rise above the challenges. Our education methodology focuses not only to produce competent students, but also compassionate and conscientious change-makers," says Chandni,

Principal Secretary, NJCC.

Navjyoti also focuses in the area of women empowerment. Till date, they have formed 100 Self-help groups that consist of 1,200 women belonging to 40 villages in Sohna block. Recently, they registered themselves as a federation under the Societies Act and have an elected President, Treasurer, and Secretary. "Women who were once illiterate are now empowered. The government schools are now approaching the federation to advocate with the government for providing infrastructure like tube wells and roads," says Ujala, Head-Operations, Rural Development Programme.

All women self-help group members have a savings account with the Grameen bank and their defaulter rate is zero. Hailing from the farming community

they have utilized the loans to purchase buffaloes or to set up small enterprises like cosmetic shops, and grocery shops. Some earn around Rs. 10,000 rupees a month as they have started to supplying goods in wholesale.

"We are fortunate to have had the adulation and support of people all along. What keeps Navjyoti going is the genuine intention to make a meaningful change in the lives of those we serve and the zeal and enthusiasm to learn new things and implement them. The enduring support and belief of a lot of people, donors and friends has kept us going. It's taken us a long time to reach where we are today, but I feel that this is just the beginning," concludes Dr. Kiran Bedi.

—Marie Banu



"We now dream to move on from Bylanes to Buildings, to bring all scattered education programmes under one roof."  
—Dr. Kiran Bedi IPS  
Founder, Navjyoti India Foundation



Photos : Marie Banu

# Young and True Disciple of Gandhiji

Famous Tamil Poet Avvaiyar who lived several thousand years ago, gave a two word synonym for the Country's prosperity through agriculture and the slogan she told was, "Varappu oyara", meaning let the bunds raise. Yes, if the bunds raise, crops will be nurtured, people will benefit, and in the process the king will rule will. With such a powerful focus, Senthil in Payir attempts to raise not only the Bunds but also the Buds.

## Young Gandhian at work

The first thought which flashes through our mind the moment we think of software professional is, they are young, brash, well dressed, having an air of arrogance along with display of their materialistic possession. Probably this is stereotyping a software professional. But, what a contrast! Senthil, a young software professional, was inspired by the Gandhian thoughts since childhood and has tried to internalize it as a process within self. He has today successfully translated it to his work at Thenur village at Perambalur district in Tamil Nadu.

Senthil had a definitive stint at US, and had come back to translate his dream of making a meaning at his homeland, than chase big money and the comforts it brings. He has not only overcome the demons in his own mind, but also the words from his parents, friends, and relatives who sure would have advised against this. He invested all his earnings into his dream project Payir and started a NGO named Payir in 2005. Payir means sapling, symbolically reflecting "the growing up of youth". With 6 acres of land donated by his uncle and with the help of his friends he launched his organization at Thenur Village in Tamilnadu.

Payir promoted by Senthil envisages the transformation of Indian villages into a socially stimulating, self reliant, growth oriented community rooted in the principles of Truth—a society where people practice and interact with the highest moral values.

## A Model village in the making

It is a village which is willing to accept an experiment, an experiment which will lead to betterment in their quality of life. Well any such experiment has its own challenges. Some of them were:

- lack of primary health care facilities and sanitation
- high level of school drop-out rates
- non-viable farming, agricultural practices, and animal husbandry
- inadequate employment opportunities mainly during the non-agricultural seasons
- inefficient water management systems

## Health is wealth

A person who had done his homework well before he stepped into his dream project, also dreamt of how his health centre, learning centre, and other infrastructure facilities should look like and the materials to be used for this. It sure looks like a hermitage from where he executes his dream and it is something for one to believe, experience, and cherish. The design and plans



were drawn in consultation with Gandhigram University and with the help of volunteer civil engineers and architects which reflects rural life—simple, but practical and appealing.

Most material used in the construction was locally sourced, low cost, and environment friendly like earthen bricks, earthen tiles and thatch. An all women's unit was engaged in brick making and they used hand press machines during the course of construction.

Further, most of the labour was sourced from the village.

An two-bed outpatient health center with a laboratory and dispensary was born out of the hard labour of commitment and love. This center provides first aid, primary health care, low cost medicines, and laboratory services.

This software professional did not stop with this. A person, who had utilized technology to further his commitment and overcome obstacles, did not let go of this with regard to his health centre also. To reach out to a larger population he added outreach, health education, referral network for secondary and tertiary problems, and tele-medicine to his kitty of medical services. Sure, he used 'Intel outside' and 'mental outside'—a true differentiator from the Intellectual "ITIntelliants" of India.



## Envisaging Abdul Kalam's dream

Senthil truly believes that education is every child's birth right and it is one weapon that would go a long way in making a difference. He also adapts an innovative non-conventional learning methodology to teach children. The major objective of the learning centre is to provide a

non-formal education to village children belonging to the age group of 4–14 years. He emphasized on imparting useful real life education which the children can relate to and put to quick use. For the children between 4–9 years, Tamil and mathematics were the main subjects that were taught. Senthil is also convincing the education department about the usefulness of such non-conventional

method of teaching, and requesting them to recognize the same.

The learning centre also serves as a library—providing newspapers, magazines, and books. Technology is not spared here too. Senthil has used e-learning to proactively handle the issue of non-availability of teachers. Children use this facility to enhance their educational and improvement needs in subjects like English, Mathematics, Accounts, and Computers. Excellent support from e-tutors Sujatha, Angaraj, Sathish, and Venkat is offered for Payir staff. In addition to helping the tutors, Payir has also

setup a dedicated e-learning centre for tutors at Mambalam in Chennai with the support of Action2020 group.

## Agriculture, the backbone of the nation

Food and fertilizer free agricultural produce are becoming a scarce and costly commodity. There is also a slow and invisible revolution happening towards organic farming. Senthil contributes in his own responsible way towards this crusade as well.

Payir runs an organic farm in the donated land. The main goal of the farm is learn, develop, and train villagers on new/traditional environmentally sustainable agricultural techniques. Payir has started producing coconut compost within the farm, which is being used to fertilize the grove and garden. Payir shares its expertise to villagers for their livelihood development.

On the employment generation front Payir has ventured into producing Neem based organic fertilizer. This year they produced over 5 tons of fertilizer that was supplied to IIT Chennai, thereby providing employment opportunities to three persons for two months. Payir plans to introduce this programme as an annual supplementary source of income.

## Self help towards betterment

Self-help is the best help any individual or group can dream of. Interaction between Payir and the local villagers was instrumental in the formation of self-help groups by the villagers. This group has come together to finance and manage a dairy project. The group consists of both men and women considering that the village women are not part of any initiative outside their homes. Also notable is the fact that the idea was conceptualized and brought to fruition by the villagers themselves, with Payir merely playing an advisory role.

Payir believes that this is a milestone in its efforts towards self sufficiency. Payir hopes that this would fuel the development of more such self-help groups, which would take Payir further in the stated objective of empowering the villagers.

## Dreams for the future

Payir is in the process of finalizing a plan to generate electricity (1.5 KW) for electrifying the whole project using solar panels. Payir also intends to provide meaningful vocational training to village youth that can be used a source of income. One of Payir's efforts is to develop local leadership. Payir is hopeful of putting together a program on basics of Law, Panchayati Raj and general leadership skills.

## The Journey

The journey had been long and unwinding springing up surprises and challenges. But, it had been a journey of learning, connecting with people of same ideologies, garnering energy and faith from all those who pass by in this journey. It is happy to note that there are a few people who want to do, but have their own restrains. Come, join and pitch in to make Payir wholesome and the experience of being with Payir meaningful to them.

—Ambuja Easwaran and S.Deenadayalan

# HAVE WINGS, WILL FLY

**Y**outhful and energetic + Environment conscious + Adventure loving = Anybody's guess. The math is simple. However, the more difficult one to get, the match, has also been made. Cognizant's grass roots team, the Wild Wing Society, a wildlife conservation group is teeming with fervent volunteers. Hearing from Saravanan, a founding member, it appears that sensitivity towards nature is a part of the very lifestyle of those associated with this group.

In the year 2009, right after Saravanan and his friends graduated from Bannari Amman Institute of Technology and joined Cognizant, they were initiated into the work of Cognizant's twin social responsibility initiatives—Go Green and Outreach. Having established a proactive wildlife conservation society back in college, Saravanan discussed the idea of setting up one of Cognizant's own with his senior colleagues, and thus Wild Wing Society was born.

The Sathyamangalam forest is a well known tourist spot in Erode District. "Many people, especially tourists, go to these forested areas for booze and throw the bottles there. Elephants stamp on these bottles, get hurt, and die. So we started with cleaning campaigns along the highway," says Saravanan. The Forest Department has joined hands with Wild Wing Society by providing them with the necessary permissions to enter deep pockets of the Sathyamangalam Forest and the Anamalai Tiger Reserve.

The society has adopted a tribal hamlet called Malliamman Durgam, in the Sathyamangalam forest where 100 families reside. As a part of Cognizant's 'Green Books' program, education is promoted in the school for tribal children in Top Slip, which was originally set up and run by the Forest Department. "With increase in tribal population, there is increased dependence on the forests, resulting in mounting pressure on nature itself. For their own sake, the current and following generation of tribals must look out for



opportunities to move out of the forest area so as to conserve these forests," says Saravanan.

"Development should not be at the cost of environment and wildlife. We are not asking the people to completely desert the forests, nor are we asking the government to lay in-roads and make these heartlands motorable. No, that will only increase tourist footprint, further destroying what little of nature we have. Instead, we are helping these families relocate outside the forests and engage in work that they can easily get trained in, like agriculture. Through intervening with the tribal education system, we are trying to equalize the opportunities available to students regardless of their place of origin," he adds.

Five solar street lamps have been set up in Malliamman Durgam. To eliminate the chances of infection due to high fluoride content in the water, three reverse osmosis plants have been set up in Top Slip Tribal School. A group of volunteers travel from Chennai to Pollachi every weekend to teach the children at the school on Saturday. These volunteers attend a two-day intensive training

workshop before they set off to teach the children. As an incentive, a trek is arranged for these volunteers every Sunday. Further, they also help the forest rangers in conducting a wildlife census every year.

Talking about the issues that the Wild Wing Society helps to resolve, Saravanan says: "The people of Malliamman Durgam have been labeled under a casteist category—Malai Vellaala Gounder, instead of being given tribal status, thereby resulting in serious political implications. The tribals primarily grow ragi (finger millet), and pick gooseberries and jackfruit from the forests which are organically produced and are of high market value. Due to their remote location, they are dependent on middlemen who take the lion's share in the revenue generated."

"Whenever we visit the village, people come flocking to us for help on relatively minor issues like obtaining birth certificates. Many a times, a stray tiger kills a few villagers for which we offer compensation. We lobby with the government on behalf of these villagers and engage in continuous dialogue. We also plan to set up a store in the city to promote the sale of organic produce coming from Malliamman Durgam," adds Saravanan.

Cognizant's Outreach program is a beehive of grass root groups which are interlinked and inter-dependent. "Without the company's support, it would be difficult to manage the magnitude of the projects that we have undertaken. We align

ourselves with other grass root groups and share the expertise. Mr. Shankara Mahadevan of 'Dreams Alive' and Mr. Kartheeban of 'Team Everest' are a source of inspiration for us. They come with great expertise and are accessible anytime we require their guidance," he says.

Wild Wing Society and Bannari Amman Institute of Technology are also inextricably linked. With 400 students joining Cognizant this year, Saravanan looks forward to the expansion of his grass roots group's work beyond the Anamalai Hills and Sathyamangalam forest. The group has already formed a panel of scientists, organic farmers, and other important stakeholders.

"Our immediate plans are to set up a play ground for the children at the school in Top Slip within the next month. We have also started the 'Light Up, Life Up' (LULU) project where we intend to distribute 100 solar lamps to the villagers. Recently, one family has been shifted from their forest home to the edge of the forest near Pollachi, with the parents engaging in agriculture and their children attending school nearby. Having successfully relocated the first of the hundred tribal families, we are convinced of our resolve to reduce their dependency on forests and to help more families maintain a dignified, sustainable source of livelihood" quips Saravanan.

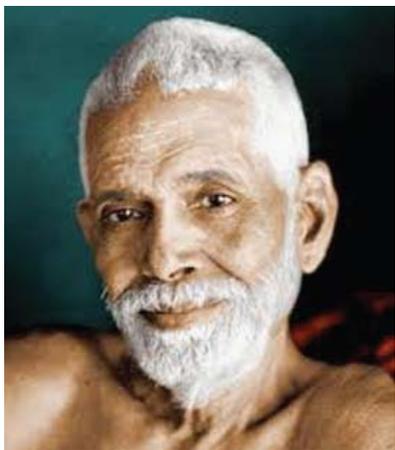
The work of the Wild Wing Society jolts us back to the grave reality—that tomorrow we may wake up to find mere foot-prints, bones, and feathers, and none of the animals and birds that we see today. With its timely response to nature's cry, the Wild Wing Society is steadily working to bring back in teeming numbers those animals, birds, and plants that are being endangered today. Want to hold paws, anybody?

—Archanaa R.



# Consciousness Amongst Humans

**B**hagwan Shri Ramana Maharishi in conversation with Major A W Chadwick about consciousness amongst humans.



**Maj. Chadwick:** Of what nature is the realization of Westerners who relate that they have had flashes of cosmic consciousness?

**Maharishi:** It came as a flash and disappeared as such. That which has a beginning must also end. Only when the ever-present consciousness is realized

will it be permanent. Consciousness is indeed always with us. Everyone knows 'I am!' No one can deny his own being. The man in deep slumber is not aware; while awake he seems to be aware. But, it is the same person. There is no change in the one who slept and the one who is now awake. In deep sleep he was not aware of his body; there was no body-consciousness. In the wakeful state he is aware of his body; there is body-consciousness. Therefore the difference lies in the emergence of body-consciousness and not in any change in the Real Consciousness. The body and body-consciousness arise together and sink together. All this amounts to saying that there are no limitations in deep sleep, whereas there are limitations in the waking state. These limitations are the bondage; the feeling 'The body is I' is the error. This false sense of 'I' must go. The real 'I' is always there. It is here and now. It never appears anew and disappears again. That which is must also persist for ever. That which appears anew will also be lost. Compare deep sleep and waking. The body appears in one state but not in the other. Therefore the body will be lost. The consciousness was pre-existent and will survive the body. In fact, there is no one who does not say 'I

am'. The wrong knowledge of 'I am the body' is the cause of all the mischief. This wrong knowledge must go. That is Realization. Realization is not acquisition of anything new nor it is a new faculty. It is only removal of all camouflage.

**Maj. Chadwick:** I try to shake off the body.

**Maharishi:** A man shakes off his clothes and remains alone and free. The Self is unlimited and is not confined to the body. How can the body be shaken off? Where will he leave it? Wherever it is, it is his still.

**Maj. Chadwick:** (Laughter.)

**Maharishi:** The ultimate Truth is so simple. It is nothing more than being in the pristine state. This is all that need be said. Still, it is a wonder that to teach this simple Truth there should come into being so many religions, creeds, methods and disputes among them and so on! Oh the pity! Oh the pity!

**Maj. Chadwick:** But people will not be content with simplicity; they want complexity.

**Maharishi:** Quite so. Because, they want something elaborate and attractive

and puzzling. So many religions have come into existence and each of them is so complex and each creed in each religion has its own adherents and antagonists.

For example, an ordinary Christian will not be satisfied unless he is told that God is somewhere in the far-off Heavens not to be reached by us unaided. Christ alone knew Him and Christ alone can guide us. Worship Christ and be saved. If told the simple truth - "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you" - he is not satisfied and will read complex and far-fetched meanings in such statements. Mature minds alone can grasp the simple Truth in all its nakedness.

*Maj. Chadwick later expressed a certain involuntary fear while meditating. He feels the spirit separated from the gross body and the sensation creates a fright.*

**Maharishi:** To whom is the fright? It is all due to the habit of identifying the body with the Self. Repeated experience of separation will make one familiar and the fright will cease.

—Excerpted from Sri Ramana Maharshi teachings

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## Commitment – the seed for Growing

*A Series on Growing -Reflections for Deep Change*

The one thing that can be extremely challenging for a social entrepreneur is the issue of value conflicts. They completely sap the energy, enthusiasm, and motivation of the social entrepreneur. Whether it is two countries, or two groups, or two individuals the seed of value conflict seems to be that ‘someone does not keep his/her commitments’.

Speaking of commitments there are two kinds of commitments that we all enter into in any relationship; the stated commitments and the unstated commitments. The stated commitments are those that explicitly state either verbally or through writing. Unstated commitments are the legitimate expectations within the relationship which are not explicitly stated, but those that are expected to be understood and upheld. In a relationship between the social entrepreneur and the community or the groups that they are serving, there are several stated and unstated commitments that we enter into which when not honored completely breaks the connectivity and sows a seed for value conflict.

There was once a mail that I read about a dialogue between a hen and a pig which said: “commitment is not about giving an egg a day but giving bacon.” Talking of commitment, in Kannada there is a beautiful folk song on a cow by name ‘*Punyakoti*’ and this parable is adapted from that song.

*Punyakoti*, the cow, was walking back home behind the rest of the herd. She looked forward to joining her little calf. Suddenly from behind the rocks jumped a huge, starving tiger and blocked *Punyakoti*’s path.

“Stop! Don’t kill me now”, pleaded *Punyakoti*. “I have a young one at home waiting for me. Please let me go feed her and I promise I’ll be back.”

“What! Am I a fool to let you go?”

“Do trust me, and I’ll come back”, said *Punyakoti*.

The reluctant tiger let her go. *Punyakoti* thanked him and went home, fed the calf lovingly, begged her kith and kin to take care of the young one telling them of the promise she has made, and returned to meet the tiger.

The tiger waited and to his surprise there was *Punyakoti* in front of him ready to be his meal. She said, “Here I am in



flesh and blood ready to become your meal. Eat me and satisfy your hunger”. The shocked tiger said, “How can I eat someone like you? Even God will not forgive me. A person who values commitment is too precious to become my prey!” The tiger let *Punyakoti* go. (Sampath. J.M. story 19 Discovery – 3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998)

When stated commitments are not honored there are several ways in which it is brought to light and demanded. But, when unstated commitments are not honored the hurt is intense leading to revenge, frustration, depression, feeling small and cheated, used, taken for granted, and so on. These surface in myriad forms so subtle and hidden that they require an intense discussion and self introspection to see where things went wrong. When individuals and institutions work with groups, strong processes have to be instituted to identify, understand and deal with unstated commitments.

As much as dishonoring commitments is a seed to value conflicts, there is no visiting card that can equal keeping commitments. Many a time we fail to realize keeping commitments are easier than dishonoring and managing the situation. Both require energy and it is a matter of choice.

When commitments are honored,

- trust is built between relationships
- openness and transparency in relationship increases
- the bandwidth within the relationship increases
- the depth and stretch in the relationship is intensified
- there is speed in action and decisions
- honesty and integrity in sharing feelings, emotions and thoughts
- accountability and responsibility increases
- acceptance, forgiveness, sacrifice and let go is easier

Someone once said, “one way to handle this is to live not making any commitments at all!” It’s like saying I will not breathe to save the oxygen in the world. We are all living in a dependent independent relationship and no one can escape the unstated commitments. Further, stated commitments are the ways to enhance our own capacities and competencies to live a connected fulfilled life. Before giving a commitment it requires mindful introspection on the commitment to be made and a clear plan of action on what needs to be done and how it will be done; renegotiation at the appropriate time when things go differently with absolute accountability.

### Points for Reflection:

- What are the different commitments that I usually make every day in my life?
- What are my constraints in keeping my words and how much do I take them into consideration while giving my word?
- How aware am I of the expectations of the people around me with whom I relate in life?
- How many of those expectations have I articulated and negotiated with clarity openly?
- How do I deal with the situation and myself when commitments made to me are not honored?
- How do I deal with myself when I fail to honor my commitments?
- Why do I fail to keep my commitments?

—J.M.Sampath & Kalpana Sampath

## INITIATIVE

Do you want a world which cherishes human initiative, creativity and passion?

Gary Hamel, strategy guru says, “employers can buy obedience, diligence, intellect but not initiative, creativity and passion.”

He defines the hierarchy of human capabilities starting with obedience at the bottom, and with diligence, intellect, initiative, and passion stacked upwards. As organizations learn to move upwards in the hierarchy, capabilities such as initiative and passion help them create wealth in the new economy and these capabilities hold the secret to outperform competitors. Thus, getting employees to bring initiative and passion to the workplace is the future of management.

If companies are moving in this direction, they have much to learn from the citizen sector. The citizen sector thrives because of persons with initiative. We call them volunteers, social workers, social change agents, and social entrepreneurs. This breed supports innovative programs, delivers results for the deprived.

Doing something new requires Initiative. The term Entrepreneur is explained by Gregory Dees in his article “The Meaning of Social Entrepreneurship” as venturesome individuals who stimulate economic progress by finding new and better ways of doing things. Likewise, Social Entrepreneurs are relentlessly pursuing new opportunities to achieve their social mission.

The problems Social Entrepreneurs are addressing are not new, but solutions and hope generated by them is.

A Culture of Initiative. Initiative is a shared characteristic among all Social Entrepreneurs. They get the capacity to do the impossible, not taking no for an answer.

Initiative is one of the true elements that set people apart. It is not about whether you have initiative or not, everyone is capable of it, it is whether you use it or not.

Social Entrepreneurs are individuals who put their initiative to use not for a narrow, personal goal but for a transcendent purpose.

Initiative means taking responsibility for a task that needs to be done, even though it was not necessarily assigned to the person. It means taking ownership.

When it comes to addressing social divides and its impact, the question is: ‘who takes the responsibility to find solutions?’ Social Entrepreneurs are the answer to this question. They tap into such opportunities without waiting to be directed. They are prolific initiators.

Social Entrepreneurs are repeatedly demonstrating a culture of initiative. Organizations begun by them are all initiatives that go beyond mere questioning, to provide solutions. The power to take initiative is however very personal, yet infectious. Social Entrepreneurs use this personal quality to enroll more people into their ventures.

The world of Initiative. Times of India’s Lead India new

national anthem “Tum Chaloo” is about taking initiative.

The film shows a child taking initiative to move a fallen tree which is obstructing traffic. While many stuck in traffic, complain, create self serving options, a little boy steps ahead to tackle the obstacle without being intimidated by the task. In so doing, the child moves others out of inertia, thus channeling collective energy towards finding a solution. This is a perfect example of how Social Entrepreneurs lead and support change.

Spreading Initiative. Be proactive is the first habit recommended by Stephen Covey in his highly acclaimed book “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People”.

Covey says that the seven habits are ‘common knowledge’ but not ‘common practice’. On being proactive, he says in his book “Taking initiative does not mean being pushy, obnoxious, or aggressive. It does mean recognizing our responsibility to make things happen.”

Social Entrepreneurs are putting to practice the habit of being proactive, of taking initiative and responsibility. Not stopping here, they are guided by the ancient Chinese proverb, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime”.

Social Entrepreneurs inspire others, particularly people they serve, to also take initiative.

—Bhuvanewari

# Queen of Justice

## Justice Prabha Sridevan shares with Marie Banu her views on women empowerment

Justice Prabha Sridevan is the fifth woman Judge of the Madras High Court. During her tenure as a High Court Judge, she has been instrumental in delivering several judgments of importance. She now goes to the National Judicial Academy Bhopal as resource person for topics like social justice, gender justice, exclusion, and poverty.

In an exclusive interview with Marie Banu, Justice Prabha Sridevan shares her views on women empowerment.

**How did you feel when you were invited to be the fifth woman Judge of the Madras High Court?**

I was zapped. That was my first reaction.

**You pursued law after marriage. Was this easy for you? Did you choose this subject because you have a lineage of law professionals?**

It was difficult. The joke was, 'nobody studies in Law College.' I wanted to be a good student. I was much older, and had two children while the rest of my classmates were 13 years younger to me. They were just out of college and were having fun. But, for me it was more serious.

My husband was a lawyer. So, I thought that it would be easy for me to slip into his office instead of going out and working elsewhere.

**Which of the professions are challenging—Lawyer or Judge?**

My years as a judge were more important to me. I think you can make a social change by your judgments on the basis of what your philosophy is. You can make a change in a way no other position can, I think.

**Being a woman, was it advantageous to have this portfolio?**

Women have a woman's perspective. I really think—without talking about quotas—that the composition of the court should be representative of all of us in the society. If the composition of the court is not so, then I feel that an ordinary man is



not likely to think that it is 'my' court. So, there should be women, minorities, people with disabilities, and so on. It should represent the society. We cannot get away with the fact that our society has castes. There should be a good mixture of everyone. Only then, the ordinary 'R.K. Laxman' man would feel 'this is my court'.

**Can you share with our readers an incident in your career which made you feel proud of being a woman?**

There are many such incidents. There are some cases where I felt that it was providential that it came up before me, because I could say what I think on that issue as a woman. Being a judge, I took part in several meetings here and abroad, where I could share my beliefs and my ideas. I would say I feel very happy (the word is not proud) to be a woman!

You want an incident. This is not a particular one, but several times women have come up to me and said, "Ma'am, after reading about you, I too feel I can also start a career or pursue studies after some years at home." The fact that I had been taking care of home and family for 13 years before I started going to law college, and the fact that after so many years I could do 'something' in the public space was important to the women. That made me very happy, as I said the word I would use is not 'proud'. It is important for women to feel that at any stage they can do this.

**What is your view on 'woman empowerment'? Do you feel women today are empowered enough?**

Frankly, I really do not know what one

means when they say 'empowerment'. If we are talking about knowing one's rights, I sometimes wonder if rural women know more. While I was a practicing lawyer, I had a client, a double graduate, who did not know what her husband was earning. I understand woman empowerment to mean that a woman is in total control of herself, knows her physical autonomy, and is aware of her rights. It is not about something that we exert on another. When women become strong, they know what they are, their worth, and that they have charge over their mind and body—I would call this empowerment!

Two years ago, while addressing a group of educated girls on women's rights, I learnt that they had not heard about the Domestic Violence Act. I said to them, "I am depressed that you do not know". The Act has been widely discussed in newspapers so many times and it is surprising that they had not read about it. There have been jokes on it as well. Is it because we do not care? That was a moment of doubt for me. God forbid, I don't want these girls to be abused. But, they should be able to lend their hands to their less fortunate sisters and for that they should know the law. Empowerment is not fighting, but knowing. It is knowledge and awareness.

**About an insurance case that you judged, and the housewife's economic contribution to the household. Can you elaborate on this please?**

That was a case in which a young girl Deepika lost both her parents in an accident and her grandfather had therefore filed for compensation on her behalf. How we work out on the compensation is that—we give

under various heads e.g. some amount towards loss of love and affection, which is notional, and it varies. For monetary loss, we find out how much the breadwinner was earning and work out on an arithmetic calculation. It was easy to work out the loss because of the father's death based on his earning, but for the mother—a homemaker—it was a notional value.

Against the award passed, the insurance company filed an appeal before the High Court, saying that they had paid too much already and it was anyway only one accident. It came up before the Division Bench presided by me and I said that actually for the child it was two accidents. Then suddenly, I said to the judge who was sitting with me, "If I do not talk about the value of a homemaker in this case, I will not get another opportunity." So, it was on a tangent I took up this issue. In fact the judgment reads 'really this is a digression..' and starts the discussion on the value of a homemaker.

I realized that I had only some more time as a judge and I wanted to start this dialogue. I found four ways of calculating this and I spoke about it all, and we calculated the value of Deepika's mother's work choosing one of them since only for one of the methods there was evidence before us.

This case is now followed by all the Lower Court Judges handling motor accident cases. Fortunately, a subsequent case came up in the Supreme Court from another High Court in which the same issue was raised, and the Supreme Court approved of the Deepika judgment saying it was an illuminating judgment. Homemakers have to be valued more in consonance with dignity.

**Your comments on Anna Hazare's Lokpal bill?**

There are difficulties in the draft bill. But, for me I look at it as a moment in history when the society also came out in the open and declared that the evil of corruption must go. Everyone needs one totem pole to go around. Anna Hazare probably provided this. I hope it does not turn out to be just a seven day wonder and all of us would go back to our own work. Civil society should work and negotiate at removing the defects and improving the existing draft as it did in the RTI Act.

## Editorial

Latha Suresh  
Marie Banu