

Conversations Today

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FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

People today are more egocentric, thinking more of their own rights and benefits at the expense of others. We have witnessed rude behaviors in public often. This is because we do not naturally consider the rights and needs of others on the same plane with our own rights and needs. Therefore, we must actively work to ensure that we are applying the intellectual standard of fairness to our fellow human beings and care for them.

Caring is when you do a good deed for someone, because it is the right thing to do. Caring should go beyond taking care of your family members and friends. It is a good trait to have, and to care for others is wonderful and noble. When you care for someone, you make a difference in the world with kindness.

Caring is letting things matter to us, including that of others. It means valuing their well-being and be conscious of their needs. When we care about someone or something, we become aware of what can harm and what is required.

We must also care about our values and principles. We should stop judging people based on what we believe. We must understand that all cultures have norms and differences that do not adapt with the dominant cultures.

Simple acts of kindness and words that letting others know that you care certainly makes a difference in people's lives. We may not have the power to change a difficult situation, but our caring and will certainly comfort the person who needs it most.

So, let us ask ourselves, "Are we caring?"

— Marie Banu

EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu

Design: Blink Foundation

“If poverty is man-made, it can be unmade by man.”

Tito Tony shares how he does this, with the goal of eradicating poverty for five million families by 2024.

The slums of Manila are notorious: thousands and thousands of huts lashed together by plywood and zinc roofs.

Atop mountains of rubbish, children scavenge for food, bottle caps and screws. Mothers nurse infants amid the swirling stench. Animals and drug dealers prowl by night. And yet nestled amid the Payatas slum in Quezon City is a strange sight: rows of brightly painted houses ringed by flowers.

Children play badminton along straight and tidy streets. Youths shoot hoops at a basketball court. At a cooperative, a dozen young men are silk-screening t-shirts, while a group of seamstresses sew clothes and bags.

“Welcome to Blue Eagle Village. I help to take care of this place,” says Peter, a middle-aged man, as he gestures to the 197 houses built in 2003.

Peter tells us that he worked as a driver before. “I used to live under a plastic tarp. The walls were carton boxes.”

This amazing social and physical transformation is happening in hundreds of similar villages within slums across 10 cities in the Philippines.

These communities are the brainchild of Antonio Meloto, or Tito Tony, as he is usually known.

Gawad Kalinga, the social enterprise he founded, has set a big goal: to eradicate poverty for five million families by 2024.

Its work has won worldwide recognition, including the Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship in 2012 and the Schwab Foundation's Social Entrepreneur of the Year in 2010.

Gawad Kalinga, which means “to give care” in Tagalog, is a collaborative model that invites the government, corporations and volunteers to build communities together.

Since 1999, the Gawad Kalinga movement has impacted 2,500 neighbourhoods and mobilised more than 1.7 million people.

Together, they target the root causes of slum life. Beyond building homes, they work on healthcare, food, and values formation. All partners are driven by the same core value of *bayanihan* – the Filipino spirit of community and helping one another.

“People see an ugly slum, but I see the beautiful community it can become,” Tony says. “My mission is to build homes. If I want the future to be secure for my children, I have to provide land for the landless, and give light for those in darkness. If poverty is man-made, it can be unmade by man. Our purpose is to restore humanity who live in subhuman conditions.”

Power of presence

A former marketing executive, Tony began his purpose-driven journey by spending his evenings with youth gangs in Bagong Silang, one of the largest slum districts in the Philippines.

“You cannot have transformative solutions without the power of presence,” he stresses. By

spending time with the gangs, he gained their trust. He spoke to their mothers. He partnered with them on projects, such as community theatre.

At one point, he encountered a young prostitute – the same age as his daughter – who was gang-raped.

Tony was struck by a thought; the only difference between his daughter and this girl was where they were born. He saw that the poor were his family too.

He learnt a great deal about solving poverty from being present in the community he wished to help. But the most valuable lesson was that it transformed his own world view.

Power of purpose

The community's needs went deeper than mere infrastructure. “Slum dwelling breeds slum mentality,” he concludes.

Men deprived of the dignity of providing for their families, became predatory and mercenary. Tony saw that their surroundings had stripped them of hope and self-respect. He wondered if given an opportunity, they could be enticed to aim for a higher purpose.

Initially, the movement met with scepticism.

People questioned if building houses would solve the drunkenness, crime, and unemployment. In Bagong Silang, Tony made every recipient of a house sign an agreement not to do drugs or get drunk, and to seek to better their community and nation instead.

Through “sweat equity,” fathers were invited to co-build the houses with volunteers. They attended values formation sessions. And many of them went on to find jobs. Gawad Kalinga's *bayanihan* approach restored the men's sense of purpose, which empowered them to be present for their families and community.

Power of partnership

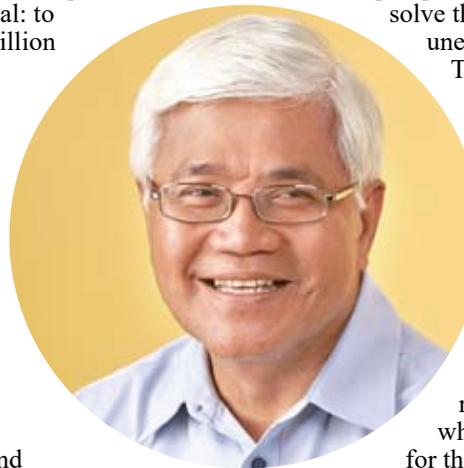
With the proof of concept in Bagong Silang, Tony began to scale up support. Grounded by Gawad Kalinga's values and mission, he invited political figures to mobilise resources through their networks; private corporations to sponsor whole villages with their profits; and universities to provide innovative solutions through research. He wanted to “bring the best to the least, and bring out the best from the least”.

Today, Gawad Kalinga is building hundreds of partnerships each year to achieve its seemingly impossible goal of eradicating poverty.

It has also launched social enterprises that help rural farmers and the urban poor sell high quality duck eggs, bamboo bikes, chocolate and organic chicken. “A lot of people want to end poverty with you. You cannot do it alone,” Tony says.

“We have built thousands of houses yet I don't own one. But I will always have a place to live. Because of that I am the richest man on the planet.”

—A story by Our Better World – the digital storytelling initiative of the Singapore International Foundation (www.ourbetterworld.org).



Ageing through generations

“I analysed the challenges senior citizens were facing and also looked at the needs of younger generation.”

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. Dobarra tries to create that space in our society for the elderly,” says Mr Manish Rai, Co-founder of Dobarra 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 Dobarra 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. Dobarra’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. Dobarra 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 Dobarra also strive to reach out to others in need. Manish says that Dobarra’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, Dobarra also adopted the build-operate-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



Leader & Leadership Matters...

1. Aspiration: An inspiring journey of Aspiration as a way of life

Meaning of Aspiration – The Leader has a lot of ambitions and dreams on what he/she would like to be and achieve in his/her life (LOI, www.discoverself.com). The dictionary meaning is a hope or ambition of achieving something. Synonyms are desire, hope, longing, ambition, wish and yearning... Interestingly the antonyms are apathy, indifference, laziness and so on.



We begin our journey of mapping Leadership attributes with ASPIRATION. A leadership journey begins with the initial acceleration. Aspiration is the seed to that acceleration. Aspiration gives the needed push to a Leader to ideate and conceive the future that can take self and team to newer pasture. Aspiration encompasses the capacity to stretch, go beyond limitations and think of possibilities that seem far-fetched.

To understand Aspiration from real life point of view, nothing like meeting a person who has lived a life filled with Aspirations for over six decades, serial entrepreneur, and a person who has created paths in spaces that were non-existent especially in development sector. Founder and Past president of AWAKE, association of Women Entrepreneurs of Karnataka (1983-1995); 2 terms Director of State Bank of Mysore; Member of many key financial institutions and entrepreneurship boards; The first woman from South Asia as District Governor Rotary International District 3190; also held many high positions in Rotary;

Let's meet Ms Madhura Chatrapathy

I asked Madhura, "Do tell me about your life and what made dreams and aspirations a way of life for you?"

"My Father", she says, "He was the most influential person and who brought me up to believe that I live to aspire, to make a difference". Hailing from Mysuru, the place of Kings, Diwans, Intellectuals and Social Workers, Madhura too was ingrained with the belief that "Doing anything that upholds common good is worth living for". With the good fortune of being home tutored, she has a number of post-graduate certificates and medals to her credit right from Food Technology to Journalism to Marketing. Her Aspiration has been to live a meaningful, creative life that can make a difference to someone or something every day! The biggest gift her parents could give her was an un-biased environment with regard to gender. Not a single aspiration was questioned or curbed based on her gender and that set the dream kite flying high for beyond half century. She has always treaded a path that has been created and carved by herself – the firsts of not just one but a series. These got her many awards like Honorary Professor conferred by Tumkur University 2012; Honorary Doctorate (Honoris Causa) Degree conferred by Mangalore University, India, 2010; Raajyotsava Award by Govt. of Karnataka for the outstanding contribution to the development self-employment in the state of Karnataka 2002; Outstanding Woman Entrepreneur, Rotary Club of Bangalore South, 1982 and Outstanding Young Person Award by Jaycees – 1981.

Madhura, can you tell me when do you think the bug of Aspiration first bite you?

"It all began with the kind of challenges I was always associated with right from childhood" she said. She had to do her 8th grade in a Kannada medium school and her mom passed away at a very young age. She managed the household and when she joined Maharanis' college doing math major which was a rarity for girls in those days. Anything she saw impossible she pursued, to make it possible. Like the vishal exam in Hindi that she completed when she was just twelve year old while her classmates were all women above thirty years. Gliding, flying in NCC and being an instructor and playing tennis, softball and even cycling to



college were part of growing up. In the times that she lived all these were not accepted as being normal for a young girl. But, Madhura never constrained herself with the norms around her. In her own words, "Scaling up was a natural way of life". From Ikebana, cooking to marketing, advertising, creative writing, were all a way of life. Women issues and supporting their challenges became Madhura's forte very early. AWAKE was born with 7 women entrepreneurs and she became the founder President in 1983. Along with other stalwarts AWAKE has been a name to reckon with.

The next question I asked her was "from where do you draw your energy to continually aspire?"

Pat came the answer "by being alive and aware; Deep concern towards injustice and problems; Deep connectivity to make a commitment to find solutions; willingly observe, learn and Deep love to help and support others". The 'never give up' attitude and patterned thinking are a part of her coding. Aspiration is like a magnet and it draws the right and the best people towards us. In her own words, "I wanted to be active to contribute in whichever post I took. I became the secretary of Association of food scientists and Technologists. There I met Mr. Panduranga Shetty who was the President and others who similarly aspired". It has been decades of strong friendship and association in working for the common good, right from Rotary to series of ventures. Her brother Srikanth joined her

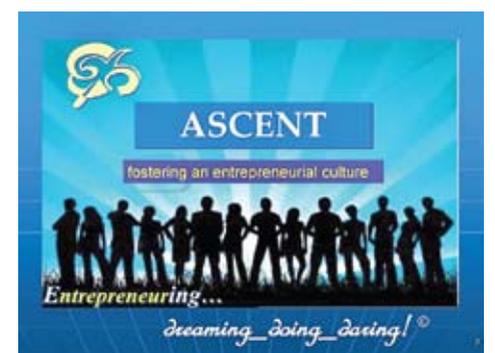
too. Strong Aspiration attracts people to support to build positive future.

This led to starting the Tamarind processing dehydration plant. 37 long years and they still hold the largest market share. Again one of firsts to bring crushed, processed tamarind into kitchens. She quietly adds, "Anything you do, do it in scale".

I notice that the shining bright eyes, energy from her voice have not faded, even a little, whatever the number of years... Madhura, how does this happen? How do you retain it on and keep building on it?

Like a child she opens up her laptop and displays a slide. "Tell me in entrepreneurship is it dreaming – doing – daring? Most of them argue with me that daring comes before doing... but I think it should be, I should dare after doing and continue to scale!! We should never be afraid to dream more and dream new. What do you say?" It is not 'Entrepreneurship' but it is 'Entrepreneurship'... A continuous process.

She says, "A true entrepreneur is one who is innovative, resourceful, a problem solver, mobiliser and has adaptability to seek solutions". When the same is turned towards betterment it is social entrepreneurship. Her starting of Toe Hold for the artisans is another huge example of dreaming, doing and daring in its scale. It is a unique idea and the women artisans have been successful in changing the entire village and its life and culture through empowering successful business. There have been only firsts in her life through her career!





Tell me Madhura, has failure affected your extent of aspiration? Have you ever felt like that's it, it's enough?

"I take failures differently", she says. For her failures are like saying the problem is not yet solved. It makes people responsible; look at pros and cons more deeply; think with more holistic perspective. In every failure there would be some dimension not taken into consideration. If one can continue thinking at a bigger level, the focus is not on the small failures that would come. Currently she has given almost 13 notices to different departments in Government asking for developing the much needed Gender Disaggregated Data of entrepreneurs and they have responded with scanty information. But that has not deterred her at all. She continues hoping a new way will be found sometime sooner or later.

Why doesn't it feel tiresome? Because, ideating is like breathing... it keeps happening in the mind. When she sees an unresolved issue/ problem, the mind doesn't brush it aside. It begins to work on finding ways to solve it and when it is resolved, there is always something else that catches the eye next and it continues. "Making things better should be a way of life".

Tell me what have been your blessings that has made your life so Aspirational and Inspirational

First, "I was never made to feel or think I am a girl by my family. No restriction absolutely and that gave me the needed wings to be all that I could be. Second, I always dare – dare to challenge myself; dare to speak out;

dare to learn new things; dare to change; dare to question others. Three, there are only attempts – no failures, every failure is a chance for next new idea and new attempt. To live life out of Courage and Conviction, and it's the gift from my Father to me". An excellent example of this is her thanking address in 1986 expo of AWAKE where the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, HRD Minister Narasimha Rao had inaugurated and she began "first of all our thanks goes to MCP Honorable Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi..." everyone was aghast. And she followed it with "most charming Prime Minister". She says it came from courage of conviction. She was quoted by all leading dailies the next morning across the country. The narration from Madhura's life shows that Aspiration is the springboard of success for a Leader. Aspiration connects the purpose and vision for the person as well as for the team.

Only Aspiration as an attribute does not make a Leader. The implications of having low or high Aspiration are also to be examined. When Leaders have low aspirations, they can only maintain but not grow the organization. They have to be pushed to stretch, take up higher goals and to come up with new ideas. If the Leaders are very high only on aspiration, they are dreamers and give ideas for problem solving but may not be executors. For execution, the Leader has to be action oriented and need to be responsible.

That will be our next discussion on Leadership value – Responsibility!

—Dr Kalpana Sampath

Aspiration



One day a disciple came to sage Ramakrishna and said, "O sage! I hear you say that depth of aspiration is the springboard to the discovery of truth. I don't understand what you mean." Ramakrishna asked the disciple to come with him to the river and take a dip in the water with him. The disciple thought that the master was going to give him a special initiation. He readily went along and as the master had requested, put his head under water. Ramakrishna just held the disciple's head under water and would not release his hold until the man almost drowned and his struggle became a frenzy. "When you aspire for truth the way you did for a breath of air, you'll not rest until you've discovered it."

 Explicit Learning

- A. The depth of aspiration is the springboard to learning.
- B. You can't learn until you really want to learn.
- C. Learning calls for persistent perseverance.

 Introspective Learning

- A. What is the nature of 'Aspiration'?
- B. How strong are my aspirations?
- C. What prevents me from putting all my efforts to achieve what I aspire for?

RULES OF DISPOSAL

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



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 I moved 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. "Initially, 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."



Our slogan was 'Segregate of Organic Wastes at Source'. This was long before MSW Rules were formed.

SOCIAL IMPACT AND OUR PECULIAR UNDERSTANDING OF 'COMMUNITY'...

Many social enterprises, and perhaps more accurately, community enterprises, say that they are having an impact on The Community. But do we really understand what we mean when we talk about 'community'?

I have been involved with a number of EU funded projects over the years and conversations with European partners turns to semantics and discussion on whether or not there is a shared understanding of some of the major concepts that we in the UK bandy about with abandon.

One of those, and one that often forms a bit of a stumbling block, is the word 'community'. The Germans say it is untranslatable; the French use it in other ways; the British say it all the time in the hope that the others get their meaning.

Turning to definitions, the Oxford Living Dictionaries states that it is, 'a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common', which implies a 'geographical community'. But it also goes on to say that community can be, 'the condition of sharing or having certain attitudes and interests in common'. This suggests more of a 'community of interest'.

These discussions remind me of when I worked with community businesses in Scotland in the late 1980s. Talking about a geographical community made sense as local people in hard pressed areas got together, formed an enterprise that created benefits for the locality by providing employment for long term unemployed and much needed services to benefit residents in the area.

But then 'community of interest' emerged. This broadened the

definition and at one meeting we realised that a golf club could be a community business serving the 'community of golfers'. Was this right? And so the argument continued within, in those days, a smoke-filled room of activists,

Added to this are two critical dilemmas worthy of consideration.

The first is that 'community' is not a homogenous unit. Within a geographical area there are a range of different people with differing values, outlooks, social and economic status, faiths and ethnic groupings. How do we, as community-based organisations, whose central purpose is to work for community benefit, serve the whole community?

What are the priorities; how are they decided; and so on? Local people on a Board of a community enterprise would be expected to understand the local community better than an outsider – but they may have their own interests and views that may not address the problem of all people living and working in the community.

The second is how the geographical community is defined. Where are the boundaries outlining the community? For some communities this is relatively straightforward as they may be islands, or particularly remote and self-defining, or they may be a housing estate squeezed into an area bounded by a major road or railway line. But for many community based organisations this is an issue and one that has to be tackled and re-addressed.

Many community enterprises over the years have tried to report on the impact that they have on their community. If they keep social accounts they are expected to draw out a local stakeholder map that charts the

nature of the relationship they have with different stakeholder groups.

This is an exercise that many find particularly useful as it exposes many in their organisation to the dilemmas mentioned above. Often there is not total agreement, but the discussion over stakeholder relationships can create a better understanding of differing positions within and around the organisation.

Also, as part of social accounting, there would be a need to consult or engage with the 'community' – some refer it to as the 'wider community'. This presents a problem as the community may be made up of thousands of households. Through my involvement with social accounting and audit, I have tried to do and suggest a number of things.

One time we worked with a community enterprise in carrying out a survey that involved a questionnaire going to each household distributed in a community newsletter. The returns were few.

Another time we worked on visiting a random selection of households in an area and conducted interviews. This was more successful but fraught with difficulties over people being out, not wanting callers, not to mention fatigue and a wearing down of shoe leather...

However, something that did seem to work well, was the creation of a kind of 'community jury'. The community enterprise identified a local councillor for the area; a head of school, a local social worker, a prominent business person, a faith leader, a local MP. These were people who were not close stakeholders but who would know about the community enterprise and a little about its work and impact.

Ideally this group would be brought together and issues about the performance and impact of the community enterprise would be discussed. In practice this was very hard to achieve and the fall-back position was to interview these people with the same questions.

The consultation and engagement with a 'community of interest' may be clearer in some ways, as the community enterprise may only be consulting those people that have

expressed an interest in what the enterprise is trying to do. But that leaves out all the people that could be in the community of interest but do not know about or have never used the services provided. Difficult or what?

I think defining and understanding 'community' is crucially important. At a meeting several years ago a prominent member of the social enterprise sector in Scotland was asked what he thought was the future of social enterprise. He said he thought it would be 'community based enterprise'. This harks back to the burgeoning community business movement in Scotland in the 1980s – plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

I also think that community enterprises are going to be more and more important. They tend to be tenacious organisations due to their close connections within communities. This is evidenced by the number of community co-operatives in the Highlands and Islands that are still around in one form or another.

Community enterprises are also like 'anchor organisations' – a conduit for local development. They usually have a clearer purpose compared to the plethora of recent social enterprises that are currently emerging – which are not community-based and struggle to show their distinction from being traditional businesses with a philanthropic arm.

Finally, we all live in 'communities' in one form or another. We are not only individuals but part of something that underlines the connections and relationships between us that make life worthwhile. I leave you with a quote from Cesar Chavez (1927 – 1993), an American labour leader and civil rights activist.

We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community... Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own.

—Alan Kay
Co-Founder,
Social Audit Network, UK
www.socialauditnetwork.org.uk



Democratising Education



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.

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 grassroots 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 stake holders. 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

Sustainability is everybody's responsibility

Those of us who have embraced the Western mantra of consumption are now adept bargain hunters. We spend days sifting through the offline and online haystack of consumer goods, looking for the best and cheapest deal. The urban rich and middle class consumer in India has stepped into the golden age of 'Walmartization' – from food and fashion to furniture and fun, we've signed up to the 'everyday low prices' credo of the retail giant.

Of course, this is not the whole story. Alongside the deal-loving, value-chasing consumer, though not as mainstream yet, but growing in numbers is India's green consumer, who is on the look out for environmentally and socially conscious brands and is willing to pay a premium for these goodly credentials.

A 2016 BBMG and Globe Scan study showed that 40% of the global public identified as 'aspirational', a subset of consumers who love to shop but want to do so responsibly, who are seeking products and services from companies that support social and environmental causes. At 53%, India has the second highest percentage of aspirational in the world, after Nigeria who strikes a pretty number at 58%. Apart from concerns over job losses, terrorism, nuclear war, financial security, the aspirational also worry about preservation of the environment, poverty and homelessness.

Going further back a couple of years, DuPont's Green Living Survey 2014 throws up similar results with 63% of Indian consumers claiming to be familiar with green products and nearly 85%, the highest amongst countries surveyed, attesting to green products being better for the environment. The survey also points to the fact that 67% of consumers in India would buy apparel, personal care, household hygiene products made from biobased ingredients that deliver environmental benefits.

So if the picture is this rosy, how come brands aren't jumping onto the green bandwagon with greater enthusiasm than is presently witnessed? Mainly because what people say they'd like to do (perhaps with the best intention) and what they actually do are two separate things. A 2011 Nielsen survey showed that 86% of Indian consumers believed in green products but only half of them actually bought these products because they considered them 'too expensive'. One could argue that even half the people surveyed buying green is a good thing, and that's true. But when you compare the size of the eco-products

market versus the mass market, the gap is substantial.

This dichotomy also showed up in a GfK MRI's 2016 survey of the American Consumer, where the number of consumers willing to pay more for green products increased to 56% in 2016 from 53% in 2010. However, the survey revealed that markets for green light bulbs, eco-friendly cleaners and other such products flatlined or declined since 2010.

Then there is the Green Gap Trend Tracker 2013 which delved a little deeper into the minds of American consumers who shop green but often don't follow through on the instructions that require them to close the loop to deliver the intended environmental results. 20% of consumers said they don't know how to dispose the product while 18% said they just didn't have enough time to do it or couldn't be bothered. For some, the absence of a supporting recycling infrastructure was the main stumbling barrier. 85% of consumers did however say that brands should do a better job of communicating and educating consumers on how to do the right thing. If we read into the subtext this could translate into easy, cheap and quick solutions!

This leaves us in a peculiar place – brands need an incentive to make a big change because change costs money. When consumers clamour for green but refuse to pay a premium for it, will companies still go ahead and implement the change? Of course, there are ways for companies to come together and push industry-wide change so the overall price tag for adopting sustainable choices is reduced. But shouldn't consumers also bear responsibility for building a sustainable world? And where does the Government figure in all this? Isn't the State responsible for creating the right infrastructure to facilitate better behaviours and choices? Things like curb side recycling, better public transport, access to cheaper renewable energy, regulations against child labour – all these and more are squarely the responsibility of governing authorities.

When it comes down to it, sustainability involves multiple actors all looped into a seamless web, each having their own levers to push and pull, and enjoying power along with responsibilities. Consumers can use their purchasing and voting power to extract change from brands and governments respectively. Corporates can rally Governments to provide the infrastructure and incentives to embrace



sustainability. Governments can discipline corporates and citizens by levying fines and penalties if they transgress environmental norms and offer subsidies and incentives to reward sustainable choices.

It's important to realise that the mess we are in today is not because of any one single actor or stakeholder. We are all complicit to varying degrees. Yes, the nexus between lobbyists and governments is powerful and real, but well-informed consumers as citizen-activists have the power to push for change - whether campaigning for sustainable palm oil or against sweat shops. We need to examine our own purchasing behaviour, equip ourselves with knowledge, dig deeper, question the brands we buy and push them to improve every day. For instance, do we really need single-use water bottles when we know just how damaging they are to our planet? A simple switch to glass or stainless steel bottles by

consumers around the world can effectively remove millions of tonnes of plastic from our environment!

While the poor and marginalised bear the least responsibility for this mess, ironically they carry the heaviest burden. The rich and middle-class consumers while vocal and active on social media when decrying violations from companies and governments, have yet to move from being spectators demanding sustainability from the side lines to actively making sustainable living choices, of which sustainable consumption is just one element. Whether we like it or not, transformative change will not happen with the click of a button. This level of change is uncomfortable and inconvenient but if we have the courage to push for it, it will only lead us to a better place, not just for ourselves but also for our children.

—Antaash Sheikh

Prakriti Seva by MOP Vaishnav College Students

The second and third year Students of BA Sociology at MOP Vaishnav College for Women in Chennai participated in the Koratur lake cleaning activity on 21st of January, 2018 along with Makkal Paathai, an NGO working on environmental protection.

This programme was coordinated by People's Club 2017-2018 which is spearheaded by the Department of Sociology.

Students were guided by the NGO volunteers to clean the lake bed and the pavement areas. Gloves and masks for safety were distributed for safety.

All students expressed their desire to participate in more such activities and discussed ways in which civil society can engage in improving the environment.

"Each of us should realise our responsibility in keeping our environment clean. I am proud to be part of this lake cleaning programme," says Shruti.

—Mrs. Uma Maheswari
HOD, Department of Sociology
Mop Vaishnav College For Women



Centre for Social Initiative and Management

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

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

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

For more information, please visit our website www.csim.in

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

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

Smt. M.P Nirmala IAS shares with Marie Banu her experiences in the Social Welfare sector

Smt. M.P. Nirmala IAS was the first Lady Deputy Collector in Tamil Nadu. 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 victim. 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 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.



Photo: Marie Banu