

# Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

RNI No.TNENG/2013/52428 | Volume 10 | Issue 6 | June 2022 | 12 Pages | For Free Circulation Only | www.msdstrust.org



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

**EDITOR: MARIE BANU. J**

## 6 COVER STORY

### SKILLED, TALENTED, EMPLOYABLE

About Diya Foundation and its programmes

#### Alumni Talk



# 3

#### Connecting the Dots

Janani's efforts to enable communities to evolve and adapt to suit the needs and potentials of differently abled persons

#### Profile



# 9

#### Collaboration Is Key

About Amogh Charitable Trust. Based in Bengaluru that creates a skilled and independent community of adults with intellectual disabilities

#### Chit Chat



# 12

**“What matters is not the 2% of net profits for CSR, but how the company has generated its overall profits.”**

An interview with Mr. Mathew Cherian, Board Chair of CARE India and Global Ambassador for HelpAge International

# FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

Honesty is one of the greatest virtues. It is a valuable trait and is of utmost importance in every sphere of one's life. It is a virtue and means developing a practice of speaking the truth always. A honest person possesses a strong moral character, and develops good attributes like kindness, discipline, truthfulness, and integrity.

Honesty acts as a catalyst in strengthening our will power and overcoming the challenges we face in our lives. People should realize the value of honesty in order to maintain social and economic balance. Thomas Jefferson once said, "Honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom." This is because it has the ability to build, shape and motivate integral values in a person's life. A person with honest behaviour is highly regarded as they are sincere, trustworthy and loyal. He/she displays good behaviour, adheres to rules and regulations, maintains discipline, speaks the truth, and is punctual.

Family values and ethics and education play an important role in developing honesty among children. Parents who display honest behaviour and character in front of their children certainly create an impact. They must influence their child to practice honesty. It is a practice which is built slowly and patiently.

Schools also have a role in inculcating honesty as a value in children. They should ensure to include few essential good habits and practices to keep a child close to morality. There are a few schools that reward children for honest actions which we can learn from.

When it comes to a relationship, honesty is very important and essential. Every relationship desires honesty and loyalty. When you are honest, you are practically loyal to the others. An honest relationship will lead to trust and will last longer. Honest people are always the happiest and most importantly peaceful persons.

Honesty leads to a fulfilling, free life. It sharpens our perception and allows us to observe everything around us with clarity.

Honesty is not just about telling the truth. It's about being real with yourself and others about who you are, what you want and what you need to live your most authentic life.

Honest means lead to honest ends. A strong person can suppress a weak one; but his/her spirit cannot be suppressed.

Marie Banu

## EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh  
Marie Banu

# Positive Energy through a student's lens

## Culture to Nature: A Memoir of the Western Ghats



Somewhere in between the lush greenery on high coast mountains and freshwater glaciers exists thin, twisty roads over the trail of the Western Ghats in India. Our drive to the destination introduced me to the beauty of the warmth and light rain showers in Mid-June.

My parents and I reached the heart of this trail around the time daylight started to fade away, just about when the sunset graced us with all the beauty the sky beheld. At that moment, the serenity of the faint beam of light radiating from the sky, magenta pink hues, and auburn sun took my breath away. The cotton-candy-looking clouds, in folds, clusters, and puffs were spread across the entire scenery, adding to the picturesque view of the sky. The wind started to blow subtly, progressively getting fierce and strong, completely taking over the paradise of the Eden-green Forest full of magnificently chiseled teak-brown trees. And then there was one fine moment when it all stopped, and the large downpour of the clouds came to sing upon the natural environment.

Initially, after getting down from the car, I had noticed that the Earth remained dull and dry, but the thick raindrops quenched the thirst of the dry soil on the surface. She drank till she was full, imparting a familiar and inviting earthy fragrance. The heavy rain also brought out the soothing song of the sweet birds chirping in their synchronous melody. In every direction around our car, I could only see webs of water streams over the tiny rocks, dense forests with fragrant jasmine flowers, and a couple of rays of sunlight hitting the leaves of the crops in the fields. As I flipped through the pages of my storybook, I felt a gush of cold air hit my face as we traveled these roads in midst of the intense monsoon season. On feeling the chilly wind, I placed my hands on the cold surface of the

window and noticed a stream of tiny droplets of water. The earthy fragrance from the soil and the sound of the Indian Nightingale bird chirping made me experience a sense of peace and tranquility that I had never experienced back in the city filled with large buildings and bustling cars.

There were several patches of tea plantations, radiating aromas of sweet floral notes with an undertone from the chamomile green tea leaves. In a nature abundant region of the Western Ghats, I was stunned that the only manmade smell was that of the petrol of our vehicle. The contrast in the earthly and manmade aromas made me appreciate how perfectly nature complements every aspect of its composition. Even hints of somewhat offensive odors manage to blend in with the elements of the forest and rivers bringing to existence an unforgettable bouquet of scents of incense, the soil, and the bergamot-chamomile undertone. On approaching the temple town within the Ghats, I could smell the scent of the incense sticks closer to the temple. On experiencing this amalgamation of aromas, the mix of woody fragrances, and hints of spicy floral notes, I felt as happy as a child in a candy store.

As we got closer to the temple, a bunch of nostalgic memories of my childhood came flooding back in my head. Ever since I was a young girl, my grandmother would often take me to visit the ancient temples around my hometown. With such meaningful people and memories tied to my experiences with nature and ancient Indian temples, I have always felt deeply connected and shared profound intimacy with places that make me feel this depth of warmth. Most of my comfort in such places is connected to emotional linkages and a sense of belongingness that they bring to my heart. This temple town made me

feel a similar kind of calmness, becoming my safe space at that moment.

At the end of the long journey, I reached the ashram of the temple, a pilgrimage spot for firm believers, which embraced the minimalistic architecture of intricately carved forts of Hindu Gods and Goddesses. The walls of the ashram were designed to possess natural white marble stone with carvings in specific regions that conveyed messages from ancient times. I felt touched to be able to be in a sacred space with memories deeply rooted in tradition. In nature's abode, encircled by the vast flora and fauna, and with distinct memories of my childhood and grandma, I could not imagine being in any other place. At that moment, I had a wide smile on my face. On observing my facial expressions, the priest asked me, "Why are you smiling so much, child?" I replied, "This place feels so safe and warm, there is nothing to not love about being here in this moment, a place rooted in tradition and ancient values." This experience made me realize that my memories associated with nature and the environment have definitive ties to temples.

My trip to the Western Ghats combined the ethereal sights of nature and Indian architecture with the scent of every natural element present. The Western Ghats thus gains its rightful reputation as it displays the kingdom that's been created for us. It was a meaningful encounter that reminded me of home as I am deeply connected to my Indian culture and tradition. I have always felt the ardent desire to experience and appreciate nature, therefore, this experience bridged the connection between tradition and nature, becoming a significant memory in my life.

Kaushiki Ravi

# CONNECTING THE DOTS

What does employment mean to every individual? “Beyond laying the foundation for self-sufficiency and economic independence, employment is also a virtue that allows one to realise community participation and personal relevance. Employment decides one’s value in both family and community. Perhaps this association is the reason why not being employed affects individual’s worth in others’ eyes,” worries Ms Janani, Founder of Aazhthiran Trust in Chennai.

Coming from a background where self-awareness and self-criticism were passed on as valuable personal traits, it was really hard for Janani to imagine or comprehend the other side. With differently abled individuals, as she later observed in life, the process of self-awareness was never complete until outsiders also came to the same page. “It was not enough for them to realise their potential but they had to struggle to prove themselves worthy of an opportunity. This is injustice and nowhere admissible in the pursuit for an equitable society,” she insists.

After graduating as an Engineer from Tanjore, Janani decided to study Social Work as her interest in community work grew with her observations from routine life. During the course, her fieldwork experience with the fishermen community exposed her to varied factors that define, disturb, distress community well-being. “I saw why it was important to think and act as a community. I understood the value of acceptance in real sense. I saw how people made way for others as they progressed. But why wasn’t this the case everywhere?” asks Janani.

Completely convinced about her decision to pursue social work, she took on every opportunity to strengthen her skills. Soon, she found herself driven towards employment of differently abled persons and she decoded the complete ecosystem that could influence the outcomes. Apart from the additional support in terms of infrastructure and technology, Janani feels that genuine efforts must be taken from school level itself to connect with differently abled students. “Vocational training and then placements was not the way I wanted to do it. I wanted to identify and connect every dot in the canvas that was left unattended so that



*Vocational training and then placements was not the way I wanted to do it. I wanted to identify and connect every dot in the canvas that was left unattended so that employment of differently abled persons evolved into an organic process.*

employment of differently abled persons evolved into an organic process. As a whole, I envisage communities to evolve and adapt to suit the needs and potentials of differently abled persons,” explains Janani.

Janani initially decided to work in the corporate sector, save enough and then establish her organisation. However, her experience at CSIM changed all her plans. “When teachers and seniors were trying to explain that an organisation could grow on its own, I was not able to

relate to the idea because all along I had witnessed external influences, be it funds or expert advice or any other means, driving an organisation’s growth trajectory. Eventually, the thought of social entrepreneurship and business model excited me,” she adds. With his new thought process, Janani began to develop a model that suited her vision. She wanted to support all influential stakeholders like teachers, students, trainers, employers and guide them towards a space where opportunities were made available to every capable individual, irrespective of their disabilities. “And the starting point is to understand skills holistically,” she points out.

Janani visited schools and organised life skills sessions for both teachers and students. The idea was ensure that they were both prepared to adapt for industry and corporate requirements. While teachers came out with intriguing concerns about supporting the differently abled students, students, on the other hand, were cognizant of what they could not expect from the system. They could articulate the disconnect between their skills, employment opportunities and their identity as differently abled persons. They were almost ready to accept disappointments

and failures. “That hurt me because students were prepared to understand that there will be obstacles but were not oriented about how they could prepare themselves to face the same and emerge successful. This is exactly why the percentage of unemployed among the differently abled is larger than the rest of the population. Every stakeholder had to be coerced to look at the potential of complementing efforts from all quarters,” shares Janani.

Still in the nascent stages, Aazhthiran trust intends to tap every avenue that can prepare differently abled individuals and communities for sustainable employment in the long run. With field work yet to roll out in full swing, Janani has been compiling insights from all her interactions to shape her model into a successful one. “When you work to build a model, every insight pushes you to work out all possible outcomes and the very process brings you to face every possible obstacle. This is a very valuable lesson from CSIM and I will hold on to this forever. Therefore, if a vocational training institute emerges to be a need I may not divulge but will design it to fit and serve the objectives of this model,” says a determined Janani.

-Shanmuga Priya.T

# WORKING HAND IN HAND FOR CHANGE



*In Karaikal, India, a colossal garbage problem threatens the environment and its people. To combat this, a grassroots movement is working to reset old habits.*



## Karaikal's littered past

For many years, Karaikal, a seaside town on the south coast of India, had a waste crisis on its hands. A lack of a solid waste management infrastructure saw garbage scattered across the landscape. A situation that afflicts many other cities in India as well. The waste impacts the environment and also threatens the people who live there.

"People collecting rubbish in plastic bags and throwing them wherever they go was common. The rubbish got carried by the winds, and garbage was found everywhere," bemoans local resident K. Mala. The rubbish that is not collected and treated can pose several problems. Plastic waste in the sea can break down into microplastics and affect sea life. Non-biodegradable waste can contaminate a community's drinking water sources.

"Garbage gets accumulated in one place, and when the pile gets big, they burn it. The smoke that emanates from this pile-up is harmful to health," shares Mala.

## "Recycle for Life" with the Green Friends

This situation was what drove Hand in Hand India (HiH India), a pan-Indian non-profit organisation that promotes sustainable development, to engage with Karaikal's locals in changing mindsets, driving behavioural change in their waste management approach.

"Smaller towns like Karaikal lack the adequate infrastructure to process its solid waste. Along with a lack of awareness among residents, it created a huge environmental problem", reports Amuda Shekharan from HIHI.

"As every household is generating rubbish, the

success of any waste management program would depend on the behavioural and mindset change in the community."

In November 2016, HiH India implemented a waste management program called "Recycle for Life", which strives for maximum waste recovery through composting, recycling and reuse. This process minimises the amount of waste in landfills; it requires the waste to be segregated at the start, making sure organic waste like food scraps is not dumped together with recyclables like plastic bottles.

A key pillar of this model is the Green Friends initiative, which recruits and trains sanitation workers involved in the door-to-door collection, transportation and processing of municipal solid waste.

"As the Green Friends go to collect garbage on a daily basis, they get to build rapport with the female



Today, 60% of Karaikal's organic waste gets converted into bio-compost



members of the household who are tasked with all major domestic duties such as taking out the trash," Amuda shares.

"This has allowed the Green Friends to effectively communicate the

importance of segregating their household waste, and to strengthen the changes in behaviour and mindset that they have been able to promote."

### Reduce Reuse Recycle: Karaikal leads the way

Karaikal's efforts at community-led waste segregation have seen very encouraging results, as 50% of households have agreed to segregate their waste before handing it over to the local Green Friends teams.

"Karaikal generates about forty-one thousand kilograms of waste on a daily basis", Amuda shares, "Of the waste collected, only about 10 to 15 per cent of it ends up at the landfill. The rest is either organic waste converted into compost or materials like plastics and metals that we send to recyclers."

Mala, who serves the community as a member of the Green Friends, has observed this transformation, "Earlier people considered garbage only as garbage. But now they are segregated and made into fertilisers and recycled. It is not seen as only garbage anymore

as it is used in many ways. Now that it is collected from house to house, littering has reduced."

While waste dumping and open burning continue to be the principal disposal methods in most places in India, Karaikal is a remarkable transformation of hope for environmental protection and sustainability for the rest of the country.

"The behavioural and mindset change among the community was a major factor for the success of this project," says Amuda, "Every individual has to come forward for a better future. Our children should have a better life tomorrow."

Being a Green Friend has also given Mala a sense of ownership in the future of the community.

"Now the community feels that things are much better – the lakes are clean, garbage gets collected from homes, so as such they have no problems. They like the work we do for their protection and now they talk highly of the work we do," says Mala. "We need to keep Karaikal as clean as it is now. That is my desire too."

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



## CONVERSATIONS WITH SHRI RAMANA MAHARISHI

Mr. Grant Duff was in the hall. Sri Bhagavan was mentioning some new publications and Maha Yoga among others. He also remarked that Mr. G. D. having read Sat Darsana Bhashya would be surprised at the different view of Maha Yoga. Both claim to represent Sri Bhagavan's philosophy; but they differ so much that Maha Yoga actually condemns the other.

Someone cited the curious claim of Sat Darsana Bhashya that individuality is retained even after the loss of ego.

### Sri Bhagavan remarked:

What is to be done? The Upanishads say: Brahmanid Brahmaiva bhavati (Knower of Brahman becomes Brahman). There are more than one Brahmanid at a time. "Are all of them the same? Are they not separate?" So ask some persons. They look to the bodies only. They do not look to the realisation. There is no difference in the realisation of the Brahmanid. That is the Truth. But when the question is raised from the standpoint of the body the reply is necessarily bound to be "Yes. They are different". This is the cause of the confusion.

**Mr. G. Duff:** The Buddhists deny the world; the Hindu philosophy admits its existence, but says that it is unreal. Am I right?

**M.:** The difference of view is according to the difference in the angles of vision.

**D.:** They say that Sakti creates the world. Is the knowledge of unreality due to the unveiling of maya?

**M.:** All admit Sakti's creation. What is the nature of the Creatrix? It can only be in conformity with the nature of the creation. The Creatrix is of the same nature as Her creation.

**D.:** Are there degrees of illusion?

**M.:** Illusion is itself illusory. Illusion must be seen by one beyond it. Can such a seer be subject to illusion? Can he then speak of degrees of illusion?

There are scenes floating on the screen in a cinema show. Fire appears to burn buildings to ashes. Water seems to wreck vessels. But the screen on which the pictures are projected remains unscorched and dry. Why?

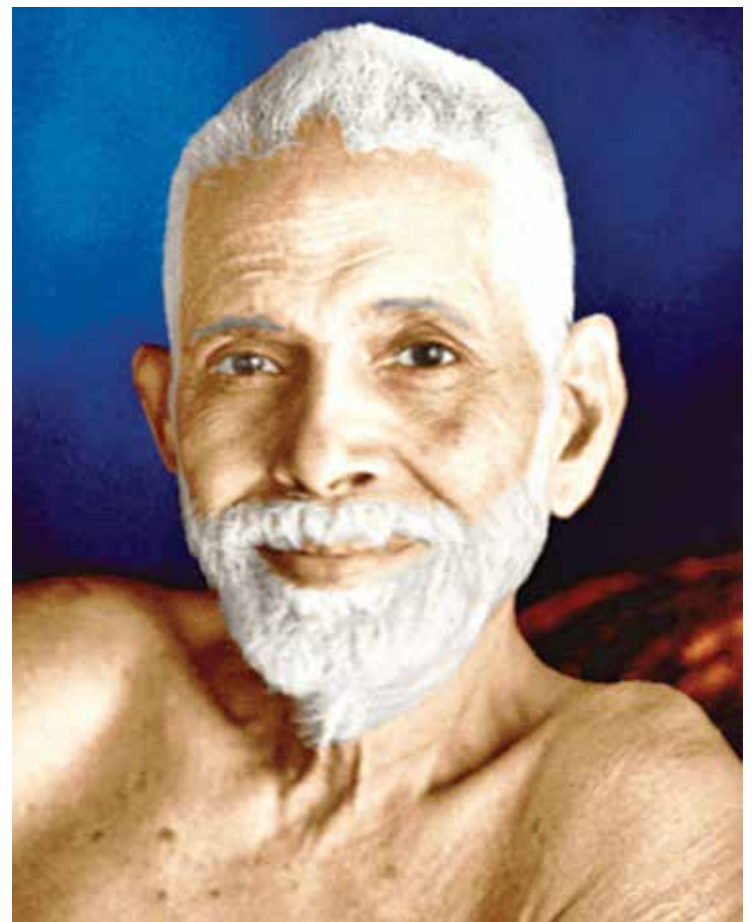
Because the pictures are unreal and the screen is real.

Again reflections pass through a mirror; but the mirror is not in any way affected by the quality or quantity of the reflections on it.

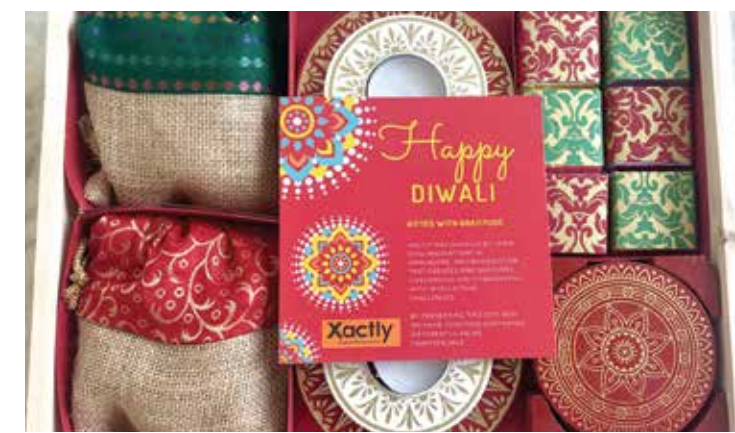
So the world is a phenomenon on the single Reality, which is not affected in any manner. Reality is only one.

The discussion about illusion is due to the difference in the angle of vision. Change your angle of vision to one of jnana and then find the universe to be only Brahman. Being now in the world, you see the world as such. Get beyond it and this will disappear: the Reality alone will shine.

*Source: Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*



# SKILLED, TALENTED, EMPLOYABLE



If there's one organization that has, in the last decade, stood for the self-reliance of differently abled individuals, it has to be Diya Foundation. Over the years, the organization has helped train its wards in disciplines like data entry, chocolate-making, candle-making, screen printing, and innovative craft including that which involves recyclable material.

Diya Foundations' sister concern, Diya Innovations, has over the course of time, employed differently abled individuals to sell products that made for corporate and individual gifting alternatives, including chocolate, candles, household linen, decorative lighting and craft.

"Diya Innovations was incorporated in 2013. We chose to set up as a private limited

company and since our inception we have provided employment directly to 10 men and women born with intellectual challenges and to about 6 on a short term contract basis," says Suman John, Co-Founder and CEO at Diya Innovations. "The team we started with 8 years ago continues to work with us today, thus providing sustained livelihoods to them for the last 8 years.

At Diya Innovations, the focus is to ensure that the differently abled look after themselves while developing skills for self-employment, which in turn help them to eke out a living. "In our team of artisans we have men and women with cerebral palsy, Down's Syndrome and other physical and mental health challenges," Suman says.

The approach is both refreshing and new-age since it not only makes such individuals employment-ready but also provides them with a platform to go about earning their living. This especially holds relevance at a day and age when employability, self-reliance and employment are buzzwords given the circumstances surrounding society and the economy at large.

Several case studies at Diya Innovations make for inspirational success stories too. Like that of Ayesha who joined the vocational training centre in 2011 where her excellent ability to follow instructions, work as a team and supervise others made her a valuable member of the candle unit. Today, Ayesha hand-crafts 50,000 little wax flowers and wax

angels a year across a myriad of colours. According to Diya Innovations, her patience and attention to detail help her excel at her tasks. "Our artisans are great at following instructions. We ensure that the training for all the stages of production that they are involved in, consists of instructions where every task is broken down into steps and they work on single-steps at a time," says Suman. "As long as there is no ambiguity in instructions, everything goes smoothly. The onus is on the trainer to make sure there is clarity in instructions and what is expected and also that there is a limited scope for doubts or questions." Another case study at Diya Innovations is that of Rekha, a hard worker who has been with the organization since 2011.

She took up chocolate making and met her goals during her training period. Today, she works independently on the group's chocolate-making vertical and is especially vigilant about cleanliness and safety standards that are set for her unit. Diya Innovations says it is especially proud of her growth, which includes her culinary and supervisory skills.

"Skills training is part of the scope of work of our sister concern Diya Foundation," says Suman. "All trainees who go through the training programme at the Foundation, are guided towards opportunities based on their skills and level of expertise gained." She adds: "These trainees are also introduced to internship and more permanent opportunities and helped to ease into work roles with job

coaches from the Foundation. We also encourage self employment models, and hope to see some success on that front soon."

A large part of the success of Diya Innovations stems from mindsets. Suman explains how those with intellectual challenges often find themselves marginalized in daily life and by society in general. However, an organization like hers often provides them with refuge and a platform to tap into their inherent skill. "They thrive instead, in places like Diya Innovations, where the 'sheltered workshop' environment works in their favour," she says.

The organization has successfully managed to place trainees from the foundation in various job verticals including housekeeping, F&B, data-mining and other related streams. The

key, Suman says, is to ensure that such individuals are provided with a safe environment and one that embraces them for who they while helping them get better. "It's all about finding employers who will include them in the workforce and create an environment that helps them thrive," she says.

The organization has presence in Bangalore today, but is on its way to opening more production centres in South India, over the next few years. The challenge lies in finding the right market for its crafts, and end up innovating processes and design. But it hopes to get there soon, and carve a niche for itself in enabling differently abled individuals to earn their living.

# LIVING IN THE UAE : DOES GROWING UP AS AN EXPAT AFFECT MENTAL HEALTH

Self-harm, over-medication, excessive hostility. These, and other signs of unhappiness, are observed in the lives of teenagers everywhere, pummeled as they are by the process of growing up and its struggles. But, for those in the UAE, a popular and comfortable second-home destination, is this equally prevalent? School teachers, parents, and young adults who have grown up in Dubai say a very definite 'Yes'. Mental health symptoms are no less observed in this haven of comfort than anywhere else.

About nine million of UAE's total population of ten million are expatriates (citizens of other countries with residency permits ranging from 2 to 10 years; generally called expats). They choose the UAE to benefit from the work opportunities available and the absence of personal taxation, allowing them to save for their future and send money back home to support their dependents. The facts bear this out: despite its comparatively smaller size, the UAE is the second in the global remittances list of countries, after the United States. Reflecting the composition of expats, over one-third of total remittances are sent to India.

The UAE is a comfortable place, known for the ease with which people can settle in and make friends. Various reports confirm this opinion; among them is a 2021 study of over 20,000 expats by HSBC's Expat Explorer that ranked UAE as the "Fourth best country in the world to live and work in." Top marks are awarded for safety, quality of life, and openness to diverse cultures. In a similar study, Dubai, where I live, was placed as third for ease of living.

But, hidden among the many benefits, are quicksands of potential depression and anxiety for those who live and grow up here, stemming from the very nature of expat life. Comments made by a few people interviewed informally give an insight into these.

## Lack of belonging

Most expats come to this country as young parents and stay for decades. The children in these families grow up in a mix of cultures; influenced by home, the international friends they make, and our host country, the UAE. The result is that these children develop a totally different outlook, a third culture. They are a breed apart from their parents, cousins back home as well as those of their friends who are natural citizens here.

These Third Culture Kids (a sociological term coined in the 1950s) are the subject of various studies which point out that they share similar patterns of emotions, behaviour, and skills. A life-coach in the group gives the input that the absence of having an identity linked to their home country is a concern for most. This lack of a sense of belonging may have different impacts, at the very least an unsettled feeling or a feeling of awkwardness in interactions with peers.

The children, who have grown up in a different country from that of their passport, appreciate having a unique and more inclusive perspective, separate from their parents' views. But, they also feel concerned about the disconnect with 'back home', political views, even family festivals.

Belonging to a community helps give expats a sense of being rooted in something. At the very least, the absence of this place where one fits in automatically is unnerving. In its extreme form, it could be a cause for sapping anxiety, in children as well as in the adults they grow into.

"I felt like I was in a strange land where everyone else spoke a different language. I was unsure whom to speak to and felt excluded because I was a little different. Throughout my time there I had no close friends – something I had never faced before. I felt so lonely. I hated it" says Rina remembering her time in college.



## Pressure cooker effect

Nearly every expat child who grows up in the UAE is expected to move away for further education after school, whether it is due to choice or due to family visa rules (which are in the process of being expanded by the UAE government). Every August is witness to a poignant scene when 17 and 18 year olds' are desperately trying to hide their nervousness and sense of loss as they leave the only home they had known. The stark reality they face is that henceforth they would only come as visitors, if at all. It is a time of deep insecurity and uncertainty in their lives.

The months before they leave can be even worse, with the strain of exams, college applications, feverishly participating in various extra-curriculars generally perceived to be a must for any admission. People with children about to join university swim around in rapid circles like they are in a fishbowl, going from one activity to another, making the final school period full of anxiety, worry and many arguments. Disagreements start even before the final years, with children disliking what they perceive as unnecessarily large expectations placed on them and parents wanting their child to do all they can – often from a much younger age - to secure a good college seat.

One young person talks about feeling like he had been in a pressure cooker. "My parent's expectations, their pride at my achievements, drove me to a point of depression that was nearly beyond my control. I had no time to relax, no friends, no social life and life didn't

seem worth living. The stress kept building and building and I had no outlet at all. I felt like I had to be at my work constantly, and take no time to enjoy myself." It was a slow, long haul for him to get out of this feeling, he says, but the scars remain. A host of other expat kids also speak of remarkably similar experiences.

## Absence of a safety net

The absence of a close social fabric might be a factor that contributes to the feeling of insecurity. With limited ability for interaction with extended families who could provide support at a time of need, there are few adults around whom youngsters can rely for help, intervention or advice. This fear gets intensified when they are sent out to make their way into the world. There is no safety net.

The final years that a child spends at home can be difficult for everyone involved. The imminent sadness of parting exists in both parents and children. Strong familial bonds will be loosened, perhaps forever. For the parents, the prospect of the inevitable empty nest, brings with it a deep sense of loss, overlaid with aspirations and pride.

## Where to from here?

Are the parents wrong when they have expectations? Is this only an expat experience, don't other children face this? I wanted to know.

The young people I spoke with all agreed that their parents' desire to help their children achieve is understandable, referring to the challenges of a move to a new country, the work that goes into building financial security that the family enjoys, the effort it takes to create a comfortable home and social circle. The difficult aspect, perhaps, is the parents' single-mindedness on what they feel their children's goals should be. This is regardless of culture or ethnic background, to different degrees.

The UAE government is now taking various steps that will help people deal with the emotional issues of living as an expat. Ranging from extending visas to support families in time of need to permitting different categories of residency permits that allow people to make long-term plans, various solutions are witnessed. In the past two years, when the world was inflicted by the virus, people were allowed to stay for many months after their visas expired. Recently, schemes that allow residents to stay for a period of 10 years, when the average length of contract is 2-3 years, were announced. These and other rules for people to enjoy a stable family life in the UAE are in place and evolving further.

The authorities are doing their bit. Perhaps there are ways that caregivers, both formal and non-formal, can find to help as well?

Parents, teachers, coaches and family friends who feel these mental health challenges do exist say they try and communicate more openly and more regularly. Listening to words said and unsaid is a critical aspect. While this is not always easy to do, focusing on the communication and listening does seem to help alleviate the pressure-cooker effect, the sense of loneliness as well as the fear of what would happen in the future.

Being a child of expatriate parents in UAE has many advantages to it. More friendly and open personalities, communicating easily with people of all backgrounds, a higher sense of empathy and quicker adaptability are all great assets that these children develop.

There is, however, the other side of the coin. Recognizing and addressing these issues – in any of the ways that one feels comfortable - could pay great dividends for our expat children and their relationships as they move away.

*Karuna Luthar*

# COLLABORATION IS KEY

The mark of an evolved society lies in the respect, dignity and empowerment accorded to the most vulnerable sections of our society. While it might seem like we are still eons behind attaining this level of collective evolution, there are individuals and organizations that are working day in and day out towards this end. Take for example, Amogh Charitable Trust. Based in Bengaluru, Amogh is a charitable organization working with persons with intellectual disabilities, providing vocational skills and finding them skilled work for reasonable pay.

Speaking with Jayashree Vaitheeswaran, Founder and Managing Trustee of Amogh Trust, we learn how Amogh is slowly but surely creating a skilled and independent community of adults with intellectual disabilities.

Since early 2000, while looking for alternative career options, Jayashree had been working in the disability sector. She started volunteering as a scribe with the Spastics Society of North India in Delhi. Subsequently she helped out with the administration of an Autism Centre. A friend of hers, who was a Chartered Accountant, quit her career to start this centre for autistic kids. Says Jayashree, "This is where I started learning the nitty-gritties of running an organization".

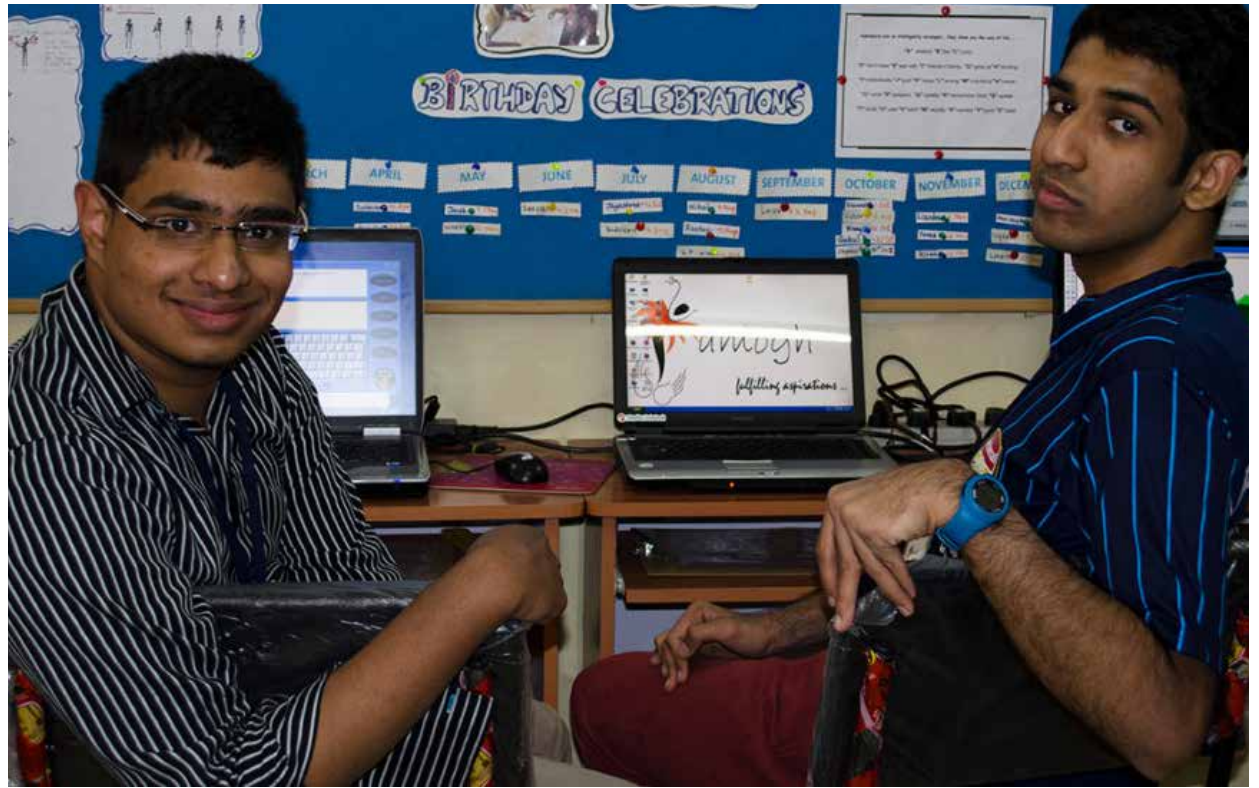
By 2011, Jayashree moved to Bengaluru. Armed with her extensive experience, Jayashree and four other friends of hers started the Amogh Trust in 2012. They resolved that the Trust would do a lot more than just gather donations for charitable causes.

Young adults (aged 18 and over) with intellectual disabilities are some of the most underserved even within the community. They age out of special schools and then their parents struggle to find avenues for them. Jayashree did her research and found out that an NGO called AMBA had a Training-of-trainers program to teach basic computer skills. She got her staff trained through this program and initiated Project Deeksha. Students of Amogh were taught MS Word, MS Excel and Powerpoint, data entry and document scanning and were trained in word-building, arithmetic, counting and general knowledge. Project Deeksha is currently also running in NIMHANS as part of their psychiatric rehabilitation centre. In essence through this project, Amogh helps persons with intellectual disabilities channelize their thoughts and actions into skilled work that their later able to earn from as well.

Says Jayashree, "Initially, we reached out to all the local special schools. We met with the parents and emphasized on the fact that this is visual-based training, simple data-entry. In no time we had 13 students. In the meantime another NGO called Seva In Action expressed a need for a computer program. They offered us a small space of 50-60 square feet. Through our trustees, large MNCs were able to donate computers for this setup. One of our earliest jobs was a contract to do hard copy to soft copy digitization of Telecom forms. These are outsourced by large telecom companies to BPO vendors, who then subcontract it out to NGOs. This subcontract, which AMBA had secured was so successful and was about to grow exponentially. However, the 2G scam came to light and this contract ended almost abruptly. However, we still found value in teaching this skill set to our students, hoping that it would come of use in another way."

Realizing that this cannot be the only program they offered, Amogh Trust decided to offer some offline skills as well. They hired an artist to provide training in painting, cutting, sticking and pasting, creating products out of everyday objects. Through Savitha's training, students of Amogh learn how to paint on different mediums. Some of their paintings are printed as greeting cards, whereas they create paper bags, Diwali lights (dijas) and a host of other eco-friendly products. These products are named Ananya and can be purchased from Amogh's website.

Soon Amogh expanded its facilities to include pressed



leaf utensils. This is a product of yet another collaboration, as Jayashree explains, "Radha Ramesh, the Director of Vidyasagar, Chennai, is also a parent of children with disability. She runs Twin Tigs, an organization where her disabled sons make and sell pressed leaf bowls and plates (Donnai). She helped us procure the machines, trained our staff and set up this workshop at Amogh".

Over the past few years, Amogh has been receiving orders for their huge selection of products. The orders keep pouring in for special occasions, Diwali and other festivals. While it is difficult to keep up with the orders, Amogh found a hidden opportunity in this. They decided to share their training and knowledge with the parents of their students who wish to help. They also extended their training to other organizations serving marginalized communities to share the work and share in the revenues as well. Amogh is offering training in bag-making to rural women who are willing to work during their free hours at home. In collaboration with the organization Hosa Belaku, they make upcycled bags. During Diwali season last year they fulfilled a corporate order. Says Jayashree, "Our volume at our own centre is very little. When we get orders for items by the thousands, we need help. So why not collaborate?"

Amogh Trust is a part of the Disability NGO Alliance (DNA) in Karnataka. DNA is a network of 150 NGOs working in the disability sector. Jayashree is on their Executive Committee. DNA in partnership with the Bengaluru Municipal Corporation conducted a hugely successful vaccination program through which 1000 persons with intellectual disabilities were given the first and second doses at the early stages of the vaccine rollouts.

On the flip side when the pandemic began, Amogh had to shut their doors on the students. A very hard decision considering how much the students needed this routine. Thankfully, shortly after, they received a work from home contract from Saksham, Delhi. This is content editing and conversion for the visually impaired. Students involved in this program need to proofread soft copies of books line by line and convert them into a format compatible with OCR reader for visually challenged persons. Currently 60 students are delivering this project, out of which 18 are from Amogh and the rest are from partnering organizations. From 2020-2022, the group has delivered more than one lakh pages.

All in all, students of Amogh Trust earn anywhere between INR 1000-7000 per month.

Says Jayashree, "Our students are really good at what they do. With a little training and supervision, they follow the instructions perfectly well and produce beautiful work. We're continuously researching ways in which to make them more self-reliant. We're trying to see if a five-hour work day might work for our candidates."

Amogh organizes information for parents so that they are able to see the scores of choices they have. Most parents conduct one medical assessment of their kid's disability during the latter's childhood and that's it. Amogh encourages them to take their children to a medical professional for a current assessment and subsequently to get their child a disability card if they haven't already done so. Explaining the more complex challenges they face, Jayashree says, "With adulthood comes various issues with respect to mental health, gender sensitization and sexuality. Sometimes our students have difficulty dealing with natural instincts. Crushes, attraction, etc. We conduct workshops for both parents and students. We ask parents, how would you observe your child's behaviour at home? Over a period of time we have developed a strong parent group consisting mostly of mothers, and we take their inputs on dealing with our students. We discuss scenarios that further help parents deal with situations"

During the interview Jayashree mentions countless organizations, sometimes giving them credit for building Amogh's capacity, and other times citing them as Amogh's partners in taking their mission forward. As the interview wraps up, she emphasizes "Collaboration is the only way to work! By ourselves, our bandwidth is limited. How else will you continue to learn and grow except by working with organizations in the sector? My cofounder and friend Akhila and I have been brainstorming on what the next step for Amogh will be. The need for centres like ours is very much prevalent and we want the younger generation to take this forward. We would like to build pre-vocational skills, for kids aged 14-18 years. In the next five years or so, maybe we will partner up with another organization and expand our reach. When new ideas and opportunities present themselves, we will not hesitate to reach for them!"

Archanaa Ramesh



# WOES TO WOWS -A PERIODICAL CLEANUP!

*"Knowing Others is intelligence. Knowing Yourself is true wisdom. Mastering others is strength. Mastering yourself is true power." - Lao Tzu*



**R**oshan (45) was a busy top-notch senior executive, a super-man wanting to get the top grades in every sphere of life. He has been so from the time he could remember in his life. Memories run as far back as grade four, with Roshan doing all his might to win the attention and approval of his teacher, parents, grandparents, and neighbors. He soon figured out it was easy. Keep bringing home laurels, awards, and top scores from school, and all attention will be grabbed.

His younger brother, who stole the show when he was born, threatened Roshan for about a year. It seemed like everyone had forgotten about him and had their attention only on little Rahul. Soon, he figured people love to see achievements, especially gloat in pride if it was from their own family. Since then, achieving and being the first in everything –from studies to martial arts and winning friends –had been Roshan's way of life.

Roshan has also disproved the belief that brains and brawns don't exist together. He was a regular at the gym, where heads turned as he walked past. His need to be the best continued into work life, and climbing the corporate ladder was his continual pursuit. He watched his bank balance and believed money could give him all that he needed in his life. He also pursued the most popular girl and won her heart, who is now his wife. He kept proving to the world and all around him that he

was worth the attention they gave. His two children, a son in ninth grade and a daughter in sixth grade, were also his prized possessions.

Roshan's life had never been a smooth, easy path. He had continually struggled, worked hard, took up challenges head-on, developed an extensive network, and was continuously watchful of context to make the best out of every situation. Not once did he think he believed in anything other than himself. In the corner of his mind sat a belief that he was the sole reason for all his achievements and he had got it all going.

Roshan was handed over a new project that demanded travel to the USA and stay for a couple of months. He was always focused on what benefits he would get and how it would further his life financially and career-wise. His family with children and a working wife were not on his mind's radar when he accepted the assignment. Roshan landed in the USA, and the work began. He had taken a service apartment and cooked one meal a day. The first month was exciting and hectic for him to think of anything else. The second month had him slightly missing his family and the comfort of home-cooked food.

When the pandemic hit, the world closed its borders! Roshan was stuck in the USA and his family in Bangalore. Initially, he thought it could be days when he couldn't travel back home, but soon the days turned

into months. His office shut, the entire world was slipping into lockdown, and he had to work from home. Virtual meetings and a couple of video calls with the family every day began to numb him slowly. No gym or physical exercise and the inability to meet anyone in person affected his vibrancy, motivation, and zeal for living. The initial enthusiasm to cook dishes by watching YouTube faded in two weeks. He tried posting his culinary experiments on Facebook and kept checking for the number of likes. Soon, boredom took over. Everyone in his circle was doing the same, flashing their little achievements and waiting for acknowledgments and appreciation. In the meantime, his organization was slipping into survival mode, and the projects were not progressing as planned.

The loneliness started hitting him harder. He had seen most of the OTT movies and web series. It was already four months with the pandemic, and things were yet to return to normal. It was the weekend, and Roshan was in no mood to interact with anyone across the laptop screen. He sat browsing his old hard disk and chanced upon photo folders. From the memory lane sprang the vacations Roshan had with his children, his marriage and honeymoon photos, his college days with friends, his school annual talent day, his parents during his growing years, his little brother Rahul and many more. He didn't realize that it was over three hours he had

spent enjoying each moment of the photo. A collage of his achievements, awards, and recognition in school and college hung in his room at his parent's home. He had captured it digitally in a photo. Everything started to come alive for him now. He was traversing through his life journey. Roshan had never found time to be with himself before. He was always action-oriented and externally engaged; an internal journey was something new. And that new journey had begun to light a fire within him.

**"What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us." – Ralph Waldo Emerson**

For the rest of the evening, Roshan surprised himself with questions he had never asked before. What is life? What does success mean? The answers that were coming to him were even more surprising. It felt like he was a stranger to himself. "Life had always been a set of activities that proved I was the best for myself and the people around me. It was an accumulation of rewards, recognition, and achievements that kept me a center of attraction wherever I went. Success, I had defined as money, position, power, and appreciation," he felt.

Seeing the family photos, he questioned himself, when was it last I shared my heart and laughed with Rahul? He had been a competitor from the day he was born, and now it was only the sharing of my achievements whenever we spoke. I had not even asked him how he truly was and felt. Instead, I was quick to give pieces of advice if he shared about his dilemmas in life. He had lost the purity of bonding somewhere growing up, and maybe living only in comparison. In every picture, he looks up to me with pride in his eyes! When have I celebrated his successes and told him I was proud of him?

A cup of coffee was his best friend now! Roshan made a hot cup of coffee and sat on the tiny balcony of his apartment overlooking the high-rise buildings. The twilight was beautiful.



Roshan's mind moved towards his wife and children. I have never really asked them what they think of me. Perhaps, I have told them only what I wanted from them. I realise Shilpa, my dear wife, has spoken lesser and lesser in the last few years with me. Our conversations had slowly moved to a functional, operational, and we don't even look at each other when we talk. When was the last time we held hands and sat as we used to do in the first two years of our marriage? Where have I been in my life that I don't recall recent great moments? Roshan had more questions than answers. It had begun to feel heavy. He realized the euphoria of successes he was living in his mind and the last few decades slowly crumbled.

Roshan remembered with a smile how he held his daughter in his hands and how she would giggle when tickled. Last three to four years, the giggle had disappeared behind the mobile phone and WhatsApp. Success is all about response time, is what he said! But, that mantra was only for the work issues. He realized his son was getting into the 'Hi Dad and Bye Dad' mode in the last year. But isn't it true I have been occupied with my thoughts too? "Most of the time, I am on the phone while at home. We seem to have made our weekend trips to the mall and restaurants a routine activity. There was no longer a space to catch up, explore and understand each other. Even in the office, my colleagues are either a threat or serve some purpose. All time only agenda plays out in my mind," he mused.

As Roshan hit the pillow, the most challenging question appeared, when did he do something extraordinary for his parents. The photos reminded him of their sacrifices to ensure that he and Rahul got all they needed in life. "Yes, they have chosen to live nearer to Rahul, but didn't I find that convenient? I did not try to think if they needed anything besides money and things from me. Their visits are always short, and it was Shilpa's responsibility to manage them. Why am I the way I am?" he wondered.

"What do I want out of my life? Who am I pleasing in all my actions? To whom do I have to prove? What do I want to tell myself at the end of my life? What should be my story? Am I living? Am I alive?" he asked.

Roshan didn't know when sleep overtook his thoughts. His voice had deafened the external voices. He felt he was cleaning himself from within! We never really do housekeeping within us! Do we? We are so busy cleaning everything outside us that we forget to clean inside. At times, consciousness gives us the space to reflect, go deep inside, clean up all garbage, and make ourselves lighter, simpler, and happier.

He felt like a new person when he woke up on



Sunday morning. He heard his mobile ring.

Hello, said a feeble Shilpa's voice. Am I waking you up?

He replied, "Hi! Tell me, dear. I just woke up. Shilpa, I miss you. Thank you for holding the fort all alone, not just now but all these years."

There was a silence on the other side, and a small smile curved Shilpa's lips.

"Shilpa, I love you. I so look forward to coming back home next month. Let's spend some quality time as a family!" he added.

*Dr. Kalpana Sampath*



## Centre for Social Initiative and Management

### Contact Persons:

**C**entre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) is a unit of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani (MSDS). 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. [www.csim.in](http://www.csim.in)

Ms. Marie Banu. J  
Director, Chennai  
@ 9884700029

Dr. Madhuri. R  
Head, Coimbatore,  
@ 91-9840222559

Dr. Agyeya Tripathi  
Head - North & NE India  
@ 91-8058662444

Mr. Sandeep Mehto,  
Head – Hosangabad,  
@ 91-96696 77054

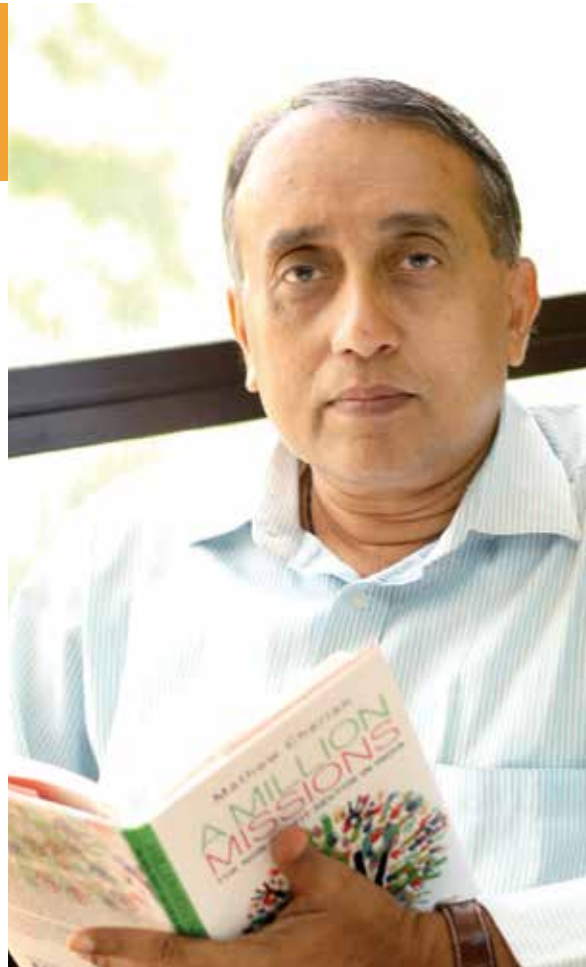


CSIM also facilitates Social Accounting and Audit for social enterprises, CSR projects, and NGOs through Social Audit Network, India. (SAN, India is an overseas chapter of Social Audit Network, UK covering India and Middle East.)

For further information, please contact:  
Ms. Latha Suresh  
Director, SAN, India  
@ 92822 05123.  
[www.san-india.org](http://www.san-india.org)

# “What matters is not the 2% of net profits for CSR, but how the company has generated its overall profits.”

## Mathew Cherian shares with Marie Banu the evolution of CSR and its impact



**M**athew Cherian is the Board Chair of CARE India. He is a B.E. (Honours) in Civil Engineering from BITS, Pilani Rajasthan and holds a PG Diploma in Rural Management from the first batch of IRMA, Institute of Rural Management Anand, Gujarat. Later, he worked in the area of rural development with cooperatives in association with the National Dairy Development Board. He also served as Director of Oxfam India from 1987-1994.

He serves as Member of the NGO Task force of the Niti Aayog, Member of the Policy Committee of the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Member of Core Committee of National Human Rights Commission. He also served as a Member of the High Level Committee on Corporate Social Responsibility, Ministry of Corporate Affairs. Currently serves as an Amicus Curiae to the Supreme Court in the elder rights matter, for pensions, homes and the Maintenance Law, which has helped bring elder issues to the forefront.

CEO of HelpAge till June 2020, Mathew continues as the Global Ambassador for HelpAge International, and also serves on the board of other international bodies like GuideStar International. He is a Member of the “Global Future Council” of World Economic Forum – foremost interdisciplinary knowledge network for promoting innovative thinking to shape a sustainable and inclusive future. He is also working on the Technical Committee of SEBI to create a Social Stock Exchange in India.

*In an exclusive interview, Mathew Cherian shares with Marie Banu the evolution of CSR and its impact on the development sector*

### Tells us about CARE India and its key programmes?

CARE India is a part of the CARE International Confederation, which is helping millions of people in living a life of dignity. We have a presence in over 100 countries. We have been contributing to India’s explosive growth for 75 years, starting from the time when it was a newly formed nation, till today when it is among the world’s fastest developing economies. In 2020-21, we impacted the lives of more than 52.7 million people, through 53 projects, carried across 18 states.

Girl’s Leadership and Empowerment Programme is implemented in the slums of Mumbai and rural areas of Cuddalore district. The programme focuses on supporting adolescent girls and creates enabling social spaces for them to build their skills, continue their studies and pursue careers that match their aspirations. CARE has developed a global programme “SOAR” based on this learning which is being implemented in many Latin American and African countries.

CARE has been working with Government of Uttar Pradesh in implementing ‘Early Grade Learning and Nutrition Programme’, a large scale Early Childhood Programme till 2017. This programme strengthens Aanganwadi Centres to provide pre-school education as well nutrition for health and well-being of children.

CARE has been working with adolescent girls in ‘STEM Labs in communities and public schools’ programme that aims in building their curiosity and scientific temper so that they could confidently pursue careers in Science, Technology and Mathematics. CARE In partnership with Government of Jharkhand is building a mobile STEAM (STEM + Arts) lab for complementing learning in government schools and

helping girls from marginalised communities in pursuing careers in science, technology and arts.

We work towards strengthening value chains for agricultural commodities and support rural farmers. We are also a partner to a global programme for empowering the garment industry workers in countries like Vietnam, Thailand and Bangladesh. Besides, through ‘Clean Energy Solution for Women Programme’, CARE has been working with marginalised women in UP, Orissa, Gujarat, Bengaluru in developing an improvised Cook Stove.

### What are the CSR projects implemented by CARE India?

CARE has partnered with Indo French Chamber of Commerce in channelising the CSR funding from all French MNCs operating in India and support COVID response. We set up oxygen plants and deliver essential medical equipment to all the lead COVID centres that was identified by Government of India.

We implemented an agro-nutrition programme in partnership with Cornell University in tribal districts of Orissa. Nutri-gardens were set up in tribal schools in Kandhamal and Kalahandi districts and was scaled up with funding from the Government of Orissa. CARE is collaborating with mining companies and PSUs in scaling this programme.

During the COVID response phase, CARE partnered with many lead corporates in strengthening hospital infrastructure by setting up critical care beds, equipment, diagnostics facility, etc. in over 15 states of India.

### About the evolution of CSR and its impact?

CSR in our country started with Corporate Philanthropy and since 2000 many companies launched their own Foundations. The oldest such initiative was the TATA trusts started in the 19th century which continues till this day. The new companies act of 2013 brought in Schedule 135 which stated 2% contribution of CSR funds that crossed a net profit of 5 crore rupees.

The ACT also specified several social causes ranging from education to health; and environment to restoration of monuments. However, these guidelines are not conducive to sustainable development.

The analysis of the Business Responsibility Reports of the top 100 companies by SEBI shows that companies are far from sustainability. The UN SDG guidelines induced the Ministry of corporate Affairs to revise their guidelines. I was a member of the High Level committee appointed by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs and we tried to steer the guidelines towards sustainable development. We also tried to move from the factory model of CSR to the poorer areas of the country and particularly the 115 aspirational districts announced by Niti Ayog.

Although 20,000 crores of CSR funding has been given for development projects, it’s impact is yet to be measured. What matters is not the 2% of net profits for CSR, but how the company has generated its overall profits. Is the company functioning ethically on the “do no harm principle” or are they destroying forests and polluting the rivers to make huge profits? The BRR reports do not show much promise. It is imperative that companies adopt ethical standards while making profits. Good CSR has to be built on sound principles and effective standards for labour and employees.

### About Social Stock Exchange and its impact in the social enterprise sector?

The Social enterprise model depends on the five indicators of social purpose and we can define them as social purpose organisations which may be doing a business or could be completely non-profit in character.

The Social Stock exchange is an idea which is being experimented in many countries and the Government had announced this move in the Budget Speech of the Finance Minister. SEBI then announced a Technical Committee to create this exchange for non-profits. I was one of the members of the SEBI committee to create the Social Stock exchange. It is very difficult to speculate on the impact of the SSE but I presume it will be an useful method to raise funds for non-profits.

### The changing trends in geriatric care in our country. Your thoughts?

India’s elderly population is at 120 million and by 2050 one in four persons in India will be a senior citizen. 25% of our population will be geriatric. By then, India would have lost its demographic dividend and will be facing a strong demographic burden caused by ageing.

With rising health care costs, India’s older adults must also be cushioned from the shocks of catastrophic health care expenditures. Declining levels of familial support among the elderly over the past decade remain a serious concern.

The need for readily available health care, including care for older adults, has been on the Indian government’s radar for quite some time. In 2007, the government passed the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, which allows adults 60 and older who are “unable to maintain” themselves to bring legal action against adult children or grandchildren who fail to provide them with such basic necessities as housing, food, clothing, and medical care. While this Act codifies the basic rights of older adults—it is particularly germane to vulnerable sub-populations, such as widows and low-income individuals—and provides a legal backbone to a faltering social order.

It is also difficult to enforce, contains no assurances for childless adults, and does not address what, if any, are the responsibilities of the Indian government toward its aging citizens. Such family-centered social welfare measures must be complemented and supported by appropriate government initiatives such as a robust pension system and health care delivery in rural areas.