

Conversations

A Chronicle of Social Currents

Volume 2 | Issue 02 | February 2011 | For Free Circulation Only | A CSIM Product

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Printed and published by:

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391/1, Venkatachalapathi Nagar,
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Photo: Marie Banu

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About a home that takes care of the God-sent children

From the Editor

Dear Friends,
Greetings!

It has been my aspiration to accelerate social citizenry as I believe that every individual has the power to bring social change. We have been highlighting the work done by many such committed citizens who are all creating an indelible mark in our

society. By lending our support to these change makers, we can strengthen their work and be a part of their journey.

I believe these organizations are like a train, and their donors are the like the passengers who get on and off in a station. As the regular donors wean away, new donors step in. Let us be the

new donors and contribute what we can during our journey.

Do read the inspiring stories ranging from a teenager to a housewife. Hope it makes you more humane than what you are!

Come, join us in our social journey!

P. N. Devarajan



The making of Social Auditors

With the increase in the number of development organisations, there is a greater need for accountability in the social sector. There has been an increasing interest among people from different walks of life in understanding the nuances, methods and tools that would enable a faster growth of social development of our country. With good governance gaining importance, it has become imperative for most organizations to analyze and report on their triple bottom line impact.

CSIM has partnered with Social Audit Network (SAN), a UK based Organization, a pioneer in the field of Social Accounting and Audit, and has launched SAN-INDIA. CSIM has introduced the SAA framework in India, which allows an organization to develop a process whereby it can account for its social performance, and draw up an

action plan to improve.

A two-day Master Class for people working in Corporate, NGOS, Management Institutes, CSR professionals, independent consultants as well as government officials was organised in New Delhi on 20 and 21 January 2011. The workshop oriented participants on: Methods for processing and preparing Social Accounts; Standardized formats for presenting the accounts; Process of getting the social accounts audited; and building a social balance sheet for the organization. This was jointly organized with Business and Community Foundation in which 20 participants all over India participated.

If you wish to know more about SAA, please contact Latha Suresh at +91 9282205123 or visit www.san-india.org

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

“From a naive home maker, I have discovered the power within me to work, motivate and lead a group of 3000 women.”
— Mahalakshmi, SHG Federation leader



SHG members receiving their awards at the Mahalir Murasu (a monthly journal) Annual Day celebrations from Mr. Durairaj, DIG of Police, Chennai.

A home maker with a little formal education, Mahalakshmi started a Self-Help Group in October 2005. Based in Ekkattuthangal at Chennai, she is now the leader of 150 SHGs that consists of 3,000 members in total.

“Though I had been working for about three and a half years, my meeting with Mrs. Latha Suresh and CSIM has been a blessing. After I

group members. She is insistent on providing all round support for her group members so as to improve their quality of life to the maximum extent possible.

“We make our members realize that their role in the family is much beyond what they think. We inculcate team spirit, and work towards including the disabled and senior citizens who are often ignored by our society,” she adds.

with State Bank of India. Eclab India, a funding organization, has supported our group immensely,” says Mahalakshmi.

The loan amount provided to SHG members allows them to commence small business activities, thereby enhancing their household income. The SHG provides training to its members in toy making, embroidery, tailoring, and also produces organic food.

“Few of our group members are vegetable vendors. They approach their customers who place an order for onions, potatoes, and tomatoes that they would require for a week. The group members procure the items from the wholesale market at Koyambedu, and supply them to their individual customers at their door steps. This activity is even more profitable when there is inflation on the prices of food commodities,” says Rosalin, a SHG member.

“The group also purchases fruits, provisions, and soap in large quantities and sells them on retail. Few group members are employed to assist in packaging and cleaning the materials. Sale is organised in industries as well. Each household saves Rs. 500 a month by purchasing the commodities from the SHG, and the group makes a profit of Rs. 500 to Rs. 1000 every month. A part of the revenue earned from this activity is saved by the SHG to conduct their annual event. The group also lends money at a 1 percent interest rate to its members,” adds Rosalin.

Besides increase in household income, the group also brings in change and improved lifestyle amongst its members. “In our group, there is a family who is engaged in wig making. All the family members were habitual alcoholics. They used to drink liquor every day as they believed that it helped them to tolerate the stench that emanated in the process of wig making. They did not eat healthy food and never sent their children to school. They lacked personal hygiene too. After they joined our self-help group and attended our meetings, their life style has changed. We counseled them to overcome alcoholism. Now, their children attend school, eat healthy food, and bathe daily. They are happy to have changed and improved their lifestyle. What more, they even save up to Rs.10,000 every month,” says Mahalakshmi.

The group conducts eye camps, health check-ups, and double up for families who do not find time to take care of elders at home. They also assist in obtaining birth, death, and community certificates from the government. Mahalakshmi conducts regular meetings with the group leaders on the third Saturday of every month. She meets the group leaders, helps them to plan their activities, discusses their problems, and proposes solutions.

“From a naive home maker, I have discovered the power within me to work, motivate and lead a group of 3,000 women. Thanks to the SHG movement and CSIM,” says Mahalakshmi.

If you wish to support the SHG, please contact Mahalakshmi at 9884188667.

—Radha Jagan



Mahalakshmi receiving the CSIM diploma certificate from Hon'ble Mayor of Chennai Thiru M. Subramaniam.

joined the Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Program (SEOP) at CSIM, I got answers to many questions, a focus on my goal, and the right direction to move on. The SEOP course helped me to a great extent and I motivated three people to enroll for the same course in the next batch!” says Mahalakshmi.

Mahalakshmi's work does not stop with just providing loans and micro credit to the self-help

Since 2005 till date, Mahalakshmi's SHG federation has disbursed loans amounting to Rs. 1 Crore. She proudly says that there have been no defaulters so far. At times when some of the members who had availed loans disappear, she reports about this to the other group members. “We are very transparent and straightforward in our activities. I have personally helped 250 people to open accounts



Clean Drinking Water for Everyone! Biosand Water Filters Come to Tamil Nadu

The facts are simply stated: Today, worldwide:

- 884 million people lack access to safe drinking water; approximately one in eight people
- 3.575 million people die each year from water-related diseases
- More people have died in the past ten years from waterborne diseases than from all wars in the entire world combined
- Diarrhoea remains the second leading cause of death among children under age five. Nearly one in five child deaths—about 1.5 million each year—is due to diarrhoea
- Waterborne disease kills more young children than AIDS, malaria, and measles combined
- 24,000 children under age five die every day from preventable waterborne illnesses.
- At any given time, half of the world hospital beds are occupied by patients suffering from diseases associated with lack of access to safe drinking water, inadequate sanitation, and poor hygiene
- Waterborne illnesses are the leading cause of school absenteeism

The situation is not very different in India, or in Tamil Nadu, where waterborne diseases remain the second leading cause of death among children.

But, stating the facts is simply not enough to understand what happens in families. Go to a village in rural Tamil Nadu. There you will find a family that has no source of clean drinking water. They can no longer afford to burn charcoal, or use scarce cooking fuel to boil water, and certainly cannot afford bottled water. As a result, the older child often suffers from dysentery, and even on the days she attends, cannot concentrate in school.

One baby died of a diarrhoeal disease. The new baby is severely weakened. The father contracted Hepatitis A from unclean water years ago and can no longer work. His family has spent all of its meager resources and is deeply in debt

from medical expenses. Without a liver transplant, he will likely die leaving the family destitute. The nearest public hospital is packed with people with waterborne illnesses.

There is a better way!

About 17 years ago, Dr. David Manz, in Calgary, Canada, invented a simple, low-cost, eco-friendly household technology that can be made from locally available materials almost anywhere in the world. It can create employment at the local level, and when used, can remove up to 99% of bacteria and viruses, as well as harmful metals from the most contaminated water sources. It requires no electricity, no chemicals, has no moving parts, and has been tested to last for more than 30 years without any maintenance. Combined with better sanitation and improved hygiene, it can reduce deaths from waterborne diseases by at least two-thirds, and increase worker productivity, family incomes, and attendance at school.

It is called —Biosand Water Filter— and is now in use in over 60 countries. Two years ago, an American organization, Friendly Water for the World partnered with Land for Tillers Freedom (LAFTI) and Padmashri Krishnammal Jagannathan to bring biosand water filter production to Nagapattinam and Tiruvarur Districts in Tamil Nadu. The raw materials to build the biosand water filter cost approximately RS 1,000, and once the steel moulds (into which cement is poured) are made each unit can be used to fabricate one filter a day. The filters, which make use of cleaned sand, gravel, and the natural inclination of bacteria in water to cannibalize each other, can produce up to one litre of pure water per minute. They are meant as a household device, but have been used effectively in hostels, schools, colleges, and clinics.

In one area in western Kenya where Friendly Water for the World works, there were 1,250 hospitalisations for waterborne diseases in a year. The following year, when a filter program was widely implemented, there were less than 100 hospitalisations. Biosand water filters have been used effectively to stop both cholera

and typhoid epidemics even without governmental intervention.

LAFTI has been working to make it possible for landless Dalits to own land in the Nagapattinam area for some 40 years. Now, it has embarked on a plan whereby families can build and own their own beautiful, 360-square foot homes, with external bathrooms and kitchen gardens. Each house, in turn, will be equipped with a biosand water filter, so that waterborne illnesses will become an issue of the past.

What's more is that biosand water filters can provide an income generation project for entrepreneurial NGOs even at the same time that they promote clean water and better hygiene and sanitation at the local level. For this, there is no need for governmental or any other assistance required.

David Albert, Board Chairman, Friendly Water of the World, has been working with LAFTI for more than 33 years. He recalls the time that he and his wife were both infected with

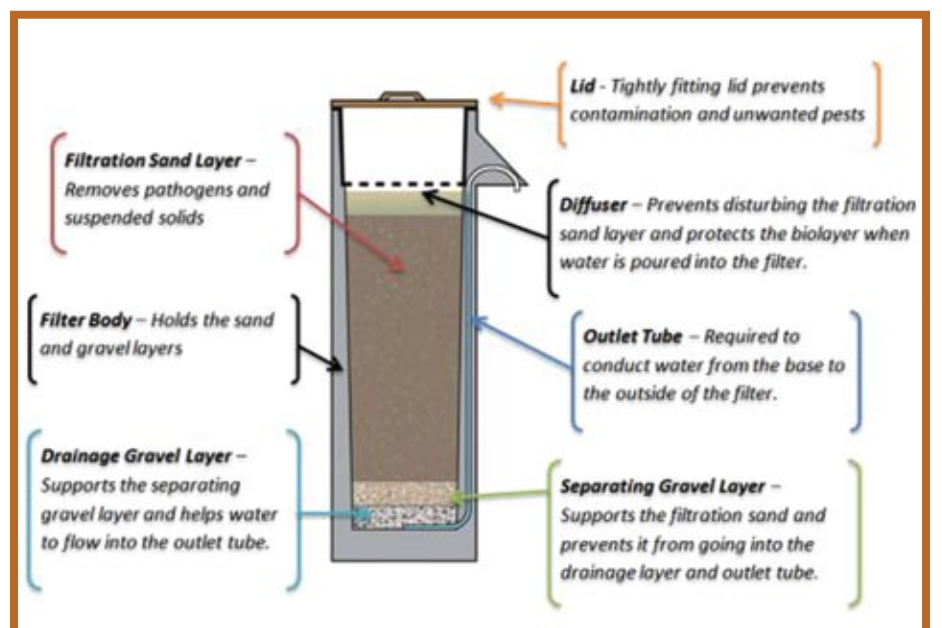
Hepatitis A (from drinking tap water in Madurai in 1981), and remembers how critical medical intervention was at that time. "It would simply have been unaffordable for most of the poor. But, now families no longer have to be sickened or bankrupted by waterborne diseases. We have the answer, and we want to share it as widely as possible," he says.

David further emphasizes that while he is working with LAFTI, he refuses to drink bottled or boiled water and relies on water from the biosand filter at LAFTI headquarters.

In the future, with the assistance of Friendly Water for the World, LAFTI may be able to offer training in hygiene promotion and biosand water filter fabrication to NGOs and community groups.

—David Albert

If you wish to know more about LAFTI, visit www.lafti.net. If you wish to contact me, write to david@friendlywaterfortheworld.com



Musings of a Social Entrepreneur

Everybody has a story to tell, and I am no different. We meet many people in our lifetime, but there are a few whom we can never forget. My encounters with many such inspiring individuals have made me feel enthused and worthwhile. It has triggered an undying passion to spread goodness around me. My interactions with these brave hearts have been the reason for me to pen my thoughts today. I salute them and their endeavours and thank them for helping me identify the social entrepreneur in me.

The seed of sharing and caring was sown in me while I was young, and this quality has complemented my social character. As a son of a school teacher, my passion for reading books was kindled in me at a very early age. I enjoyed sharing the books that I read and discussing it with my peers. When I was 20 years old, I started a small library near my home. With the support of a few friends, I built a small hut and I stacked it with all the books I had. Many people visited the club everyday, read the newspapers, magazines, and books and also held inspiring discussions.

I was one among the eight students selected for pursuing M.Tech in Chemical Engineering from IIT Kharagpur. Amongst the eight of us, four of us received a scholarship cum stipend of Rs. 150, which was a huge amount in those days. I was a bit upset, that four of my fellow class mates did not receive the same monetary benefits as us. I always dreamt of an equitable world, and wanted it amongst my classmates too. I suggested to my other three friends, that we should split our stipend money and share it with the other four who did not get the stipend. I was lucky to have friends who believed in my philosophy, and all the eight of us had Rs. 75 every month as stipend. This led to a unique bonding amongst us. I can never ever forget the life of sharing and caring we experienced in those two years of my life.

In my career as a Chemical Engineer for over 50 years, I have had the good fortune to work in many of the leading chemical industries in India. Most of the chemical factories were either situated on the city outskirts, or far away from the cities. This made me experience rural realities and urban development. This has also given me an opportunity to meet many individuals who have been a source of inspiration in my life.

I had the good fortune of staying for two days with an extraordinary doctor couple—Dr. Raj Arole and his wife Dr. Mabelle Arole—at Jhamked, a remote and poverty stricken village in Maharashtra. After graduating from CMC, Vellore, they went to USA to pursue their higher studies, and worked with the Red Indian tribes. They came back to India and started a comprehensive rural health project in Jhamked. Their mission was to provide health care services to the rural poor and tribals of that area. Health was inter-related with nutrition, agriculture, economics, education, women's status, and other factors. They trained the rural illiterate women as village health workers.

I was amazed to see the transformation that they

brought about in the lives of these marginalised women. The most unforgettable statement made by the doctors was: "Our dream is to ensure that all the beds in our hospital lie empty. This would mean that every villager in the neighbourhood would be healthy". This profound statement made me understand how important it was to have a vision for an organisation to bring about social change.

I had an opportunity to launch a social initiative, when I was working as the Chairman and Managing Director of Hindustan Organic Chemicals Limited in Rasayani that was located in the outskirts of Mumbai. I requested the tenth and eleventh grade school children of Rasayani to conduct a door-to-door survey to identify eye-related problems amongst the villagers. There were many villagers who needed treatment in some form. I organised a group of doctors from Mumbai to visit the HOL Hospital at Rasayani, and offer treatment to these villagers. Realising that this initiative should be regular and periodic, I formed a Vision Trust in the name of my predecessor Dr. Kasbekar, and also created a corpus fund for it. This made me understand the concept of 'sustainability' in a societal context.

I remember another young couple who lived with the tribal community in a remote village at Thane in order to understand their way of living, and to identify their various needs. They launched their initiative after making a comprehensive study of the community, and finding out what interventions would benefit them. It made me realise the importance of a 'need assessment study' before launching a social enterprise.

I understood the need to evolve 'innovative strategies' when we started a 'free tuition centre' for the children of Koli tribes in Maharashtra. These children used to spend their free time helping their parents to catch crabs in the backwaters. In order to ensure that many children attended our tuition centres, we organised the classes when the children were free, and not when we were free.

In my early sixties, I developed a keen interest to understand the work done by social work organisations, and therefore went around visiting many organisations across India. I was deeply moved by the passion and commitment that was exhibited amongst all the heads of these organisations. I was especially impressed and moved by many organisations that were headed by women. I admired their undying passion, courage, and strength in running their organisation without much formal training. Their great work was going unnoticed, and this made me feel helpless. I realised that 'celebrating social work' was a missing element in the social sector.



There were certainly not many formal celebrations conducted to showcase the work done by social workers belonging to rural areas. Also, most of the social change agents did not have any formal training and were managing their organisations without proper 'management education'. As a result, many of them had teething troubles while launching their projects.

It is been said that: 'Habits change to character'. I could not remain quiet after my analysis of the social sector. It motivated me to start 'Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani' (MSDS). It is a Sanskrit phrase that means 'The divine mother who kindles the natural, inborn but hidden inclination in every human being to serve others with love'.

I had the privilege of meeting Swami Nityanandagiri in 1999, before starting MSDS. As I was narrating my views on the social sector, He narrated the story of Swami Gnanananda, a sage who was extremely supportive of women and children, and encouraged them to be independent in their lives. The stories about the great sage moved me and led me to institute an award for women social change agents in His name. I began my crusade to felicitate women social entrepreneurs, encourage them further, and motivate them to carry out their work with renewed zeal.

Thus began my journey as a social entrepreneur. I also realised the need for a customised training program for budding social entrepreneurs. There were many enthusiastic and committed individuals who wanted to start social enterprises,

but did not know the intricacies involved in it, nor had a person to guide them. This was the reason behind starting the 'Centre for Social Initiative and Management' (CSIM). After a year of meetings and discussions with numerous social change agents, academicians, industrialists, and volunteers, we evolved a curriculum for a one-year full time program, and a short-term program in Social Entrepreneurship. We started our first centre in Chennai, and later spread to Hyderabad, Mumbai, and Bangalore. My vision is to have about 100 centres across India, and be the 'one stop point' for guiding social entrepreneurs across the nation.

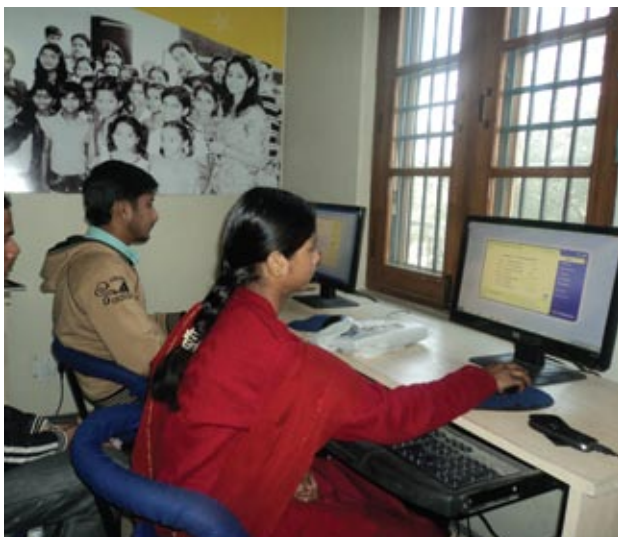
Social Entrepreneurship throws opportunities to practice the concept of Servant leadership and create more leaders. Social Entrepreneurship is the backbone and key to the development of a sustainable social enterprise. It is also about developing leaders within the organisation, creating sustainable organisations, and empowering communities. There have been many key aspects that have to be nurtured by a social change agent to evolve as a social entrepreneur. I have been observing all this for the last few years and have made a note of it. I would call them my musings and not any theoretical research work. That is why I have named my book 'Musings of a social entrepreneur'.

If you wish to get a copy of this publication, please contact Marie Banu at +91 9884700029 or email chennai@csim.in

—PN Devarajan

The seed of sharing and caring was sown in me while I was young, and this quality has complemented my social character

”



Miracle Mother

“God cannot be everywhere, and that is why he created mothers”
—A Jewish proverb



Anjina Rajagopal

“Whenever I see an abandoned child, I say to myself: God has sent this child to me. It is my duty to take care of her”



One and a half-year-old Sania was fast asleep in her cozy mattress. Pooja stood close to her and enjoyed tucking her into the blanket now and then. She seemed like waiting for her to wake up, so that they could play. Taarika (1½) and Mansi(4) were playing at the backyard. They were pushing a toy car while Pinky, their caretaker, was carrying Aryan (8months) and supervising the household work.

The cloth lines were filled with clothes, and Chotu was rinsing another set of them in the wash room. Loppa was preparing dough for dinner while Poonam was cutting vegetables. The home was spic and span, and everybody was busy with their own work.

Anjina Rajagopal welcomed us with her warm smile. “This is where my 46 children live,” she says.

The children on hearing Anjina’s voice came running towards her, and she spontaneously cuddled them. “Most of the children have come into our homes as infants. We only admit children who are below ten years of age. Our youngest child is Aryan who is eight months old. Children who are orphaned or abandoned by their parents, and those who have lost their way home are brought to us by the Police. We try our best to trace their families and reunite them,” says Anjina.

Anjina hails from a well-to-do family in Kerala. She had a passion for children since she was 10 years old. While studying at Bellary, she was deeply touched by the sight of children beating drums and carrying notebooks, knocking at every door to collect donations for the orphanage they lived in. Her family moved to Sandur and later to Delhi in 1976 to get over a personal tragedy. She took up a job, and in 1983 moved to Noida.

She was deeply disturbed on reading reports in newspapers and magazines about exploitation of children, and images of Bellary came back to her mind. This was how the dream was born—a dream of providing a home for the homeless children. She wanted to provide a home where they would not only get food, shelter, clothing, and education but also feel as secure and confident as their more privileged peers.

It took a decade for Anjina to turn her dream into reality. In 1988, PRADAN, a voluntary organization, offered her a fellowship for a period of three months. She visited various homes all over India and made an in-depth study. She also spent 20 days in the Antar Bharati Balgram at Lonavla. By this time, she identified friends who were willing to help her. Thus, the Society SAIKRIPA was registered in March 1989.

She established ‘Bal Kutir’, a home for abandoned and destitute children, in 1990 at Sector 20 in Noida. “I wanted to give these children their lost home and provide them with emotional as well as physical security. Local people also identify abandoned children and bring them to us. That is how Sania was brought here. Pooja came when she was five years old. We take care of them until they are able to take care of themselves,” says Anjina.

Pooja (21) aspires to become a Homeopathic doctor and is presently preparing for the medical entrance examination. She says: “I have seen doctors who demand a lot of money from their patients for treatment. There are poor people in our country who need doctors to provide them treatment at a low cost. This is what I want to do. I will continue to remain here as my family is here.”

“I remember that I belong to Kanpur and had visited Noida along with a relative to spend my vacation. A localite found me stranded and handed me over to the police who brought me here. I now have a good and a happy family. There are many children who do not get proper love and affection from their own families, but everyone gets unconditional love and affection here. I feel good when I see children brought into our home as I will be having one more family member. I love to take

Love and Affection’ was started in October 2009 for children with special needs. It endeavors to identify the innate talent and potential of each child separately, and nurture them in an appropriate manner through early intervention.

“Whenever I see an abandoned child, I say to myself: God has sent this child to me. It is my duty to take care of her. My oldest child Rajath is now 30 years old. He is a special child who was brought to our home when he was 9 years old. He studies in Mata Bhagavanti Chaddha Niketan, and we still take care of him,” says Anjina.

Since April 2010, Sai Kripa has been offering vocational training for the underprivileged children in the neighbourhood. Computer training, tailoring, mobile phone repairing, and beautician course is offered to interested candidates and the training period varies from person to person. A nominal



Photos: Marie Banu

care of them. It feels good to do something for our younger ones,” adds Pooja.

Sai Kripa also runs three schools—Sai Shiksha Sansthan, Sai Bal Sansar, and Sai Vatsalya Vatika.

Sai Shiksha Sansthan is an English medium school with classes up to 10th standard which was started in April 1991 at Vazidpur, a village 16 kilometers away from Noida. Besides children from Bal Kutir, around 300 students belonging to the economically weaker section in the surrounding villages study here. The school charges a monthly fee of Rs.200 per month, and students appear for their Higher Secondary Board Examinations through National Institute of Open Schooling.

Sai Bal Sansar is an informal education centre that was started in November 1999 for the benefit of the slum/street children of Noida. It provides free education and mid-day meal to the under privileged children. The purpose of this centre was to encourage these children to spend their time more fruitfully instead of engaging in beggary.

Sai Vatsalya Vatika which means ‘Sai’s Garden of

amount of Rs. 100 is charged from each participant. Till date, 12 students have undergone the tailoring course, 12 have completed the mobile phone repairing course, 10 have been trained to be a beautician, and 6 have learnt basic Computer programming. In a month’s time from now, Sai Kripa will launch its own bakery unit.

Sai Kripa also houses a Goshala. “We have seven cows and so we do not have any shortage of milk. The excess milk we sell to the poor people at a nominal cost, and we use the dung for biogas,” says Anjina.

Anjina is the recipient of the CNN-IBN Real Heroes award 2010, and the Sadguru Gnanananda Award for Social Work in 2000.

Sai Kripa is located at Z-133-134, Sector-12, Noida - 201301, Uttar Pradesh. Phone: (0120) 2536416/2531521. Email: saikripa1989@yahoo.com. For more information please visit www.saikripa.org

—Marie Banu

Teenage Technologist



“I need to be afraid of you as you have aspirations to be like me,” said Bill Gates to Suhas Gopinath, a young Indian entrepreneur, now aged 23.

Suhas was recognized as the world’s youngest certified professional web-developer through his project ‘www.coolhindustan.com’. He is the Founder, CEO, and Chairman of Globals Inc, an IT multinational company, which he launched at the age of 14 at California, USA.

Net Mania(c)

His is a story of a pastime turning into obsession. Being a naturally inquisitive personality, he dabbled with various websites, and internet applications. His other passion was animals, largely inspired by his pet dog. Initially torn between becoming a veterinarian, or to plunge into the mysterious software world, he eventually decided upon the latter. This dilemma occurred to him when he was just thirteen years old. By 2000, Suhas became an internet addict.

His father, an Air Force employee, could not afford to buy him a computer. By 2000 Suhas became a net addict. He used his daily pocket money of fifteen rupees to access internet for ten minutes in a cyber café each day.

Obstacles are Opportunities

As Shakespeare says, ‘sweet are the uses of adversity’, Suhas capitalized on this obstacle and converted it into an asset. He noticed that the owner closed the cyber café from 1:00 P.M to 4:00 P.M and so volunteered to keep the shop open during these hours in return for free internet access. The owner readily agreed to this win-win proposition.

This laid the foundation for a phenomenal success story.

Suhas studied in a military school which

operated on a shift system. The luxury of the noon helped him to fulfill his cause. This learning earner saved his pocket money and procured his first personal computer.

Suhas hails from a totally non-business family, and academic excellence was the family’s priority. Like most parents and teachers he was also the victim of academic censure, and his failure in mathematics in the ninth standard compounded it further. But, these censures did not reduce his creativity nor set aside his entrepreneurial spirit. He took a temporary break from his passion, and passed out with flying colors in his 10th standard board examinations.

Negotiating Across Countries

While his peers might have been wondering what game to play in the evening, Suhas was busy creating new websites, and negotiating deals with acquaintances who were sitting thousands of miles away. He kept reminding his parents that his role model was Bill Gates, another expert teenage programmer.

Suhas slowly started building websites and positioned himself as a freelancer.

On one occasion, a company felt insecure to provide him with a job when they learnt his age and academic qualification. Suhas then made up his mind to start his own organization. He decided to employ individuals who have the right skills sets, and not enquire about their age or academic qualifications.

His parent’s supported Suhas’s decision.

Despite all success and the media attention he received, there has not been any significant change in his lifestyle. Network Solutions, a software company based at United States, was impressed with Suhas’s skills. They invited him to US in 2000 and sponsored all his expenses. This was Suhas’s first trip abroad. He was offered a

My parents have been a great support to my dreams. The values they have instilled in me have helped me in my business as well. It’s very important for parents to encourage their children especially if they have the entrepreneurial spirit in them

scholarship to pursue his studies, but he rejected it. Instead, he requested the company to outsource their website building work to him.

“I have learned to live modestly. In fact, when, as a company, we hit our first US\$500,000 revenue, I was still taking pocket money from my dad. Success can go to your head, hence it’s important to stay humble and grounded,” says Suhas.

Suhas is the youngest entrepreneur in the world to launch a company at an age of 13. He started a company called ‘Globals’ with the aid offered by an online acquaintance from the USA. He registered the firm in his friend’s name as he was not an adult and therefore was not eligible to sign a legal contract.

He viewed these obstacles as opportunities. At times, his new employees, who were twice his age or more, could not trust someone young to lead them. Suhas did not get demoralized. Despite being a busy traveler, attending conferences in top companies in Europe, and delivering lectures in Ivy League universities like Harvard, the passionate programmer moved on.

Global’s Vision

Globals offers cost effective world class quality solutions in web designing, software, mobile, and multimedia services and will soon graduate to be a product oriented organization. Suhas has launched an innovative product called education ERP.net which helps in streamlining the processes at schools like maintaining student’s records from the time of admission till he leaves school. Suhas wants to be the market leader in ICT in education. Today, Global’s software is being used in more than 100 schools all over India, Singapore and the Middle East. He plans to launch a huge gamut of IT based products spreading in 11 countries in 11 years time.

“I have always believed that IT is not just technology, but a tool that can solve the problems of people. That is what I want to do in my company”, says Suhas.

He is the only Indian in the Board of the World Bank and is helping them set policies on ICT in university education so that employability can be enhanced. His aim is to reduce the number of unemployed eligible youth in the world. He dreams that his company would become a market leader in software solutions concentrating on education.

Having served more than 200 clients in 9 years,

it is expected that in few years from now, we would know Globals as one of the leading provider of product based IT services.

Accolades for the young CEO

Suhas at the age of 16 was recognized as the world’s youngest entrepreneur by CNBC and e-business, Canada. At 17, he was recognized as the World’s Youngest CEO by leading media including BBC, Washington Times, The Age, and Limca Book of Records. He is a resource person for Entrepreneurship at IIM Ahmedabad, and an Advisory Board Member at IIT Bombay Entrepreneurship Cell. In 2005 he became the youngest recipient of Rajyotsava Award conferred by the State Government of Karnataka.

Socially spirited entrepreneur

Suhas has also volunteered as the Brand ambassador of PETA and the Youth Ambassador for Indo-Pak Leadership Program organized by School of Leadership, Pakistan. In December 2007, The European Parliament and International Association for Human Values conferred ‘Young Achiever Award’ to him at the EU Parliament, Brussels. He was one of the ‘Young Global Leaders’ for 2008-2009 by the prestigious World Economic Forum, Davos and he became the youngest member ever in the World Economic Forum’s history. In June 2009, Suhas Gopinath bagged the ‘Make a Difference Award’ conferred on him by the Incredible Europe at Vienna, Austria and in October 2009, Suhas Gopinath bagged the SIP Fellow Award at the Global Social Innovators Forum 2009 at Singapore.

Suhas’s mission has been to establish a platform for youth where they find encouragement in their chosen career in the field of IT and also to build up their entrepreneurial skills. Today, he has proved that age is no constraint for an individual to be successful by his/her dedication and hard work.

“Although I have made many sacrifices to reach this point, the joy of providing employment to hundreds of talented youth has made it a worthwhile journey for me so far,” says Suhas.

He has become the source of inspiration for the youth of the country to believe in the power of sheer determination to accomplish their goals in life, howsoever difficult they might be. For, this 23-year-old believes that academic skill sets are not the end. “We need more of personal skill sets to achieve goals,” he quips.

—Sonal Dhawale and D.Avinandan

Healing the “Hidden Handicap”



“If a child cannot learn the way you teach, then teach him in a way he can learn.” This is the maxim which informs the curricular structure of Alpha to Omega Learning Centre, an organisation that specializes in educating children with Learning Disability (LD), and also in training prospective remedial educators. The information brochure on the school says: ‘Our school is mainstream in structure, but specialist in nature’.

Learning Disability, also known as the ‘hidden handicap’, is a delicate condition in which although there are seldom, if any, apparent physical signs of disability, the affected person finds it difficult to perceive and comprehend academic and related instruction. Tell tale signs of learning disability (as given in the brochure of the school) include difficulty in: (a) recognizing letters, (b) recognizing numbers, (c) following more than one step or instruction at a time, (d) holding the pencil properly, (e) copying basic shapes accurately, (f) pronouncing some sounds or words, (g) answering questions, and (h) understanding directions. If a combination of three or more of these symptoms are observed in a child, he or she may be having LD.

Talking to Founder Director Lalitha Ramanujan, an established rehabilitation psychologist and trained instructor of remedial education, one is apt to seek answers to many questions that arise out of a widely held misconception about Learning Disability. “LD is not mental retardation” she clarifies. “It is not a condition of below average intelligence levels. In fact children with LD are usually of average or above average intelligence levels, and are very creative. If taught using appropriate techniques that are tailor-made to their distinctive learning styles, these children can reach their full potential” she says.

A group of like-minded people, of which

Lalitha was a part, started helping children with dyslexia in 1988. After school hours, around 30–40 kids would come to the learning center for one-to-one remedial help.

Learning disability is a combination of several problems that may have been caused before, during or after child-birth. Epilepsy and birth trauma are two examples. There may also be overlapping symptoms which can be really difficult to differentiate, even in clinical terms. Therefore learning disability is usually diagnosed using academic and psychological testing methods. The saddest part of this rigor is that most people in the society refuse to understand the problem as there is no outwardly appearance of disability.

“In the year 1995, a group of boys aged around 14–15 years came to us with the complaint that their schools turned them out because of ‘insufficient’ scores in the examination. We rented out the upper portion of a house, and with 4–5 of us initiating it, we started taking regular classes for these children. We started with 17 children, but by the year 2000 the number quickly grew to 90. We then shifted to the campus at Kilpauk in Chennai. Around the same time, we purchased a piece of land in Kalipathur on which 6000 sq.ft. of constructed area houses our day cum residential school. This school has been functional since 2005” says Lalitha.

The school offers yoga, music, dance, drama, sport, speech and occupational therapy, as well as counseling services to its students besides the regular curriculum. “We feel that every child has the ability. We tap into all kinds of creative

resources so that the children may fully enjoy their childhood as well as bloom to their fullest potential. Every child needs his/her play time, drawing and painting time, music, and everything else that is a part of a healthy childhood. It makes their childhood more fun and keeps their innocence intact. Our children are simply adorable. They may be arguably the most mischievous, but they seldom carry a grudge and disarm you with their innocence,” says Lalitha with a warm smile.

While talking about the lack of trained teachers to bring about the desired change in our country through educational reforms, Lalitha shares information on the training programmes offered by Alpha to Omega Learning Centre. She says: “We started training educators in 1993, and our focus to this day remains to increase the numbers of trained educators in this field. We are certified trainers of Kansas University Centre for Enhancing Learning, as well as the International Centre for Enhancing Learning Potential.

Although we have not gone on a grand commercial scale with our training programme, we manage to train around 25–30 people within the city every year. We also travel extensively all over the country, and through our 7 week intensive training programmes, we train around 100 people every year. The fact that many of these trained educators actually are going and helping people is what we consider as our success.”

“Our training program blends in theory as well as practice. We believe that only by engaging with real children who have in real life faced the problems pertaining to learning disability, will our

educators understand how to effectively implement the methods and techniques taught to them. A remedial teacher is always on her toes, looking for the bleakest of signs that may signal improvement or need for the same. There are good days and bad days for the same subject. Therefore, practicing with models is simply not enough” says Lalitha.

“Eventually we want to emphasize on training and keep the school as a model laboratory to implement our teaching-learning methods. In a few years, by adding another floor to our Kalipathur campus, we will be establishing ourselves as a full-fledged model school that caters to the overall development of our children” she adds.

Being a pioneer of sorts in this field, Alpha to Omega Learning Centre has several plans for expansion that will improve accessibility of remedial education as well as training for the same all over the country. “In the U.S. and U.K. there are hundreds of organizations that are doing tremendous work in this area. To encourage more activity in India, we also conduct international conferences. With every conference we find that more and more organizations are coming together. We will be happy to have 10 more centres of this kind. We welcome suggestions to spread awareness about LD as well as about the options available to treat it,” concludes Lalitha.

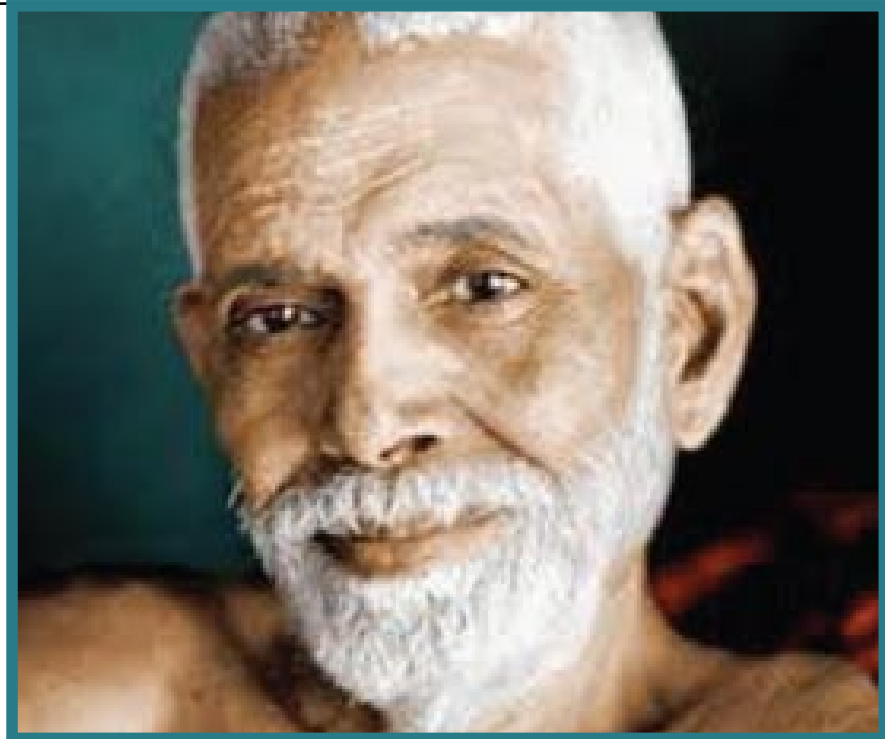
As she is about to sign off, Lalitha gives an express clarification that at once swipes clean of a singularly most important apprehension—“We do not use any kind of medication to treat our kids for Learning Disability.”

If you wish to contact Alpha to Omega, please call: (044) 26443090/26476257, or write to: atolc@eth.net.

—Archanaa R.

We do not use any kind of medication to treat our kids for Learning Disability

Realising the Real



An inspiring conversation with Ramana Maharishi and his disciple on how to control the mind and our distractions.

D.: What is the interrelation between regulation of thought and regulation of breath?

M.: Thought (intellectual) and respiration, circulation, etc. (vegetative) activities are both different aspects of the same—the individual life. Both depend upon (or metaphorically ‘reside’ or ‘inhere’ in) life. Personality and other ideas spring from it like the vital activity. If respiration or other vital activity is forcibly repressed, thought is also repressed. If thought is forcibly slowed down and pinned to a point, the vital activity of respiration is slowed down, made even, and confined to the lowest level compatible with life. In both cases the distracting variety of thought is temporarily at an end.

The interaction is noticeable in other ways also. Take the will to live. That is thought-power. That sustains and keeps up life when other vitality is almost exhausted, and delays death. In the absence of such will-power death is accelerated. So, thought is said to carry life with it in the flesh, and from one fleshy body to another.

D.: Are there any aids to (1) concentration and (2) casting off distractions?

M.: Physically the digestive and other organs are kept free from irritation. Therefore food is regulated both in quantity and quality. Non-irritants are eaten, avoiding chillies, excess of salt, onions, wine, opium, etc. Avoid constipation, drowsiness, and excitement, and all foods which induce them. Mentally take

interest in one thing and fix the mind on it. Let such interest be all-absorbing to the exclusion of everything else. This is dispassion (*vairagya*) and concentration. God or mantra may be chosen. The mind gains strength to grasp the subtle and merge into it.

D.: Distractions result from inherited tendencies. Can they be cast off too?

M.: Yes. Many have done so. Believe it! They did so, because they believed they could. *Vasanas* (pre-dispositions) can be obliterated. It is done by concentration on that which is free from *vasanas*, and yet is their core.

D.: How long is the practice to continue?

M.: Till success is achieved and until yoga-liberation becomes permanent. Success begets success. If one distraction is conquered the next is conquered, and so on until all are finally conquered. The process is like reducing an enemy’s fort by slaying its man-power one by one as each issues out.

D.: What is the goal of this process?

M.: Realising the Real.

D.: What is the nature of the Reality?

M.: (a) Existence without beginning or end—Eternal. (b) Existence everywhere, endless, infinite. (c) Existence underlying all forms, all changes, all forces, all matter, and all spirit. The many change and pass away (phenomena), whereas the One always endures (noumenon). (d) The one displacing the triads, i.e., the knower, the knowledge, and the known. The triads are only appearances in time and space, whereas the Reality lies beyond and behind

them. They are like a mirage over the Reality. They are the result of delusion.

D.: If ‘I’ also be an illusion, who then casts off the illusion?

M.: The ‘I’ casts off the illusion of ‘I’ and yet remains as ‘I’. Such is the paradox of Self-Realisation. The realised do not see any contradiction in it. Take the case of *bhakti* - I approach *Iswara* and pray to be absorbed in Him. I then surrender myself in faith and by concentration. What remains afterwards? In place of the original ‘I’, perfect self-surrender leaves a residuum of God in which the ‘I’ is lost. This is the highest form of devotion (*parabhakti*), *prapatti*, surrender or the height of *vairagya*. You give up this and that of ‘my’ possessions. If you give up ‘I’ and ‘Mine’ instead, all are given up at a stroke. The very seed of possession is lost. Thus the evil is

nipped in the bud, or crushed in the germ itself. Dispassion (*vairagya*) must be very strong to do this. Eagerness to do it must be equal to that of a man kept under water trying to rise up to the surface for his life.

D.: Cannot this trouble and difficulty be lessened with the aid of a Master or an *Ishta Devata* (God chosen for worship)? Cannot they give the power to see our Self as it is - to change us into themselves - to take us into Self-Realisation?

M.: *Ishta Devata* and Guru are aids—very powerful aids on this path. But an aid to be effective requires your effort also. Your effort is a sine qua non. It is you who should see the sun. Can spectacles and the sun see for you? You yourself have to see your true nature. Not much aid is required for doing it!

—Excerpted from Sri Ramana Maharshi teachings

Growing Innovative Practices and Leadership Lessons in the Social Sector



The Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM), Hyderabad, organized a Conference on ‘Social Innovations and Leadership in Action (SILIA)’ on 30 January 2011 at CESS Auditorium, Ameerpet. The main aim of this conference was to create awareness on innovations for social benefit, and to learn lessons from practitioners in this field.

The event was sponsored by IKYA Technovations Pvt Ltd and National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development-NABARD. Radio Mirchi was the media partner for the event.

The day-long conference was attended by over 100 persons comprising of development professionals, social entrepreneurs, corporate staff dealing with CSR, academicians, social workers

and students.

In his inspiring key note speech, Mr. M.Gopalkrishna, IAS (Retd.) and Former Director, IPE, highlighted the importance of innovations, and dedicated leadership in the social sector for inclusive and sustainable development of the country.

Mr. Srinivas Garudachar (e-Kutir Rural Mgt. Services) presented impact of information and communication technology applications in villages of Orissa. Dr.N.Sai Bhaskar (Geo-ecology Energy Organization) presented several eco-friendly technologies for rural areas.

Mr. R.Murali Krishna (IKYA Technovations Pvt. Ltd) discussed appropriate technologies developed by rural innovators, and his experience in supporting scaling of these technological innovations. Subsequently, Prof.

K.L.Srivastava (CSIM) highlighted the important role of NABARD in supporting rural innovations and entrepreneurship.

Other speakers presented examples of affordable innovations and eco-social entrepreneurship. Emerging career opportunities in social entrepreneurship were also discussed.

The conference included a panel discussion on social innovations and lively interaction among social entrepreneurs and other participants. Several organizations showcased their innovative products by setting up stalls at the conference venue. In addition, prizes were given to selected college students for their insightful essays dealing with important social development issues.

— K.L.Srivastava

Equanimity – the inner balance

A Series on Growing-Reflections for Deep Change

“The best kind of help to others, whenever possible, is indirect, and consists in such modifications of the conditions of life, of the general level of subsistence, as enables them independently to help themselves.” —John Dewey

This philosophy is a social work philosophy—‘to help people to help themselves’. When a social entrepreneur enters into the arena of taking responsibility and accountability of things beyond self, there are several challenging contexts that they will have to face. Whenever a change is instituted there are several obstacles that a social entrepreneur encounters. Similarly, when certain outcomes are achieved there would be several laurels that the social entrepreneur receives. Each of them could leave the person disappointed, distressed, or highly elated and proud. Reacting and getting attached to any of these would be a sure way of getting away from the primary objective. What the social entrepreneur requires is a core of steel, not allowing the inner resolution to be shaken. To be that the social entrepreneur requires developing a state of equanimity.

Once upon a time there lived a king who was very powerful. His court was always full of wise men from many lands. One day he called the wise men to his court and said, “I wish to test your wisdom. Bring for me, before sunset, a gift that will make me joyous when I am unhappy and sober when I am indulgent.”

In the evening he called for the wise men to see what they had brought for him. The wise men paid their respects to the king and placed before him a ring on which was inscribed, “This too shall pass.”

(Sampath. J.M. story 89 Discovery – 3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998)

The meaning of ‘Equanimity’ in the



dictionary is ‘level headedness’; ‘calm’; ‘evenness of mind’; ‘composure’. It means the ability to be passionately engaged with the process of helping, but not getting attached to the outcomes. The antonym of equanimity is agitation, alarm, anxiety, discomposure, excitableness, upset, worry. These are some of the emotions that can cause distractions in the mind of the entrepreneur.

At the deepest level the attachment to the outcomes comes from a belief that there are two groups—the enabler and the enabled; and the enabler is at a higher level than the enabled. When the social entrepreneur begins to think that they make the difference and whatever happens to the project is because of them and their efforts, the outcomes begin to affect the inner resolve. While the one who helps is important; one cannot become a social entrepreneur until the community does not seek and accept help. Both are a part of the larger subsystem

and each is helping to fulfill the needs of the other. This is also many times the consciousness way of responding to the larger requirements. When this deeper dimension is understood the social entrepreneur emerges from the space of humility and gratitude. Equanimity and conviction will not thrive in spaces of superiority and supremacy. Only ego thrives there.

The development of a state of equanimity helps the entrepreneur in several ways:

- There may be a difference between what the entrepreneur may want to give to the needy community and what they actually require. The inner balance or equanimity will help the social entrepreneur to understand this difference, accept the reality, and respond to what is required rather than what one wants.
- Equanimity brings a deep sense of humility. This will make the

entrepreneur more responsive to the context with openness, learner perspective and lend oneself to what needs to be done in the context.

- Equanimity builds a stronger resolve to stay focused on the objectives to be achieved. This makes the person responsive than reactive to context. It gives strength to conviction and a capacity to accept things that happen. Acceptance clears the mind and flowers the creativity to manage the situation.
- There is many a time a difference between ‘what one sees’ and ‘what is’ in every situation. Being in the state of equanimity makes the person non judgmental of people and situations. It takes the typical rights and wrongs that one gets into and allows multiple perspectives to emerge.
- Equanimity lends to the entrepreneur a higher level of emotional consciousness and an ability to identify, recognize and relate to the emotional state of being, and choose the response voluntarily. This brings in appropriateness in behaviour of the social entrepreneur.
- It builds the capacity in the social entrepreneur to LET GO when the time comes to enable the community to sustain on its own than create a dependency.

Points for Reflection:

- What does balance and equanimity mean to me?
- What is the root cause of my joys and sorrows? What are the kinds of things that give me an emotional high?
- How aware am I when my emotional balance tips off in a context? How soon am I able to catch myself getting engaged with my feelings?
- What are the processes that I follow to maintain a sense of balance within me while working on my project?

—J.M.Sampath & Kalpana Sampath

What is Leadership?

I wish to share outstanding thoughts from John C Maxwell on leadership. How fitting they are for a social entrepreneur!

1. Leadership is the willingness to put yourself at risk.
2. Leadership is the passion to make a difference with others.
3. Leadership is being dissatisfied with current reality.
4. Leadership is taking responsibility,

while others are making excuses.

5. Leadership is seeing possibilities in a situation while others are in the limitations.
6. Leadership is an open mind and open heart.
7. Leadership is the ability to submerge your ego for the sake of what is best.
8. Leadership is evoking in others the

capacity dream.

9. Leadership is inspiring others with a vision for what they can contribute.
10. Leadership is the power of an harvesting the power of money.
11. Leadership is your heart speaking to the heart of others.
12. Leadership is the integration of heart, head, and soul.

13. Leadership is the capacity to care, and in caring to liberate the ideas, energy, and capabilities of others.
14. Leadership is dream made reality.
15. Leadership is above all courageous.

If you steadily read the above, you will see what jewels they are to practice.

—P.N. Devarajan

Dr. Kiran Bedi IPS shares with **Marie Banu** and **Latha Suresh** her views about NGOs and the role of corporates in bringing about social change

Avant-Garde

Dr. Kiran Bedi IPS, India's first and highest ranking woman officer joined the Indian Police Service in 1972. Her experience and expertise include more than 35 years of tough, innovative, and welfare policing. She has worked with the United Nations as the Police Advisor to the Secretary General, Department of Peace Keeping Operations. She represented India at the United Nations, and in International forums on crime prevention, drug abuse, police and prison reforms and women's issues. She has also been a National and an Asian Tennis champion.

Recipient of the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award (also called the Asian Nobel Prize), and several other decorations, Dr. Kiran Bedi is an author of several books, anchors radio and television shows, and is a columnist with leading newspapers and magazines. She is a sought after speaker on social, professional, and leadership issues. She is the founder of two NGOs—Navjyoti and India Vision Foundation.

Navjyoti India Foundation was established in 1988 as the brain child of Dr. Kiran Bedi. The organization was set up with the idea of promoting welfare policing, the outcome of which was the drug de-addiction program. Since its inception, Navjyoti India Foundation has made significant contributions in areas like education, women empowerment, family counseling, rural and urban development, health, HIV/AIDS, and environment as well.

India Vision Foundation was born with the receipt of the Ramon Magsaysay Award by Dr. Kiran Bedi in 1994. It began its work inside the prison, by setting up a Bread Making Unit within the Prison, for the welfare of the inmates. A Plant Nursery was also set up where rare saplings were grown and marketed outside. The

profits earned from these activities went to the Prisoner's Welfare Fund.

Dr. Kiran Bedi has been voted as India's most admired woman and fifth amongst all Indians.

In an exclusive interview, Dr. Kiran Bedi shares with Marie Banu and Latha Suresh her views about NGOs and how corporate houses can bring about social change.

You were the first woman to join the Indian Police Service. What made you different?

Parenting was great. I think it was my upbringing, home environment and school quality. Well, many friends had the same school, but my home was different.

Women all over the world admire you. Who has been your role model?

My role model has been my parents. They were the best and remain the best.

Which of these roles would you like to be identified with: IPS officer, visionary, social worker, role model?

With all! Which is no less important? You can't deny it. People identify me with my project. Some identify me with the prisoner education project while some identify me with the *galli* school project, because they have met me only there and do not know about the other programs that I am engaged in. It varies from person to person. Some identify me for having written a book, and some identify me with a television channel. So, it varies.

Which are the areas you think NGOs and Police could work together?

Most importantly what an NGO could do is to work with families of policemen. I am already working with the police department by providing computer education to the

families of policemen. We already have 2,500 children of policemen who have been educated and made e-literate. We opened scores of centers of computer education in the police lines. Others NGOs could not enter here. Who else can enter a police line? We thought we could, and so partnered with Vedanta (Sterlite Foundation) to provide computer education. While India Vision Foundation provided access and linkage, Vedanta provided the computers.

Do you think NGOs are effective in their mission?

They are as effective as they are resourced—both skilled and resourced. They are resourced with leadership, the right kind of people, and have got the way with all. They can be very effective. Our NGO is effective because all my project heads are brilliant. They are youthful, energetic, passionate, missionary, and are secure inside. These are their qualities, and that is why they

enjoy trust. They just have to open our mouth to get people on their side.

Your advice for our corporate readers?

Corporates must be the biggest givers. They are not generators but givers. Because, givers will become generators. It is in our interest of being consumers, because it is they who create better consumers. A better consumer means better purchasing power, and better purchasing power means better business for corporates.

Already, India is on GDP of this kind, because we are a major market ourselves. In fact, India survived because it is a market by itself. We still have half of India waiting to become another market. By 2030 we would have added another 30 to 40 million people and would be almost one and a half billion by then. That means, India would have generated much more consumers, and we are creating another

wealth of youth consumers.

It is in the interest of every corporate to strengthen and reach out to the youth. Because, if they take them out of the poverty line and make them educated and enabled, they would be the biggest consumer and a quality consumer. That's when they consume what the corporate produce.

So, it is in our interest. It is a very positive cycle—a corporate creates a consumer through corporate social responsibility, and thus a consumer will demand for a corporate. It is a two way process.

Photo: Marie Banu



Editorial

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu