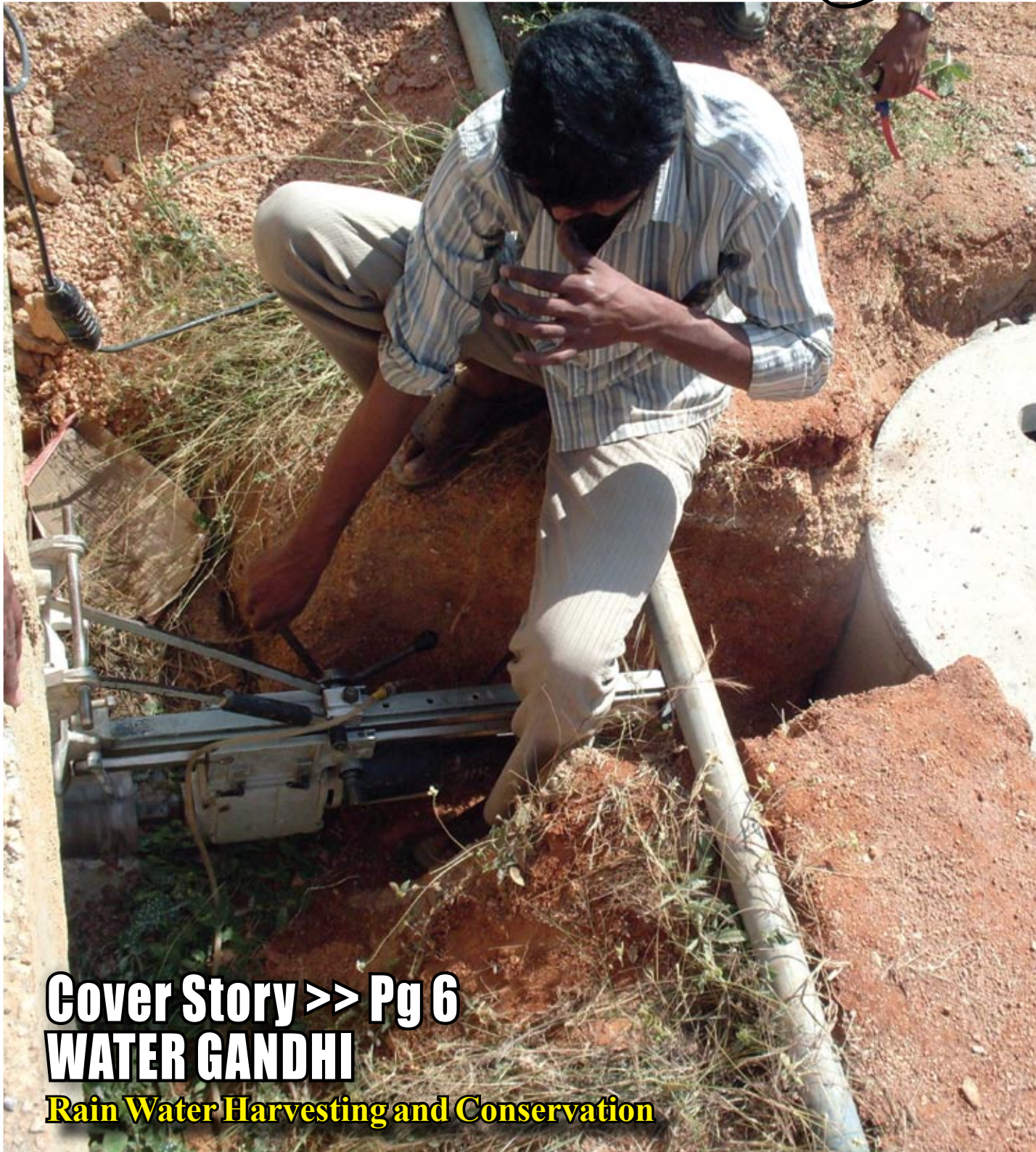


Conversations

A Chronicle of Social Currents

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with C. Gopinath



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From the Editor

Dear friends,

Seasons Greetings!

As we enter into another new year, let us all resolve to abide by a set of values for ourselves and our organization. Values are

the most important element and the foundation for a social enterprise. Therefore, lot of time and consideration should be given for establishment of values.

Practicing values is essential in strengthening the vision and making an

enterprise sustainable. Ultimately, values embedded in an organization will manifest into quality and affordability.

Happy reading and value building!

P. N. Devarajan

You Can Also Be A SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR

CSIM offers varied part time courses on social enterpruneruship.

Social Entrepreneurship Outlook program (SEOP) – E-learning module

S EOP is an online training programme for aspiring social entrepreneurs and working professionals. It enables the participants to understand the concept of social entrepreneurship.

Individuals who have an inclination towards social work are encouraged to enroll in this course. Knowledge of English and computer skills are essential. At the end of the

course, the participants would gain a clear understanding of Social Entrepreneurship, a greater understanding about the development sector, and practical knowledge on NGO Management and legal requirements.

To register for the course please contact Latha Suresh, Director, CSIM at 9282205123 or write to csimonline@gmail.com

Social Entrepreneurship Outlook PROGRAM (SEOP)

S EOP is a part-time learning program for existing and potential social work professionals and social entrepreneurs. It enables the participants to adopt an entrepreneurial approach to the social sector.

The course is conducted on every Saturday from 2 P.M to 6 P.M. for a period of four months.

Existing and potential social change agents are

eligible to enroll. The current student profile consists mostly of working professionals and NGO staff.

Course consists of a total instruction time of about 60 hours.

Next batch commences on Saturday January 8, 2010 in Chennai. Interested persons may contact Eva Rosalin, Coordinator, CSIM at 9840671061.

The following modules form the SEOP curriculum:

- Social issues and NGOs
- Social Entrepreneurship with Case studies (videos and documents)
- Management of Social Enterprises
- Legal Issues for starting a Social Enterprise (non-profits)
- Fundraising
- Financial Management
- Leadership
- Human Resources Management
- Social marketing
- Effective communication in Social Enterprises
- Social accounting and audit
- Proposal writing

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



VISION unlimited

“Millions of people in India (and the rest of the world) still do not have access to basic eye care and refractive services, mainly due to a shortage of trained personnel to provide them. There are only 1,200 Optometrists against the need for 11,000 of them.”

—WHO's Vision 2020 declaration

The sound of a van halting in his village and a few men wearing white coats alighting from it caught the attention of fourteen-year-old Sivakumar. He rushed to see the men in action and realized that they had come to his village Padavedu to conduct an eye camp. He stood in a corner watching them work, and what fascinated him most was seeing his fellow villager, a paramedical worker, washing his hands often and vigorously in a unique way. He picked up a conversation with him and learnt about eye camps and the role of optometrists.

The stories of eye surgeries narrated by the paramedical worker in the following days, inspired Sivakumar, and it was then he decided that his mission would be to restore eyesight to people. He completed a Diploma in Optometry at

and refractive services, mainly due to a shortage of trained personnel to provide them. There are only 1,200 Optometrists against the need for 11,000 of them.” This made him realize that India needed many players in the field of Optometry, and Refractive Error focused eye camps at the door steps of a common man needed to be organized in order to overcome this problem. Thus, he started Alayem Eye Care, an optometric clinic where he identified and diagnosed refractive errors, and prescribed and marketed spectacles at prices which were affordable to all sections of the society.

Sivakumar grew anxious when he learnt that the weaker section of the community would not voluntarily have their eyes tested. The social entrepreneur in him found an

problems to hospitals within Chennai for free surgery. Other patients were referred to ophthalmologists for treatment at subsidized rates. These services enabled Sivakumar increase the sales margin from sale of spectacles, and the added earnings helped him to resolve the problem of needless blindness.

Strong networking with service providers, transparency, counseling, and follow up services were Sivakumar's USP. A true social entrepreneur indeed! He continued to research for newer avenues to scale up his work.

Sivakumar enrolled at Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) to develop his social entrepreneurial skills. He began to interact with other players in the field of vision care and also read about many social entrepreneurs. He

of vision impairment (refractive error), and can also help in alleviating the burden of other causes of blindness through diagnosis, management, and referrals. This prompted him to launch the 'Sight Care Institute of Optometry', and offer one-year and two-year certificate and diploma courses in Optometry to boys and girls.

“I hail from Ayyaneri, a hamlet near Sholingar Village. After completing my 12th standard, I underwent the three-month course on Optometry that was offered by Aalayam Eye care at Anew, a NGO. I now work as an optometrist at KBKL optics at Mambalam, Chennai and earn Rs. 6000 a month. This course has changed my career and I

“The course offered by CSIM helped me hone my entrepreneurial skills. I understood the magnitude and severity of the problem in a holistic way and decided to reach out to the villages surrounding Chennai as well.”



the Government Regional Institute of Ophthalmology in Chennai. His perseverance and hard work sought him employment at Sankara Nethralaya, a leading Tertiary Care hospital of Global repute, in Chennai.

With over a decade's work experience at Sankara Nethralaya, Sivakumar clearly understood the major role optometrists played in the society. He understood that uncorrected refractive error was the major cause of avoidable vision impairment, the second most common cause of blindness in India and the world generally.

He was deeply shaken by the WHO's Vision 2020 declaration, which clearly stated that, “Millions of people in India (and the rest of the world) still do not have access to basic eye care

innovative solution to resolve this issue, and address the optometric needs of the urban poor. He purchased a portable computerized eye testing equipment and conducted eye camps for the weaker sections in Chennai and its suburbs. He networked with the Lions club for financial support and with the support of few philanthropists he performed one eye camp a week. These screening camps not only created awareness for the people at their door steps, but also helped Sivakumar to identify people with refractive errors, cataract problems, and those with other eye related problems.

Within four days of the camp, Sivakumar would provide spectacles from his shop 'Aalayam Eye care' to patients identified with refractive errors, at their doorsteps. He referred people with cataract

says: “The course offered by CSIM helped me hone my entrepreneurial skills. I understood the magnitude and severity of the problem in a holistic way and decided to reach out to the villages surrounding Chennai as well.”

He organized outreach camps every weekend and deployed a team of five persons to rural areas, suburban areas, slums, and industries to conduct vision check-up, and provide spectacles to those who needed them. Further, patients with other eye related problems were referred to local hospitals. It was at this point in time he realized the need for trained optometrists to scale up his mission to reach out to 10 million eyes.

Sivakumar believed that Optometrists, who were primary health care practitioners of eye and vision, can successfully manage the leading cause

want to become the best optometrist in the city one day”, says Asha.

Sivakumar envisions creating 200 Optometrists every year, which would provide succor to at least 300,000 people a year by solving their eye related problems. This would enable him reach his goal of reaching out to 10 million eyes within a span of six years.

—Latha Suresh

If you wish to contact Aalayam Eye Care, please call +91 9840369969 or write to sightcarefoundation@gmail.com

Reaping Hope

“Current agricultural practices are neither economically nor environmentally sustainable and India’s yields for many agricultural commodities are low.”

Photo: Marie Banu

India ranks second, worldwide in farm output. Agriculture, along with forestry has consistently accounted for almost 16.6% of the GDP in 2007. Added to this, almost 52% of the total workforce in the country has found employment due to agriculture and despite a steady decline of its share in the GDP agriculture continues to be the largest economic sector, playing a significant role in the overall socio-economic development of India.

However, the ground realities are far from flattering. The year 2008 saw 16,196 farmers’ suicides. This brought the total to 1,99,132 since 1997—almost 2 lakh as per the data released by the end of 2008—this, despite loan waivers amounting to Rs 70,000 crores and multiple farm packages. So what is it exactly that plagues Indian agriculture?

“Slow agricultural growth is a concern for policymakers as some two-thirds of India’s people depend on rural employment for a living,” opines the World Bank on the Indian agricultural scenario, evidently suggesting that the importance agriculture plays in Indian economy and its sustenance. It continues, “Current agricultural practices are neither economically nor environmentally sustainable and India’s yields for many agricultural commodities are low. Poorly maintained irrigation systems and almost universal lack of good extension services are among the factors responsible.” While this situation may be worrying, policy makers might argue that loan waivers and attractive farming packages are introduced with the intention of making the farmer happy. But is the Indian farmer really satisfied?

Dependence on rainfall

Irrigation is one of the mainstays of sustainable

agriculture. Good, well-thought-out irrigation practices inadvertently mean better produce and less reliability on rainfall. The Indian agricultural scenario, if observed carefully, in the recent past relies too heavily on rainfall simply on account of lack of irrigational facilities. Irrigation facilities are inadequate, as revealed by the fact that only 52.6% of the land was irrigated in 2003–04, which result in farmers still being dependent on rainfall, specifically the monsoon season. Too much or too less rain is equally hazardous to the delicate agricultural scene in the country. While floods in 2008 damaged most agricultural produce, drought in 2009 was equally damaging as well. However, many would agree that drought is completely avoidable if only proper irrigational facilities were established within the country.

Socio-economic conditions

Illiteracy and general socio-economic backwardness are other factors that hamper the growth of agriculture in the country. Slow progress in implementing land reforms is another issue all together that stems from low literacy rates and economic-backwardness. According to statistics, Indian farmers are reluctant to adopt modern farming practices—crop rotation and green manuring being two of these. This has, over time led to the continuous deterioration of Indian agricultural practices which has resulted in low produce and consequently led to the downfall of the agricultural scenario in the country. In addition to this, the use of technology in Indian farming is

known to be inadequate as most farmers prefer to stick to traditional methods of agriculture.

Land-holdings

The average size of land holdings in the country is very small (less than 20,000 m²). The more shocking aspect of this already bleak scenario is the fact that this small area of land holding is subject to fragmentation due to land ceiling acts and in some cases, family disputes. Since one of the mainstays of the Indian economy is agriculture, these small land fragments are over-manned and have resulted in low productivity.

A model scenario

An October 2010 report in ‘The Hindu’ has stated that the Orissa government (one of the many drought-hit areas in the country) plans to allocate 50,000 private lift irrigation points that will be installed by June 2011 under the Jalnidhi Scheme. A subsidy of 50 percent subject to ceiling of Rs. 15, 000 is also slated to be provided to farmers for procuring plastic/PVC/HDPE pipes for carrying water for the newly installed irrigation process.

The government also claims that 50 percent subsidy will be provided on purchase of pump sets. Defunct lift irrigation points will also be revived, as per the plans of the government, to make them operational in drought-affected areas, and working lift irrigation points are slated to be made operational across the State. Power connections are expected to be provided to lift

irrigation points within three days on payment of just 50 percent of arrears of electricity dues. The construction of 2,000 check dams by June 2011 is also something farmers in Orissa can look forward to. Priority, of course the report states, will be given to drought affected areas.

This scenario seems a bit more encouraging, given the bleak scenario that Indian agriculture has been consistently finding itself in. What this report also opens out is the fact that the Government ought to move beyond mere rendering of support to the farming community. The promises that the Orissa government has made prove that good governance and maintenance of the delicate Indian agricultural scenario comes from being more pro-active than merely supportive.

The road ahead

Urgent changes are needed in Indian agriculture to respond to new demands for a greater role for technology in agriculture. Integrity of degrading natural resources ought to be brought back into being even as changes in demand and opportunity arising from economic liberalization arising from advances in biotechnology continue to take place.

Greater attention ought to be paid to the quality of produce for the domestic market. Production, it goes without saying must be handled in relation to the growing demand in the country. India’s population today rises at a rapid pace than the country’s ability to produce rice and wheat. This can be achieved only by setting global standards of research and focusing on well defined priorities and most importantly bring about interaction of farmers and researchers, the private sector and markets.

—JSS

“Urgent changes are needed in Indian agriculture to respond to new demands for a greater role for technology in agriculture”

“Each of us can play a role in stopping violence—starting from our homes, to touching the lives of others”



BREAKING THE SILENCE over Domestic Violence

“Care and assistance to the children is a huge factor that draws women out of their closed environment and to approach us”



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Phone: 044-43111143.
E.mail: pcvc2000@yahoo.com

I felt I was wrong in hitting my wife. At the end of the day, I gave a call to the crisis line number.” This is one of the testimonies on the website: www.pcvconline.org.

Remarkable as it seems, it is still just one of those rare instances when the perpetrator of violence himself has taken the onus to put an end to it. There are several others who have not been so lucky. “Each of us can play a role in stopping violence—starting from our homes, to touching the lives of others. Do not blame the victims or ask them to put up with it. One might as well reach out for help; it is as easy as that,” says Dr. Prasanna Poornachandra, Founder Trustee and CEO of the International Foundation for Crime Prevention and Victim Care (PCVC), Chennai.

PCVC started in 2001, by three like-minded individuals who had a strong background and considerable experience working in the field of Criminology and Victim Assistance. Prasanna Poornachandra, Hema Ramachandran, and Usha made a beginning with a helpline and counseling center that was dedicated to the cause of rebuilding the lives of victims of domestic violence (DV) and of abusive relationships.

Domestic violence is one of the most under reported crimes even today. “When we were about to begin, our main objective was to set up a victim assistance centre, which would provide help related to any kind of violence or crime. After a year of running the organization and studying the responses of the people who approached us, we realized that more than 90% of them were middle class women, suffering from DV. We also realized that the cruelty meted out in the middle and upper classes tend to be more manipulative in nature, more discreet, and therefore very complicated,” says Prasanna. “Although there are many organizations that provide assistance for women in distress, there are only few that deal with DV. A woman who has suffered any form of violence would consider going to the police station only as a last resort; after all other support mechanisms have failed her. In that case, there was an urgent need to set up a facility which would be of use to these victims in their hour of need,” she says.

Ten years since inception, PCVC’s services have expanded to include: a safe home—a temporary shelter for women and children who have decided to leave their homes, employment assistance, a funding programme that helps children from abusive or broken families to continue their education, a relief programme in collaboration with Kilpauk Medical College that helps burn victims with essential amenities during their stay at the hospital, an awareness programmes on sexual harassment and DV, partnerships with corporate houses to prevent harassment at workplace, referrals for medical aid, therapy and legal aid, community workshops, and educational programmes that are aimed at preventing gender based violence, to name a few.

Working with Women Police Stations’, several sensitization workshops and training programmes are regularly conducted by PCVC for the police-women, as also monthly meetings with Inspectors and Sub-Inspectors. PCVC is also the state coordinator of the ‘We Can’ campaign supported by Oxfam. Through this campaign they have reached out to 15 districts in Tamil Nadu, networked with around 300 organizations, and mobilized over 100,000 change makers within the state alone.

“Our target is fourfold. (a) Stopping the violence; (b) Establishing safety; (c) Empowerment, and (d) Healing. We work based upon the victim-empowerment model, wherein the victim makes the decision at every step. The problems that our clients faces are not as simple as, say, chain snatching. It is about relationships which are quite complex. The counselor merely shares information on those areas which the victim may not be aware of. Also, our counselors work only based on the time-table of our clients, and not the other way around,” says Prasanna, adding that “we do not place too many security measures unnecessarily. Yes, rescuing a victim of DV sometimes involves risk, but we believe that a sense of safety and protection should come from within. If we overprotect our clients, then they might become dependent.”

PCVC works not only with the individual, but

with their consent, with their families as well, especially their children. “Restructuring the lives of these families is the most difficult task, but it is the one task to which we also dedicate our time and energy. When a woman is undergoing a strained relationship with her husband, usually, she is wont to leave her house in disarray, her children untended, and her routine gone haywire. In the time she and her children spend at our center, we try and bring back a state of normalcy and regularity to their day to day routine. Care and assistance to the children is a huge factor that draws women out of their closed environment and to approach us.”

Besides the round the clock helpline and counseling services, PCVC website is also skillfully designed so as to provide adequate information on issues such as sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. Guidance on how and when to seek support, safety mechanisms, facts about the implications of DV on the lives of the sufferers and their children, a call to those who wish to help, and also motivational pages on reviving the spirit of survival among potential victims are available here.

As the organization ushers in its tenth year, there are a number of tasks lined up. “We would like to replicate our service model at a few other places. A public hotline is another addition that will be brought to effect from 2011. We are planning to extend our work in the hospitals by placing permanent referral booths. We will be working towards introducing modules on healthy relationships and prevention of DV that can be taught in all the schools,” beams Prasanna.

Violence is attitudinal. The perpetration of violence is caused by two things: the apathy of the offender, and in equal measure the submissiveness and silence observed by the victim. As much as it is important to uphold traditional beliefs of keeping the family together, it is also important to establish a non-violent environment for each member to live in. Organizations like PCVC help realize that independence and empowerment are powerful tools which can break the silence once and for all.

—Archanaa R.

“If you don’t link and mess with our rivers, India will have water surplus in 2050!” —Ayyapa Masagi

Ayyappa Masagi is a living Gandhi “on Rain Water Harvesting and Conservation”. He blends indigenous ingenuity and modern science, and vehemently disagrees with Irrigation ‘experts’ and water gurus on large dams and check dams. He does not hesitate to repudiate some of Shri Abdul Kalam’s views on water, poverty and inter-linking of rivers. He feels that Mother Nature and the clouds are doing their duty year after year, and we are the ones who are creating obstacles in their path.

He works on sustainable, surface, subsurface, and ground water recharging, and his 'Sand Box' project in dry tracts of Northern Karnataka has proved him to be right. He achieved this by working with the soil and restoring the hydrological cycle. "If this is done, you don't need to dig new bore wells. We have recharged old bore wells in eight states and over 80,000 wells have benefited from this process," says Ayvappa Masagi.

Workman to Wonder man

Ayyappa Masagi was born in a joint family at Sudi village, near Gadag in Karnataka. He suffered from poverty during childhood. He studied without the help of lights, under an uncovered lamp, as his family could not afford to buy kerosene. After completing tenth standard, although he wanted to pursue science, he chose to study commerce as his mother could not afford to pay Rs. 450 as fees. He scored first class and entered Industrial Training Institute in 1974. Despite being qualified for the electrician course, due to

administrative lapse he was offered a 'Fitter course' that was meant for school drop outs.

Gold Sold – and Goodbye to gold from then on

He sold the 8 grams of gold that his mother had for Rs. 80 Rupees to pay the ITI fee. As a tribute to his mother's efforts, Ayyapapa does not wear gold even now. He stood outstanding in academics, and today this Gadag born young boy stands tall as an Engineer.

Poverty turned into prosperity for Ayyappa when he was offered an apprenticeship by BEML for Rs 750 per month. He moved to Larsen and Toubro during the early 80s where he started earning Rs. 1150 per month. He excelled in his blue-collar stint, completed his eight hours job in just four hours, and spent the rest of his time studying inside the factory toilet. Thus he passed Diploma, Mechanical Engineering, and also did the SQC course where his fellow classmates were his own managers. While his white collared classmates struggled to complete the course, he qualified with distinction and got promoted with a role in Quality Control. He accomplished with distinction, and in Quality he saved Rs 2 crores by reusing the scrap material.

Wife a Critique and a supporter

His passion to excel also earned him a good bride in 1983 amidst family rift. His family is now champions in rainwater harvesting. 1994, a year of

drought, was when Ayyappa Masagi began to experiment water conservation techniques in his own fields at his native village Veerapura at Gadag District, Karnataka. He chose to focus on agriculture, as he hailed from that background and from a drought prone area. Without the knowledge of his family, he quit his job after two decades of service, as he could not focus on agriculture and work at the same time. His wife was furious when she heard about his decision and called him 'Thanda Pindam' (meaning useless fellow in Kannada).

He earned the prestigious Ashoka Fellowship and L&T Management persuaded him to withdraw his resignation. But, Ayyappa Masagi chose to answer his inner call. His first tryst with agriculture was in his native village and it was a failure. He realized that the reason was not drought, but poor water management. His father, known for his stinginess, would spend only one third of what his neighbors would spend on agriculture. But, the produce would be three or four fold as he had the ability to communicate and motivate plants. Inheriting native intelligence from his father, he embarked on 'Rain Water Harvesting', 'Non irrigational agriculture', and 'Introspective irrigation'. His father insisted that natures' call should be answered only in the field as urea and manure through human excreta is nutritive to fields than fertilizers.

Ashoka Recognizes him

His pursuit on rainwater harvesting resulted in Ashoka foundation supporting him to establish WLF - 'Water Literacy foundation' with an initial fund of Rs. 30,000 per month. This amount was more than the salary he earned at L&T, and the societal impact that he created through this was invaluable. Slowly, NGOs, students, and others joined in his efforts.

Water Efficient Nation

The goal of WLF was to change the water usage pattern in houses, apartments, factories, corporate houses, community wells, rivers, tanks, and in agricultural activities as well. Ayyappa Masagi's concern and care for water changed a small section of people, and his journey to reach a larger audience

innovative water conservation techniques for sustainable agricultural growth. This helps to not only enhance farm productivity, but also bails the farmers from suicides.

Corporates are becoming richer

Widia, or SKF or Kenna Metals or Chowgules in



seems to be untiring. He is optimistic and wants every HR manager to make his working family, neighborhood sensitive to meaningful water harvest and conservation systems.

WLF is concentrating to build a sensitive, caring, and responsible farming community for easy implementation of cost effective, eco friendly

Goa are saving crores of liters of water every year as well as on their water tax—thanks to his innovation in water harvesting. Ayyappa Masagi remains to be a charitable person, Gandhian, and Mother Earth lover and not a businessman wishing to leverage his brand across nations.

Akshya Patra- in Karnataka is Unique

1.8 lakh children studying in government schools across several districts of Karnataka benefit from 'Akshya Patra', the mid-day meal scheme that was launched by Late Sri K. Kamaraj. The mega kitchen required a minimum of one crore liters of water per annum, and thus water was being purchased by paying an exorbitant price as the main feeder bore wells in the premises ran dry.

With technical support from WLF, a small lake (100 Feet diameter and 12 Feet depth) was constructed to collect all the run offs for easier infiltration into a dried up bore well using reverse osmosis technique. This arrested suspended sediments ensuring zero turbidity, purity, hygiene, and sustainability of the system. The entire project costed Rs. 8 lakhs, and 'Akshya Patra' true to its literal meaning is now self sufficient for the present future. The money saved will now feed many more children and enable them to attend school.

The promise of 'Every Day Rain'

Ayyappa Masagi's 102-year-old father Madavappa, waters the banana plants once in ten days against the conventional practice of daily watering, and the productivity has been twofold. He does not use hybrids nor fertilizers, but uses plastic to ensure water retention around the banana plants. Ayyappa Masagi termed this concept as 'every day rain' and following his father's footsteps scaled up this thought for 'Stream Water Harvesting' in large areas.

In order to force the hidden water in a streambed to disperse through the banks instead of escaping downstream, a sub surface polypropylene check dam is constructed. Through this simple and cost-effective technique 500 acres of land is covered for water replenishment. Hence, farmers who made 400 to 600 kgs of Jowar per acre are able to now make

double their harvest, and some up to 14 quintals.

His next campaign is against usage of tanker water. "If each household, be it an apartment or independent house, implements innovative rain water harvesting techniques, then water tankers will be seen only in the museum and environment will be more green. Recycling of bathing water helps one to bathe many times and the soap residue, which is phosphate, serves as good manure

Appeal to CSR Custodians in the corporate world

This water Gandhi has an appeal to all corporate houses that have a CSR budget. He says: "if you are adopting a village, don't merely build a concrete school building, but ensure one-time support for rainwater harvesting. Fit and forget model ensures continuous recharge of water for decades as against the annual cost involved in check dam maintenance. If there is water, greenery will appear and this will spread prosperity and enhance education." WLF has developed 100+ innovative technologies to capture and utilize every last drop of water and has adapted these different techniques based on the need and requirements.

Ayyappa's Vision

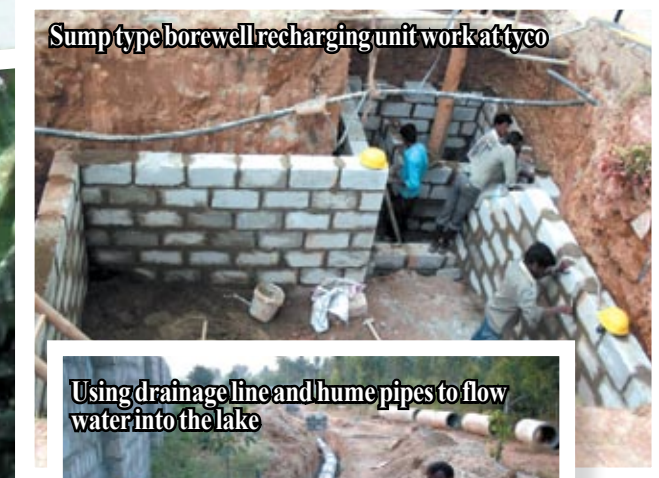
Just as Gandhiji preached non-violence, Ayyappa Masagi considered rainwater harvesting and conservation as a movement—not merely for farmers, but for all citizens. He uses street theatre, folk songs, story telling and media to propagate and has reached to a limited section of people in Karnataka as well as few NGOs across the globe.

Reward and recognitions

Mr. Ayyappa was awarded the prestigious award by Ashoka foundation for his contribution to the society. Several organizations, Rotary clubs, Professional forums have honored him, but he wants each one of them to move from talk to walk. His other hobbies include raising pet budgerigars (incidentally an evolutionarily unique and under-appreciated bird originally of the Australian desert and an efficient water user) and write poems in his Kannada.

Jamal Bajaj Institute has chosen him as an innovative Social Entrepreneur for year 2009

—S. Deenadavalan and Arun Nayak



Water Gandhi

Suicide is the third major cause of death in India. A fact, not many of us are aware of. SNEHA, an NGO dealing in the field suicide intervention for the last 24 years is solely dedicated to this noble cause. Dr. Lakshmi Vijayakumar, the founder of SNEHA, after attending a conference in Vienna on suicide prevention felt the strong urge to start an NGO on the same lines in India. Facing resentment from friends and family, she surged on, and SNEHA was founded in 1986.

"I had just finished my course in psychiatry and post conference I had the opportunity of visiting similar centres in Europe and England. Medications for such problems were few and I felt the need of a similar facility in India," says Dr. Lakshmi Vijayakumar, who has a doctorate in Suicidology.

"Initially this concept faced resentment as people felt that the idea would not be accepted by the society, and the public would not be willing to discuss their problems. But, here we are 15 years later, having received over 150,000 calls, and our success speaks for itself," she adds.

Confidentiality, anonymity and non-judgemental attitude of the volunteers are the three strongholds that are behind SNEHA's success. With over 50 trained volunteers belonging to varying age groups, SNEHA attends to calls, personal visits, e-mails and letters 24x7.

A strong policy followed by SNEHA is that of not giving advice! Strange as it sounds, its volunteers are trained to listen more than anything else. "A person facing a certain hardship is certain to have been dwelling on it for a long time and would have thought of possible solutions. Advising someone is the easiest option, but reality is different and most persons just need to vent out their emotions and need a listening ear," explains Shanti, a volunteer.

Having had a humble beginning, SNEHA started off in a rented premise that was funded by a well-wisher, and the phone bills were paid by a volunteer. Expenses were kept at a bare minimum and they shifted to their new premises in R.A. Puram at Chennai in 2005. Till date, all expenses are borne by volunteers and donors. The information that is shared by the callers are held in strict confidence and the identity of each caller is carefully protected within the four walls of SNEHA.

"We started off small, and I have seen a lot more



VOICES THAT HEAL

"Advising someone is the easiest option, but reality is different and most persons just need to vent out their emotions and need a listening ear"

changed in the attitude of people. They are more open and communicable. As stress levels have increased, so have suicide related issues. E-mails have replaced letters, and people prefer remaining anonymous and speaking over the phone. The number of personal visits have decreased," says Dr. Vijayakumar.

A member of the International Association for Suicide Prevention, SNEHA is one of the founding members of Befrienders India, the National Association that has more than ten centres in India. The centres work within the framework of the Charter of Befrienders International, the world body, with its headquarters in the United Kingdom.

However, SNEHA is the only centre that caters to the public 24x7. They receive not only national calls, but international calls as well.

"A phenomenon we have noticed is a large call flow from the US, Europe, and Arab countries especially during night. People call in and say they want to hear an Indian voice. It's very touching to speak to such individuals and many volunteers are left with tears in their eyes," says Shanti who has been associated with SNEHA since its inception.

Resting on the belief that suicide prevention is every individual's responsibility, SNEHA conducts interactive programmes in schools, colleges, corporate houses, and self-help groups. "Most students dislike the word 'suicide' and we come up with alternative seminars that gradually lead to the topic and get students talking on this issue, thus spreading awareness among the student community," she points out.

SNEHA also adopted Srinivasapuram, a hamlet along the coast of Marina in Chennai, post tsunami. Within a year and a half, the NGO had accomplished quite a feat. Narrating the incident Shanti says: "When we put up our tent at the Tsunami Rehabilitation site, we were laughed at by other NGOs who found our presence there amusing. Minutes later, there was a huge line of people queuing outside our tent as they wanted to share their grief and were looking for someone to talk to."

Another project that SNEHA is involved in is related to farmers and pesticide suicides in the Kattumannu village, near Cuddalore. A WHO sponsored project, each farmer is given a locker to store their pesticides; thus preventing them to store it at home. A strategy adopted to check if it impacts suicide rates in the region. "A technique adapted for the first time in India, it is to be implemented across other states as well. A similar technique was practiced in Sri Lanka, but farmers were given boxes to lock up pesticides after use, but the boxes were still kept in their houses," narrates Shanti.

A humble beginning and a gradual step up the success ladder, SNEHA has come a long way. Reaching out to individuals across boundaries, SNEHA has touched many human lives and helped individuals face life; overcoming their crisis in ways more than one.

—Nidhi Adlakha

Creativity That Gives

The speaker who gives — creatively and BIG TIME

Fredrik Härén is an extraordinary speaker. And he's an amazing giver too.

Fredrik's Idea Book is not only one of the bestselling creativity books of all time, it's the one of just four on 'innovation' to make The Best 100 Business Books list. His new book called 'The Developing World' is truly inspiring and thought provoking.

There are so many things that make Fredrik distinctly inspiring and distinctly different. For example, his identical twin brother Teo is an award-winning speaker and an author too. They have been known to speak together in their native Stockholm with Fredrik outside the

room and Teo inside just to completely 'freak out' audiences!

And right now, Fredrik and Teo are doing what no speaker in the world has ever done. And it's giving in the most impactful and creative (yet stunningly simple) way.

Here's how Fredrik expresses it. "For every hour a participant listens to me speak, I will send one child to school for one day." And Teo has made precisely that same commitment too.

It is already started. Fredrik did 20 speeches for corporate houses around the world during January 2010 with an average of 100 participants in each. So when you multiply out the hours it means that

Fredrik's giving alone means 2000 'kid-days' of education get given.

And those kids are at the Parijat Academy free school for underprivileged children covering nine tribal villages in India—Pamohi, Mahguapra, Deosutal, Garchuk, Mainakhorong, Dhalbama, Nowagaon, Garoghuli, Garbhanga. It is a school in a remote jungle tribal village and so it is truly making a difference. Without Fredrik and Teo's generosity, it would struggle.

Fredrik says he loves 'BIG1'. Methinks there's a whole generation of kids that might just love Fredrik and Teo too!

—Source: BIG1.com



Fredrik Härén

The multifarious efforts put in by the members of Aruwe, their friends, and collaborators have borne fruit in the changed mindsets amongst the members of the Ayanavaram community towards education and income generating capacity of women



TO LIVE IS TO LOVE



Sandwiched between narrow lanes of houses in Ayanavaram at Chennai, is a house which looks not very different from the others. Opening its gates, one is met with a sight peculiar only to familial occupation. A moment's hesitance to knock proves helpful as a friendly man guides me upstairs to the canopied terrace, where Aruwe's office is located. "This is my parents' home. I pleaded them to let me use this space to set up the organization and it has stayed since," says Aspy Joyson casually.

Aspy Joyson and Rachel Xavier were students of Stella Maris College, and they pursued their Master degree in Social Work in 1991. While working as student field workers, they were inspired to start something for their own community, Ayanavaram, where they resided. There were not many NGOs in the city back then, and before they officially started Aruwe, both of them networked with existing governmental as well as non-governmental organizations and organized medical camps.

"We had done some field work with CEWA (Centre for the Welfare of the Aged), Chennai. That organization is a pioneer in residential care for the elderly in India. Our interest in taking care of the elderly sprang up from the services and dignity maintained by CEWA. There used to be a few homeless elders thronging the streets in Ayanavaram, often found begging. We, along with a few friends started to bring food regularly for these people, and no sooner had we done that some of them decided to stay," says Aspy.

Starting with three elders and expanding to seven, Aruwe has provided them with residential care and has accommodated a few children as

well. "In 1996, we came across school and college students who were finding it difficult to pay their fees. Some parents requested us to provide a tuition centre for their children. Ayanavaram used to be an area in which education was a highly neglected option, what with the presence of alcoholism among men and women, and abusive relations spoiling the peace at home. So, a few children just took to the streets. Some were even encouraged by their parents to beg, as a child sometimes earned more than an adult would, by seeking alms. People should stop giving alms to children," says a furious Aspy. "We should feel guilty for actually spoiling the child's future while answering to their begging calls," she adds.

The work at Aruwe keeps expanding like an umbrella, and to hold it all together must require the joint efforts of many people. "We are glad to have very helpful collaborators" says Aspy. "Our patrons Dr. Udaya Mahadevan, Associate Professor of Social Work at Loyola College, Chennai, Mrs. Janaki Arunkumar, Commissioner of Customs and Central Excise, Mr. M.S.Jain and Mr. Sridhar of Maithri Educational Trust are all truly committed individuals who keep our motto alive—To live is to love. We also have a few corporate sponsors who fund our programmes. Mr. Paul of Little Drops Home for the Aged has been offering instantaneous support whenever we needed to drop in an elderly person at his home for

"At Aruwe, the call to work can be expected to come at any time, and from anywhere"

want of better care," says Aspy.

Speaking of alcoholism and disturbed family relations, Ayanavaram locality has been witness to an alarming increase in suicidal rates in the last ten years. As in most of these families, the women were the sole bread winners, and also victims of domestic violence and other forms of crime. Referrals for counseling, legal advice, and treatment was started by Aruwe in collaboration with other NGOs. In this, the support and committed services of Mrs. Beulah Azaria and Ms. Isabel Richardson are noteworthy. In July 2010, Aruwe along with the Banyan Foundation set up a mental health clinic in the neighborhood. Other organizations that served as a catalyst in helping women were the International Foundation for Crime Prevention and Victim Care (PCVC), Madras Christian Council of Social Service (MCCSS), and Pen Urimai Iyakkam, to name a few.

"At Aruwe, the call to work can be expected to come at any time, and from anywhere," says Simon Johny, who manages Aruwe's programmes. He adds: "Our friends often spot individuals in need and contact us immediately for help. They may be calling from the other end of the city, but it is our duty to attend to their call and we do it gladly. Once, an old lady was found living on the pavement near St. Thomas Mount railway station. Upon reaching there, we chatted with her. It turns out that her husband, a porter died of an accident on the railway track many years ago. Not wanting to leave the place and the memories that it contained for her, she chose to live very close to the site where the incident occurred. We

decided against forcing her to come away from there, and instead arranged for food to be provided to her regularly."

"On another occasion, we were visiting Plesipalayam, a village situated in the Tamil Nadu-Andhra Pradesh border, to purchase a piece of land for setting up our own premises. There we found the issue of heavy malnutrition and neglect of education. Particularly, there was a girl who had incurred a huge debt with paying fees for her Teacher Training Programme. We mobilized funds for her to complete her training, and also gave her hope as we found her on the verge of committing suicide. We ended up serving the people residing in Plesipalayam although our land buying prospects are yet to be finalized," says Simon.

The multifarious efforts put in by the members of Aruwe, their friends and collaborators have borne fruit in the changed mindsets amongst the members of the Ayanavaram community towards education and income generating capacity of women. The seemingly silent Simon Johny says: "Service should be cascading like the waterfalls. To some, our work may seem to lack focus, because we deal with not just one issue. Our purpose in being here is to serve and to spread the message of love. In the process of attaining common standards of 'professionalism' we do not want to lose out on the human essence to our work." Here is an organization that prefers to mould itself to suit the needs of the people it serves!

—Archanaa R.

Aruwe is located at No.11, Solai Amman Koil Street, Ayanavaram, Chennai- 600 023. Phone: 044-2645 4615/ 2644 6109. E.mail: info@aruwe.org

Three State of Consciousness

Interesting conversations serve as road signs directing Creative thought. We bring you a few conversations that we feel are inspiring and thought provoking. Here is an interesting conversation about "Three State of Consciousness" between Sri Ramana Maharishi and his disciple.

D: Is the world that is seen, felt and sensed by us in so many ways something like a dream, an illusion?

M: There is no alternative for you but to accept the world as unreal if you are seeking the truth and the truth alone, for the simple reason that unless you give up the idea that the world is real your mind will always be after it. If you take the appearance to be real you will never know the real itself, although it is the real alone that exists. This point is illustrated by the analogy of the snake in the rope. You may be deceived into believing that a piece of rope is a snake. While you imagine that the rope is a snake you cannot see the rope as a rope. The non-existent snake becomes real to you, while the real rope seems wholly non-existent as such.

D: It is easy to accept tentatively that the world is not ultimately real, but it is hard to have the conviction that it is really unreal.

M: Even so is your dream world real while you are dreaming. So long as the dream lasts everything you see and feel in it is real.

D: Is then the world no better than a dream?

M: What is wrong with the sense of reality you have while you are dreaming? You may be dreaming of something quite impossible, for instance, of having a happy chat with a dead person. Just for a moment, you may doubt in the dream, asking yourself, 'was he not dead?', but somehow your mind reconciles itself to the dream vision, and the person is as good as alive for the purposes of the dream. In other words, the dream as a dream does not permit you to doubt its reality. It is the same in the waking state, for you are unable to doubt the reality of the world that you see while you are awake. How can the mind which has itself created the world accept it as unreal? That is the significance of the comparison made between the world of the waking state and the dream world. Both are creations of the mind, and so long as the

mind is engrossed in either, it finds itself unable to deny their reality. It cannot deny the reality of the dream world while it is dreaming and it cannot deny the reality of the waking world while it is awake. If, on the contrary, you withdraw your mind completely from the world and turn it within and abide there, that is, if you keep awake always to the Self which is the substratum of all experiences, you will find the world of which you are now aware is just as unreal as the world in which you lived in your dream.

D: We see, feel and sense the world in so many ways. These sensations are the reactions to the objects seen and felt. They are not mental creations as in dreams, which differ not only from person to person but also with regard to the same person. Is that not enough to prove the objective reality of the world?

M: All this talk about inconsistencies in the dream world arises only now, when you are awake. While you are dreaming, the dream was a perfectly integrated whole. That is to say, if you felt thirsty in a dream, the illusory drinking of illusory water quenched your illusory thirst. But all this was real and not illusory to you so long as you did not know that the dream itself was illusory. It is similar with the waking world. The sensations you now have get coordinated to give you the impression that the world is real.

If, on the contrary, the world is a self-existent reality (that is what you evidently mean by objectivity), what prevents the world from revealing itself to you in sleep? You do not say you did not exist in your sleep.

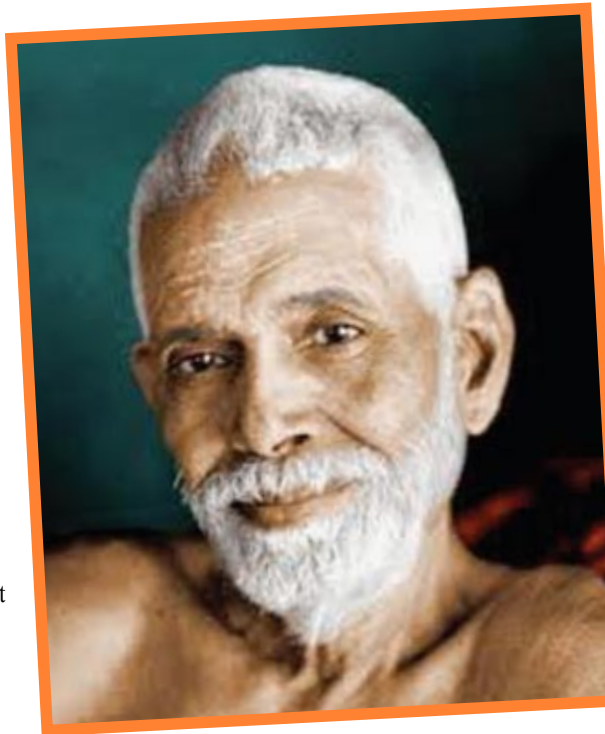
D: Neither do I deny the world's existence while I am asleep. It has been existing all the while. If during my sleep I did not see it, others who were not sleeping saw it.

M: To say that you existed while asleep was it necessary to call in the evidence of others so as to prove it to you? Why do you seek their evidence

now? Those others can tell you of having seen the world during your sleep only when you yourself are awake.

With regard to your own existence it is different. On waking up you say you had a sound sleep, and so that extent you are aware of yourself in the deepest sleep, whereas you have not the slightest notion of the world's existence then. Even now, while you are awake, is it the world that says, "I am real", or is it you?

D: Of course I say it, but I say it of the



world.

M: well then, that world, which you say is real, is really mocking at you for seeking to prove its reality while of your own reality you are ignorant.

You want somehow or other to maintain that the world is real. What is the standard of reality? That alone is real which exists by itself, which reveals itself by itself and which is eternal and unchanging. Does the world exist by itself? Was it ever seen

without the aid of the mind? In deep sleep there is neither mind nor world. When awake, there is the mind and there is the world. What does invariable concomitance mean? You are familiar with the principles of inductive logic which are considered the very basis of scientific investigation. Why do you not decide this question of the reality of the world in the light of those accepted principles of logic?

Of yourself, you can say "I exist". That is, your existence is not mere existence; it is existence of which you are conscious. Really, it is existence identical with consciousness.

D: The world may not be conscious of itself, yet it exists.

M: Consciousness is always Self-consciousness. If you are conscious of anything you are essentially conscious of yourself. Un-selfconscious existence is a contradiction in terms. It is no existence at all. It is merely attributed existence, whereas true existence, the SAT, is not an attribute, it is the substance itself. It is the Vastu (Reality). Reality is therefore known as SAT-CHIT, being consciousness, and never merely the one to the exclusion of the other. The world neither exists by itself, nor is it conscious of its existence. How can you say that such a world is real?

And what is the nature of the world? It is perpetual change, a continuous, interminable flux. A dependent, un-selfconscious, ever-changing world cannot be real.

D: Are the names and forms of the world real?

M: You won't find them separate from the substratum (*Adhishtana*). When you try to get at name and form, you will find reality only. Therefore attain the knowledge of that which is real for all time.

D: Why does the waking state look so real?

M: We see so much on the cinema screen, but it is not real. Nothing is real there except the screen. In the same way in the waking state, there is nothing but *Adhishtana* (substratum). Knowledge of the world is knowledge of the knower of the world. Both go away in sleep.

—Excerpted from Sri Ramana Maharshi teachings

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Rigidity – holding to hold long

A Series on Growing-Reflections for Deep Change

When an accident deprived the village headman of the use of his legs, he took to walking on crutches. He gradually developed the ability so well that he could dance and execute pirouettes. He also trained his children in the use of crutches. By the fourth generation, no one in the village could walk without crutches. It had become a way of life. One day a young man demanded to know why everyone in the village had to walk on crutches since God had provided them with legs to walk on. The amused village elders, in order to teach him a lesson, asked him for a demonstration.

On a bright Sunday morning, in front of the whole village gathering, the young man stood upright and dropped his crutches, took a bold step forward and fell flat on his face. With that, everyone made fun of him for the attempt he made, and confirmed their belief that it was quite impossible to walk without the help of crutches. (Sampath. J.M. story 91 Discovery – 3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998)

Just like this young man, as a social entrepreneur there are frequent experiences of questioning many fossilized beliefs within the system. This can make people drive into several blank walls and hard rock which are difficult to crack. Actually, as much as a change needs to be brought in the system, the entire process of initiating change and instituting change is an internal growing experience for the social entrepreneur who is a change agent. This calls for patience, perseverance, hope, faith,

and relentless pursuit born out of strong conviction within the change agent.

There is a process through which the beliefs are formed. Every experience that a person goes through leaves behind certain opinions and conclusions. These conclusions over a period of time become beliefs and beliefs become operational by governing the behavior of the person. A set of beliefs expressed through certain behaviour formulate the culture of a group or community over a period of time. As time passes these beliefs get fossilized in the form of rituals and practices leaving behind a strong conviction within the individuals belonging to the system.

In the widely read book 'Zen and the Art of Motorcycle maintenance', Robert M Prigis writes,

"To tear down a factory or to revolt against a government or to avoid repair of a motor cycle because it is a system, is to attack effects rather than causes; and as long as the attack is up on effects only, no change is possible. The true system, the real system, is our present construction of systematic thought itself, rationality itself, and if a factory is torn down but the rationality, which produces it, is left standing, then that

rationality will simply produce another factory. If a revolution destroys a systematic government, but the systematic patterns of thought that produced that Government are left intact, then those patterns will repeat themselves in the succeeding government." (Pirsig, 1974, p.88)

Without these beliefs being questioned, it is not easy to achieve change. To sustain the change movement we, as change agents need intense clarity on what we believe in and a willingness to change within. To do this, we need support and not mockery from the people we associate with. The target community or group resists change due to the fear of change. The group is also unwilling to put the

efforts to change; because it is easy to follow and live with what is known than move towards the unknown. Rigidity makes a person or group unwilling to listen, explore or experiment anything different from what they know. It also kills openness and the ego looms large to protect and sustain self. When there is rigidity the defense mechanisms are highest and the anger is directed towards the change agent itself.

The change agent cannot approach the

community or group without understanding these realities. Also, the change agent cannot approach with a superiority status to change the community. As a social entrepreneur attempting change they will have to approach with utmost respect, humility and willingness to work along with the community to sustain growth.

Being a change agent, it is necessary to recognize the fossilized beliefs within self too. There may be several beliefs about the community, group that we are choosing to work with. The beliefs of the change agent itself can become the blocks. Therefore, social entrepreneurship is a two way process. It not only grows the group or the community, it also enables the individual change agent to grow. Only when we attempt to change do we realize the difficulty in change and that grows a sense of empathy and tolerance within to become an effective social entrepreneur.

Points for Reflection:

- Why do I resist change?
- What are the changes I have attempted in the last two years and to what extent have I been able to sustain them?
- Where are the areas of rigidity that I can recognize in myself? How am I able to deal with them?
- What is my own level of patience? What are the processes that I use regularly to enhance my level of patience?

—J.M.Sampath & Kalpana Sampath



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

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

Initiative

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

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

Doing Something New Requires Initiative

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

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

A Culture of Initiative

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

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

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

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

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

to be directed. They are prolific initiators.

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

The world of Initiative

Times of India's Lead India new national anthem "Tum Chal" is about taking initiative. The



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

Spreading Initiative

Be proactive is the first habit recommended by Stephen Covey in his highly acclaimed book 'The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People'. Covey says that the seven habits are 'common knowledge' and not 'common practice'. On being proactive, he says in his book 'Taking initiative', does not mean being pushy, obnoxious, or aggressive. It does mean recognizing our responsibility to make things happen."

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

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

—P.N. Devarajan

The Gifted Gab

Gopinath speaks to Marie Banu about his passion for media and the need for social change

Gopinath, popularly known as 'Neeya Naana Gopinath', is the host of the popular television debate show called 'Neeya Naana?'. Earlier, he was known as 'Makkal Yaar Pakkam Gopi', and was subsequently identified with a programme titled 'Sigaram Thotta Manithargal'.

His knowledge on current affairs is laudable. Having succeeded as a television anchor, he is now helping students improve their communication skills. He has published two books titled 'Theruvellam Thevathaigal'—a collection of poems, and 'Please Indha Puthakatha Vaangatheenga'—a book on personality development.

He is the recipient of Young Achiever award by India Today magazine (2007); Best Anchor of the State by *Anantha Vikatan* (2007, 2008), and also won the outstanding Young Indian Award by JCI in 2008.

In an exclusive interview with Marie Banu, C. Gopinath shares his passion for the media, and the need for social change.

You are always identified with your television programs: 'Makkal Yaar Pakkam', 'Sigaram Thotta Manithargal', 'Neeya Naana', and 'Nadanathu Enna'. Now, you are popularly known 'Neeya Naana Gopinath'. How do you feel when one addresses you so?

Friends used to call me 'Gopi'; others call me 'Gopinath'. Popularly, people call me 'Neeya Naana Gopinath'. Basically, I am a journalist. I started my career as a journalist in the television industry 12 years ago. From day one, my advantage was that I was an on-screen as well as an off-screen person. If I was a reporter, I was also the news reader; when I was reporting, I was hosting programmes as well. I wanted to experiment things better. It has been my passion to work in the media.

Gopi is my personal name and Gopinath is my official name. I like to be called 'Gopi'.

Amongst all the talk shows, which issue did you find difficult to moderate?

Actually, nothing is hard when you like it. Each talk show has its formulas. Each one has its own sincerities and commitments. I can say that commitment and the work that goes into each of the shows are different. While some need a psychological approach, some also requires more commitment, research, meetings, and physical work.



It is joyous to meet different people, understand, react, convince, console, justify, make them feel happy, make them understand the realities, and at the same time gain an understanding of what is happening in the rest of the world. It is like a sweat after five kilometers run. I never felt it as a hard task. It might be tiring physically. At times, we do three shoots in a day for programmes that are staged on sets. We shoot continuously for four days and I would have to stand for 18 hours in a day. If I elaborate on this further, it would seem like a herculean task, but I would just say it in one phrase: "I Love my job."

Who has been your role model?

I do not have any role model as such. I have derived inspirations from people like Pranoy Roy, Rajdeep Sardesai, and Ravi Bernard. Even when I go to colleges to chair seminars, I tell the students not to take me as a role model, but as an inspiration, if they think I deserve it.

If you take me as a role model, it would automatically turn into hero worship, and you would want to be another Gopinath. There are

“Despite challenges, struggles, and de-motivation, NGOs continue to do their work. Their effort towards bring about social change should be appreciated

many talented people so take one good thing from each person and derive inspirations from them.

You are helping students to improve their communication skills. Can you tell us about your 'Taalk Shop Academy School of Excellence'?

It was my passion to start a training academy for all sectors. I researched for three years on training needs in this competitive world, apart from academic education. For example, I came from the southern part of the state. When I came to Chennai,



it was a cultural shock to me. I was hesitant to interview leaders who were from the North as I had to converse in English. Although I knew the language, I did not have the confidence and the exposure.

Apart from soft skills, one requires negotiation skills, enterprising skills, speaking skills, and commanding skills. Most of the time communication skills are connected with language. But, strongly I believe that language is only a part of communication. Content, body language, and confidence level forms most of the communication. Our training programmes aims to

enhance the employable quality of the individual.

Our next project is to start a media school. We plan to tie up with educational institutions and offer an optional course. Our core team has worked on the course module in such a way that it is more interesting for the students and is not restricted to class room lectures alone. Even a student of seventh standard would know how to read the news. But, to read correctly really matters. This is what we aim to teach.

Which of the social issues disturb you the most? How can we use media to bring about change?

There are many issues that require change. Each and everyone should feel that they can also contribute towards the society. Change always happens because of one person who initiated the process. People followed Tiguara. People believed in Gandhi and followed him. There was no CNN then, nor did they follow because he was Gandhi. It was because they all wanted a change.

People have their own set of responsibilities. Our next generation just needs to be tuned. Our society demands children to study well. We force them to study well, score high marks, and enter into a medical or engineering college. We force them to excel in their education so that they can get into a good job and still force them to earn more money. After all of this, you expect them to show love and affection, when you have just created an ATM. You never taught them social values, but complain that they do have any social consciousness and not having concern about their country. We have lost our moral capability to criticize them.

Your advice to those engaged in social work?

I never advice people. I have a very big respect for social workers and NGOs. It is difficult for one to sacrifice a Saturday evening or a Sunday for somebody. In a scenario where the whole world is like a corporate company, these NGOs and social workers are making a difference.

Although most of them receive criticism they continue with their work, because they strongly believe in the cause. They are handicapped many a times to express their point of view. It is difficult to talk to a lay man about the environment impact after 45 years which would affect their future generations as he would not live that long.

Despite challenges, struggles, and de-motivation, NGOs continue to do their work. Their effort towards bring about social change should be appreciated.

There are two kinds of social workers—one addressing problems that are happening in the immediate present, and the other who are forecasters working on issues that would happen after ten or twenty years.

There is a verse in the bible that says that 'theerkadharasi ullooril madhika maataan', (meaning that forecasters would not be respected in their native). NGOs are like that. They work despite all the criticism they receive and this is why I respect them.

Editorial

**Latha Suresh
Marie Banu**