

Conversations

A Chronicle of Social Currents

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Cover Story >> Pg 6 Tender loving care 24x7

Stories about compassionate caregivers in NGOs

From the Editor

Dear friends,

'Each one, reach one; each one, teach one,' has been a mantra that I spread everyday. If this philosophy is imbibed by one and all then each one of us can bring a smile on the face of the

other. We can all create a new way of life and a new spirit of existence.

The heroes and heroines of this issue seem to be following this mantra. From caregivers to leaders, activists to public servants, all of them who are featured here seem to believe—"there will never be

another now; I will make most of it now."

Please read about these individuals who spread cheer and joy amidst despair. I hope you share these stories with your friends.

P.N. Devarajan

inside



Alumni Talk

Pg 3

Mission Education

Story of a computer professional engaged in rural education



Profile

Pg 9

Conscious Corporate

Enabling employment opportunities for the disabled



Chit Chat

Pg 12

Reform in Uniform

An exclusive encounter with DGP R. Nataraj



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Prove & Improve

CSIM has partnered with Social Audit Network, UK to promote the concept of Social Audit amongst organizations—both for-profit and non-profit in India. The social accounting system analyses the Social, Economic and Environmental impact of an organization and reports upon it.

Fullerton India Credit Company, one of India's leading retail finance company enrolled with CSIM and prepared its social accounts. Alan Kay, social auditor of Social Audit Network, UK conducted the audit.

Fullerton India's Vision:
"We care and make a difference in the lives and future of our customers."

With a widespread presence across over 400 towns and cities and a workforce of over 12000, it was challenging to build awareness of its vision, mission, core values, brand

values and business processes amongst all its stakeholders. Hence, an annual Social Audit was considered an ideal method of assessing the extent to which Fullerton India has been able to achieve its vision and organizational objectives. It was also considered the right methodology to assess, improve and communicate its social performance.

The prime objective of conducting the Social Audit exercise for Fullerton India was to assess the social and economic impact of its products, services and internal systems on stakeholders including customers, employees and CSR beneficiaries. The leadership team was committed to the Social Audit process and formed a core group which was responsible for drafting the social accounts. The Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility

(CSR) team also helped in coordinating and compiling the details from all the primary and secondary sources of information.

Benefits of the Social Audit exercise

- ❑ Fullerton India identified and drafted the mission and objectives of the organization
- ❑ All the company's activities were aligned with the respective objectives
- ❑ The indicators for performance assessment for each of these activities identified in consultation with the respective stakeholders
- ❑ Multi stakeholders feedback helped the company identify key issues to be addressed for the long term sustenance of the organisation.
- ❑ The Social Audit report helped to communicate the social intent/

CSR commitment of the organization

- ❑ The audit process and the report also projected the ethical, transparent and good governance practices of the company that helped build the goodwill of the organisation.

The Social Audit and the report played a significant role for Fullerton India to bag the 'Company with best CSR practices' for 2009 from IMC & ACCG.

Do you want to audit the 'Mission Compliance' of your company? CSIM will facilitate in drafting your company's social accounts.

For further details contact Latha Suresh @ 92822 05123.

—Namrata Kaur

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**


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Mission Education

With just Rs 5,000, Kamalakannan started his NGO, Vizhuthugal in the year 2008. Today, he stands tall as a social entrepreneur supporting five tuition centres in the district of Erode, Tamil Nadu.

Born in a weaver's family, Kamalakannan was a first-generation graduate. He followed the principles of Swami Vivekananda and was an avid reader of his books. After completing his Bachelors' Degree in Computer Science in Coimbatore, he started a Ramakrishna ashram where he taught children who lived in the nearby slum.

After a few months of starting the ashram, he joined Deccan Services, a BPO in Chennai. Kamalakannan served as a volunteer at the Shirdi Sai Baba Temple and every Thursday he distributed food to those who lived in the vicinity. "I wanted to do something tangible for these people, but did not know how. I wanted to render social work in a professional manner," said Kamalakannan.

Quitting a secure job and engaging in social work full-time was not easy. Kamalakannan enquired in various educational institutions in Chennai about the social work courses that they offered. "I learnt that a master's degree in social work was a two-year course and I could not afford to pay the high fees. When I read about CSIM in a Tamil daily, I called their office and was asked to attend the interview. At the interview, I expressed my inability to pay the fees and requested for support. Latha Suresh, the Director, was compassionate and enrolled me in the course. This was a turning point in my life and I have never looked back since," he said.

Kamalakkannan joined for the Post-Graduate Diploma in Social Initiative and Management. "I was offered a scholarship of Rs 2,000 per month. I utilised this money to meet my travel, food, and accommodation costs," he said.

Kamalakkannan was selected for the 'Inainthu Naam 99' fellowship scheme that was offered by Siragugal, an NGO in Chennai.

"I was offered a fellowship of Rs 5,000 per month for two years to start an NGO. The formal event was organised by Siragugal in Pollachi to distribute the fellowship amount, for which APJ Abdul Kalam was the chief guest. I launched the Vizhuthugal Social Trust in Punjai Puliyampatti in June 2008 along with my friends Elango and Parthasarathy," added Kamalakannan.

The trust offers tuition services to underprivileged children. Vizhuthugal

started working in one village and later expanded to five villages. The fellowship fund lasted six months and Kamalakannan did not know how to continue supporting the NGO's activities after that period. "We found it difficult to pay the salary for our tuition teachers. I contacted Latha Suresh who said that she would support us for three months and advised me to identify a donor in the interim. When P N Subramanian learnt about our problem, he requested his friend Murugan to contribute to our trust," said Kamalakannan.

Murugan donated a computer and offered a regular sponsorship of Rs 5,000 a month. Today, there are 245 children studying from standard 3rd to 9th who are provided tuition through five centers coordinated by Vizhuthugal. "I have not missed a single tuition class as it is more interesting than my school," says Senthil, a student at Vizhuthugal tuition center.

In a span of four years, Kamalakannan had donned many hats—a corporate employee, a volunteer at Sai Baba Temple, a CSIM student and a NGO head. When asked which of these roles he liked best, he replied: "I liked only two of them—being a CSIM student and my present role as NGO Director."

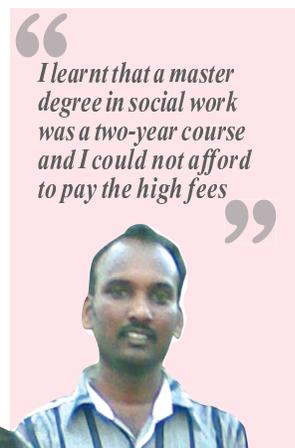
Additionally, Kamalakannan coordinated eye camps with the help of Aravind Eye Hospital and planted tree saplings near the tuition centers. The trust also extended support to those who needed medical assistance.

Besides regular lessons, children are also taught spoken English, computers, and yoga. During the summer vacation, the children attend dance lessons that are conducted by trained teachers.

"Villagers from Madampalayam and Marampalayam are requesting us to set up tuition centers in their villages as well. Individual donations from friends and well wishers enable us to meet the program expenses. If we have more support, we will be able to expand to these villages as well," said Kamalakannan. "The respect I gained through my social work activities has been encouraging. My family, who were once apprehensive when I shifted to social work, is now extremely proud of me," concluded Kamalakannan with a glint in his eye.



Children at the tuition center



“*I learnt that a master degree in social work was a two-year course and I could not afford to pay the high fees***”**



Tree planting in the tuition center premises



Kamalakkannan with the children

Do you wish to support Kamalakannan? Contact him at 9382296406

Traffic K R Ramaswamy. The no nonsense man that many commoners cherish and the nuisance man to those with vested interests. Meet Chennai City's notable social worker, public interest litigant, whistle-blower and arbitrator — all rolled into one.

Traffic K R Ramaswamy—the no nonsense man that many commoners cherish and the nuisance man to those with vested interests. Meet Chennai City's notable social worker, public interest litigant, whistle-blower and arbitrator—all rolled into one.

'Be the change you wish to see in the world,' is what Mahatma Gandhi said. Here is a man who follows this adage on a daily basis. Working out of a 150 square feet office cum residence, Traffic K R Ramaswamy is a die-hard fighter seeking social justice. A former mill worker in his late seventies, Ramaswamy is a founder member of the State's Home Guard and a self-appointed traffic policeman and social activist from Chennai.

Early days and humble beginnings

As the eldest son of his household, Ramaswamy's childhood was like any other. He graduated from Pachaiyappa's College, and began his career in 1952 as the Personal Secretary for Minister K Venkatasamynaidu. He then joined as an office boy in B&C Mills and moved on to becoming a clerk. Alongside, he did a course at AMIE and was appointed as Assistant Weaving Master in the B&C Mills.

The evolution of "Traffic" Ramaswamy

After 20 years of service in B&C Mills, Ramaswamy opted for voluntary retirement and took up an initiative to control the city's chaotic traffic. The local police were so pleased with his efforts that they provided him with an official identity card. That is how he acquired the nickname "Traffic Ramaswamy." Later, he became famous for filing many public interest lawsuits. He tasted victory for the first time in 2000 when he won a case against the Tamil Nadu Government resulting in cancellation of one-ways in the Madras High Court roads.



“When lawyers were on strike blocking traffic for more than 35 days, he filed a PIL against the same and as a result of that, there is a case against 10 lawyers pending at present.”

Over the years, Ramaswamy has fought political parties, bureaucrats, the top echelons of the police and who's who of the state who have a finger in the pie of corruption. Ramaswamy single-handedly brought many public interest lawsuits in the Madras High Court. In one recent case, his opponents' lawyers attacked him on the steps of the courthouse. This was not the first time though. In 2002, he was assaulted after he obtained a ban on the use of motorized fish carts, thereby damaging his sight.

The PIL Hero

If T. Nagar's Usman Road and Ranganathan Street are a shopper's paradise, it is due to Ramaswamy's Public Interest Litigations (PIL) that pulled down high rise buildings, removed the hawkers and regulated unauthorized constructions.

It is because of his efforts that the Ponur Lake is a pleasant sight—Ramaswamy's PIL led to the removal of encroached huts and colonies. Along similar lines, he ensured that the Cooum River stretch at Maduravoyal was back to its full breadth. In 2004, when advocates were boycotting courts in Tamil Nadu, his PIL in the Supreme Court upheld his contention and 160 advocates

were arrested. When lawyers were on strike blocking traffic for more than 35 days, he filed a PIL against the same, and as a result there is a case against 10 lawyers pending in the court. His PIL against malpractices ensured a re-election in 100 booths in the Chennai Corporation, and hiked the auto fares from Rs 7 to Rs 14. He also stalled the production of 'Periyar,' a film financed by the Government.

With another PIL, he sought to restrain highway authorities from collecting road toll on the Chennai-Calcutta highway. He pointed out that the four-lane highway was not constructed by L&T and said that toilets, rooms, pedestrian underpass, service roads, and by lanes had not been completed before the toll collection had started. The toll gate near Karanodai did not have a canopy and lacked light, he said, adding that there were no uniform fee collections as well.

Fighting for prevention

Soon as the news of a possible swine-flu epidemic broke out, Ramaswamy filed a petition in

the Madras High Court saying that all people of Tamil Nadu should be given masks to protect them. As expected, the court partly ruled in his favour. The final judgment was that if people asked for free masks, the Government would provide them free of cost through all Government and Corporation Hospitals.

Terrific Traffic Ramaswamy

In 2007, Ramaswamy's PIL enforced the Motor Vehicles Act section 129, and made the wearing of helmets compulsory throughout the country. He brought out the dormant rule to the light that motor vehicle companies should include a helmet along with the purchase of the two-wheeler itself. This gave way to a Government order that directed RTOs across India to register a vehicle with a helmet. He says that he will one day sue the common man for not wearing a helmet, as he considers the common man's life to be extremely precious. The urge within him to achieve the truth and goodwill for people drives him to continuously fight for what is right. He is concerned about the society at large, irrespective of caste, creed, or religion. According to him patience and confidence are the mantras for his astounding success.

Traffic K R Ramaswamy can be reached at 044-25381801 and his email address is trafficramaswamy@gmail.com. —S. Deenadayalan

Terrific Ramaswamy!



A Walk Down Potter's Lane

When you take a sudden left on a bustling road in Arcot block in Vellore, you find yourself in a narrow lane with a row of identical houses, each with a thatched roof and old fashioned verandah. Arranged in neat rows outside every home are beautiful clay pots and figures gently basking in the sun. You are in Potter's lane. The potters of Tamil Nadu are known as kuyavar or velar, and it is said that they can trace their origin to Vishwakarma, the divine craftsman. "Pottery is mostly a hereditary skill passed down from generation to generation," says A.K Arumugam, a retired employee of EID Parry, now working full time as a potter.

Tamil Nadu has a rich tradition and distinctive style of pottery. Almost every Tamil village has an

wheel or a machine, but it allows the potter more control over the shaping process," she adds. The pots are then dried in the sun and then put in a furnace before being made ready for sale.

Venkatraman sits on his verandah and works the mechanized wheel every day. "This wheel is good for making small pots, vases and lamps.

Everything will come out uniformly and neatly," he demonstrates adding that he learnt his basics with a hand wheel when he was a child. The mechanized potter's wheel has made life easier for the potters: though it requires electricity, the work takes less time and effort. But only small items can be made with the machine, large items still need to be made by hand. The mechanized wheel has an electric motor and works on electric power. The

wheel rotates rapidly while the artist uses both hands to press and mould the soft clay into the desired shape. "I can make 20 lamps from one mould and in one day can complete 200 such lamps," says Venkatraman. The mechanized wheel is widely used to make small articles such as intricately-detailed figurines.

Arumugam works with the traditional potter's wheel. "This wheel may be slower but it is very precise and can make wares of any required size," he says. He places a handful of clay on the centre of the wheel, which is called the wheel-head, and then turns or rotates the wheel with his other hand. A shape is immediately formed and he expertly contours it to create a perfectly shaped cooking pot. "After we dry the pots in the sun, we build a

furnace and fire them. Without firing, the article cannot be called pottery," he adds. Earlier the demand for earthenware pots was higher since people cooled water in them during the summer. "But sales have reduced because people have refrigerators now," says Arumugam. The carefully crafted pots are sold for anything from Rs 10 to Rs 200 and come in all shapes and sizes. Using a traditional potter's wheel is very demanding on the potter in terms of skill, agrees Arumugam. "But an accomplished potter can make close to 20 identical articles everyday."

Sustaining this traditional form of livelihood has been difficult for this community of potters. "We get no help from the government and the Potters' Sangam (or Association of Potters) doesn't do much to help us," says Arumugam. Though they enjoy good sales during Pongal in January, it is not enough to sustain their dwindling market. "Now we even have problems getting raw material," says Venkatraman, "The tashildar of the area is now refusing to allow us to take the mud we need. Only if water and mud are available is work possible for us."

Almost every village in India has potters who churn out the most useful articles for a household ranging from utensils to flowerpots to cooking pots and stoves. They sit outside their homes, spinning their wheels, creating bowls, mugs, plates, ums, flowerpots, foot-scrubbers, small pots and myriad other articles considered essential by an Indian household. With the changing trends and dwindling demand for their traditional wares, today nearly two million potters in rural India are struggling for survival. If this ancient craft is to survive, the artisans need to be taught how to promote themselves in order to tap into both local and foreign markets.

—Aishwarya Shankar
Asian College of Journalism



idol of Ayyanar, the guardian deity who protects the village against evil, at its entrance. Ayyanar is seated on an enormous terracotta horse, which is handmade, from clay.

A potter's most basic tools are his hands. But many additional tools like the potter's wheel and turntable are used today. Forty-year-old Gnanamma makes pots by hand. "I sell them cheap because they are crude when compared to the ones made with a wheel," she reveals. "They lack perfection but the double stoves and animal feed troughs I make sell well." Using one's hands to shape the clay is one of the earliest methods of pottery. "The clay is prepared in the same way as for the potter's wheel," shares Gnyanamma. "The mud is dried and the rocks are separated from the clay. The fine clay is used to make the pots." In this case, the hand is used to join together a runny mixture of clay and water to form the required shape. "Moulding by hand is slower than using a



“*This wheel is good for making small pots, vases and lamps. Everything will come out uniformly and neatly*”





Innaci with the visually impaired children

“Disability is not in the person with a handicap; it is in you if you cannot understand the needs of the disabled.”
—Lalitha, a caregiver at Sri Arunodayam.

Tender Loving Care 24x7

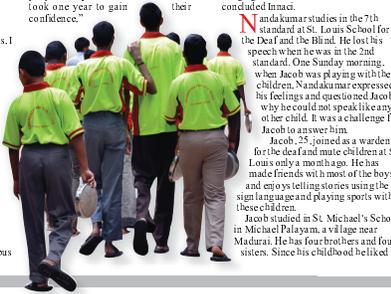
from his family. “My father, a retired bus driver, wanted to become a priest but due to family reasons had to leave the seminary after two years. He took a resolution to send one of his children to the seminary. Now he is happy that two of his sons are priests,” said Innaci.

Innaci joined the Montford seminary at the age of 18 and has worked for several churches in India. Apart of his training for priesthood, he worked in Trichy, Hyderabad, and Bihar and served for three years in St. Joseph’s School at Chengalpattu managing the primary school. He served as the personal secretary for the Provincial at Trichy and was offered the opportunity to work in France and Madagascar as a missionary. “I did not want to go as I wanted to remain in India and help the children here. When working with the Missionaries of Charity in Kolkata, helping the children and leprosy patients, I had a vision to help visually challenged children. I chose to work in St. Louis School for the Deaf and the Blind and pursued special training to teach the blind,” said Innaci.

When Innaci joined dates at St. Louis School in 2004, his first initiative was to remove the stick that was given to the visually impaired children. Innaci said, “Holding a stick makes a child feel inferior. I held the hand of each boy and took him around the campus with the help of senior students. I struggled for the first three months to train them as they were new to the place. I taught them to wash their clothes, shower and use the toilet without anybody’s help. Now they are independent and move around the campus

like any one of us.” St. Louis School follows the matriculation syllabus and the government arranges scribers for the 10th and 12th standard students. Besides education, children are provided mobility training and are taken on an education tour every year. They are encouraged to participate in sports and few children have formed an orchestra that performs in and around Chennai.

Most of the children studying in the school have their optical nerve affected and therefore eye donation would not help in restoring their sight. “All they need is care and affection. The children live in an imaginary world and are very sensitive to touch and smell. They can recognize people easily from their voices. I took one year to gain their confidence.”



Currently there are 150 boys studying in standard 6th to 12th, of these 90 students stay in the hostel. Only 60 boys have parents visiting them during weekends and the rest are neglected or orphaned. Parents who visit their children are requested to bring extra food packed for other children as well. About 35 volunteers visit the children during weekends and play with them, and there are 15 volunteers who come to school every day to help the children in their studies. “I am available 24x7 for the children. They are allowed to come to my office anytime. I am willing to continue serving in this school for my entire lifetime if my congregation allows me to do so,” concluded Innaci.

Nandakumar studies in the 7th standard at St. Louis School for the Deaf and the Blind. He lost his speech when he was in the 2nd standard. One Sunday morning, when Jacob was playing with the children, Nandakumar expressed his feelings and questioned Jacob why he could not speak like any other child. It was a challenge for Jacob to answer him.

Jacob, 25, joined as a warden for the deaf and mute children at St. Louis only a month ago. He has made friends with most of the boys and enjoys telling stories using the sign language and playing sports with these children.

Jacob studied in St. Michael’s School in Michael Palayam, a village near Madurai. He has four brothers and four sisters. Since his childhood he liked

helping children and wanted to do something for them when he grew up. When he told his parents that he wanted to become a priest and serve the needy, they advised him not to step back from his decision. “When I was in the 6th standard, I wanted to pursue my higher studies and become a priest. My father, a farmer, said that if I scored a minimum of 400 marks in my Class X examination, I would be allowed to study further. But, I scored only 396 marks and therefore was sent to work because my father was very strict in his words and actions. I joined the seminary when I was 14,” said Jacob.

After working as a bus driver in the Trichy Diocese, in May 2010 Jacob joined St. Louis School for the Blind and the Deaf. He is a graduate in literature and is now pursuing Masters in Theological Studies.

“I made a preliminary visit to St. Louis School in February to understand my duties. When I saw the deaf and mute children, I cried. I realized that they have greater potential than me and decided to render my service for these children. I stayed with them for a month and learnt their sign language,” said Jacob.

After they completed their fourth standard at Little Flower Convent, children are admitted to St. Louis and are provided education upto 12th standard. There are 110 children who stay in the hostel. Eight of them are orphans and two have been abandoned by their parents. “I tell these children to ask me whatever they want to. I treat them like my own brothers,” said Jacob. Children enjoy playing football. They watch television news and movies.



Nadia and Gomathy with the inmates at Visbarati

Nadia, 21, works as a staff nurse in Visbarati, an old-age home in Chennai. She wanted to become a nurse when she was 12 and do service like Mother Teresa. “My family could not afford to support my education. Therefore, I joined Sri Ramakrishna Mission where I did my first nurse training. After working in a private hospital for a year, I joined Visbarati in 2009,” said Nadia. Nadia’s parents visit her at Visbarati during weekends and she visits her family once in three months.

“I have decided to work here till I get married. If allowed, I will continue to work here even after I get married. I take care of four geriatric in the infirmary section. Besides giving them medicines, I also feed and bathe them. One granny, Rajamma, expired two months ago. She was 100 years old and was very affectionate towards me. Even now, when I go to her bed, I stop for a moment to pray for her. She was very kind and jovial and I miss her very much,” said Nadia.

Like Nadia, Gomathy, 20, also underwent nurse training at Sri Ramakrishna Mission. She lost her grandmother when she was studying in the tenth standard. “I was heart broken when I lost her. I was so sad that I lost my appetite for a long time and I panicked. It was then that I decided to become a nurse and help people like my grandmother recover,” said Gomathy.

After completing the 12th standard, Gomathy told her father that she wanted to become a nurse. But as the family could not finance her

education, she remained at home for a year. Kana gramma from Ramakrishna Mission had visited her village and encouraged her to enroll in nurse training.

After completing the training she worked in Karaman hospital at Retteri for a year. Kana gramma then offered her a job at Visbarati. He had told her that if she was given the opportunity to work in Visbarati, he would have gladly accepted it. This motivated Gomathy to accept the job offer.

Gomathy’s brother and sister speak with her over phone often and her father visits her regularly. When she visited Ramakrishna Mission recently, her friend mentioned about a job opening at a leading hospital in the city. “I had heard that I was interested and asked her to tell Visbarati and spend time with me here. In the beginning I did not like to work in Visbarati. Now, even if you ask me to leave, I shall not go. I love the Rajamma paai (family grandmother) who passed away very recently. When angry, she used to shout at me but I never used to get upset. Some grannies refuse to eat the food that is served. I convince them that it is good for their health and feed them,” said Gomathy.

Nadia and Gomathy were trained in geriatrics after they joined Visbarati. They reside in the same premises and visit their homes every three months. “These young girls are like my own granddaughters. They know when I am hungry and are very kind towards me,” said 80-year-old Subodhana, a resident at Visbarati.



Jacob

Sports competition and matches are organized between schools and Jacob plans to start a basketball team so that the children can also participate at state-level competitions. Volunteers coach the students during holidays and sponsors extend supporting to organize events.

“I had visited my family five months ago. Before that I visited them about three and a half years ago. Spending time with my parents and siblings does not help me in any way. I was with them for 14 years and that is more than enough. Even when my brothers, four of them who are in Chennai want to visit me, I tell them that I do not have the time. Although I have been assigned this role for only three years, I am willing to serve as a warden for these children throughout my lifetime,” said Jacob.

Disability is not in the person, it is in our minds—if we cannot recognize the disabled person’s needs,” concluded Lalitha.

Lalitha, 22, joined Sri Arunodayam as a caregiver a few days after Lalitha did. She belongs to Thiruvannamalai village and has completed her 12th standard. Her uncle who was working as a watchman near Sri Arunodayam had told her about the job opening. “I always loved children and wanted to work in a place where there were children. When I visited Sri Arunodayam, I immediately agreed to work here,” said Valli.

Besides teaching children, Valli enjoys playing with the children and taking them to the nearby park.

Valli’s decision to work in Sri Arunodayam was not impulsive. She lost her sister and brother-in-law in an accident and her stepbrother was orphaned when he was one. Valli and her mother took care of him for over a year, after which her brother-in-law’s brother took the child away. “This incident affected me a lot and since the reason for me to accept the caregiver position in Sri Arunodayam. Parents should not disown their children. Whenever a child dies, I feel that he is thinking about his mother or father who has disowned him. Hardly he was with his parent, he would have been much happier. It gives immense satisfaction working for these children and I will continue to work here till the end of my life,” said Valli.

—Marie Banu



Lalitha and Valli with the children at Sri Arunodayam

Inspiring Conversations

“Are there two ‘I’s in the same person? Ask yourself these questions”

Eleanor Roosevelt said “Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people”. We need more conversations, the inspiring and thought-provoking kind. Here is an interesting conversation about “Who am I” between Ramana Maharishi and his disciples.

Some men asked the Master questions which ultimately resolved themselves into one, that ‘I’ is not perceptible however much they might struggle.

The Master’s reply was in the usual strain: Who is it that says that ‘I’ is not perceptible? Is there an ‘I’ ignorant, and an ‘I’ elusive? Are there two ‘I’s in the same person? Ask yourself these questions. It is the mind which says that ‘I’ is not perceptible. Where is that mind from? Know the mind. You will find it a myth. King Janaka said, “I have discovered the thief who had been ruining me so long. I will now deal with him summarily. Then I shall be happy.” Similarly it will be with others.

Disciple.: How to know the ‘I’?

Maharishi.: The ‘I-I’ is always there. There is no knowing it. It is not a new knowledge acquired. What is new and not here and now will be evanes-

cent only. The ‘I’ is always there. There is obstruction to its knowledge and it is called ignorance. Remove the ignorance and knowledge shines forth. In fact this ignorance or even knowledge is not for Atman. They are only overgrowths to be cleared off. That is why Atman is said to be beyond knowledge and ignorance. It remains as it naturally is - that is all.

D.: There is no perceptible progress in spite of our attempts.

M.: Progress can be spoken of in things to be obtained a fresh. Whereas here it is the removal of ignorance and not acquisition of knowledge. What kind of progress can be expected in the quest for the Self?

D.: How to remove the ignorance?

M.: While lying in bed in Tiruvannamalai you dream in your sleep that you find yourself in another town. The scene is real to you. Your body remains here on your bed in a room. Can a town

enter your room, or could you have left this place and gone elsewhere, leaving the body here? Both are impossible. Therefore your being here and seeing another town are both unreal. They appear real to the mind. The ‘I’ of the dream soon vanishes, then another ‘I’ speaks of the dream. This ‘I’ was not in the dream. Both the ‘I’s are unreal. There is the substratum of the mind which continues all along, giving rise to so many scenes. An ‘I’ rises forth with every thought and with its disappearance that ‘I’ disappears too. Many ‘I’s are born and die every moment. The subsisting mind is the real trouble. That is the thief according to Janaka. Find him out and you will be happy.

Arjuna’s conversation with Lord Krishna about Karma or Action

Arjuna said, “If it be thought by Thee that knowledge is superior to action, why then O Krishna, does Thou engage me in this terrible action? Thou confusest my understanding. Tell me that one way for certain by which I may attain eternal bliss.”

Lord Krishna replies, “In this world there is a

twofold path, the path of knowledge of the Sankhyas and the path of action of the Yogins. Man cannot remain even for a moment without performing some kind of action. Everyone is helplessly driven to action by the qualities born of nature. That fool, who merely controls the organs of action but continually thinks of the objects of senses is called a Mithyachara or hypocrite.”

“Constantly perform your duty without attachment. You will attain the Supreme. Janaka attained perfection by action. The great man should set an example to the world. I perform action though there is nothing in the three worlds that should be done by Me”

“The egoistic man thinks I am the doer. In reality Prakriti (nature) does everything. A Jnani who remains as a silent witness and who knows the essence of the division of the quality and functions is not bound.”

“Control Raga-dvesha - obstructors of the spiritual path. Do your own duty well. Control desire and anger - the enemies of wisdom. Master first the senses. Kill this enemy-desire by restraining the self by the Self and by knowing Him who is superior to intellect.”



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Conscious Corporate

Sujatha entered Kamarajar Arangam with her application to register for employment at a Job Fair organized by Need Trust, in conjunction with the Tamil Nadu Handicapped Federation Trust. The job fair was open exclusively for physically challenged and was inaugurated by Kanimozhi, MP in August 2009. Sujatha waited in the queue amidst eight thousand applicants—all of them physically challenged. After four hours, she reached the registration desk. “What type of job are you looking for?” asked the coordinator. “Any job that would treat me with respect and pay me enough money to take care of myself,” replied Sujatha.

Need trust is a CSR initiative of Sinar Jernih India Pvt Ltd, a corporate house in Chennai. “We thought that we would have less than hundred applicants registering at the job fair. I was overwhelmed with the response and there were over 14 corporate houses who participated in the event,” said Shekar, the founder of Need trust and the Executive Director of Sinar Jernih.

“There was a lady who was deprived of her lower limbs. She was a management graduate in human resources and was arguing that she was fit enough to work at least as a receptionist even if she could not be employed in the human resource department. Such overwhelming experiences were unforgettable for me in my life,” added Shekar.



Shekar

Sujatha, a post graduate in zoology had applied for a lecturer position in many colleges since 1998. She was always rejected for a job due to her disability and faced a lot of humiliation whenever she was interviewed. Within two months of registering in the job fair, she received a call requesting her to join duties as Business Administrator for Ablejob Visionary Services, a wing of Need trust that provides employment opportunities for the differently abled persons. Ablejob has developed their own job portal and has 1980 applications registered so far. This portal will be launched very soon for use of all employers. All the staff in Ablejob are physically challenged and hence are able to understand the needs of the job requirements of similar aspirants.

A corporate house with a difference, Sinar Jernih has effective CSR policies. “More than 65 percent of our staff is either poor or uneducated or unqualified. This inspired me to provide them with employment opportunities, even if they had studied only up to the sixth standard. Besides giving them employment, we wanted to educate them and so set up a specialized training centre—Sinar Academy for Service Excellence,” said Shekar.

Sinar Academy for Service Excellence networks with several NGOs to source candidates and develop their skills in telephone operation, data entry, food and beverages and housekeeping. The trained persons are offered a diploma certificate which qualifies them for employment. “Some people drop out from the training as they want to earn money from day one. This is a big challenge. So we offer them a part time job to earn and at the same time learn the skills related to the job. They are permitted to pay the fees only after they start earning full time. So far 200 persons have been trained and most of them have been placed in corporate houses. They are now earning a minimum of Rs. 3,500 a month,” said Shekar.

Shekar founded Need Trust to bridge the gap between donors and NGOs and to coordinate the CSR activities of Sinar

“*There is no purpose in doing service just for orphans or for any particular cause. We realized that each one of these activities required support*”

Jernih. He realized that while NGOs had the technical skills to render service, corporate houses had the funds to support social causes. “The biggest inspiration for me to gain this vision was Dr. V.Shanta of Cancer Institute who said: ‘There are so many needs in the world. But every need cannot have just a good heart, it needs good money. While people like us are busy serving, there should be people like you from the corporate to help us.’ We learnt how cancer can be prevented and cured, if identified at an early stage and we organized campaigns sensitizing people on how to identify common cancers,” said Shekar.

Shekar visited several NGOs and charities to understand their needs and help them raise funds. “There was no purpose in



Applicants at the job fair in 2009

doing service just for any single cause. We realized that each noble cause and service required support. We got like-minded people together and helped NGOs by organizing fundraising events. Within a period of one year, we were able to support several causes. We also strongly believed that money raised should be used by the right beneficiary to its fullest value and so we formed Need Trust,” said Shekar. In true support of this, Shekar also launched the “Reach Out” fund raising program benefiting one NGO per month with free of cost events.

The key vision and mission of Need trust is to assist unsupported people to be self dependent. The trust’s primary objective is education, empowerment, employment, and advocacy. Recently, the trust has adopted a SHG which coordinates 300 women groups consisting of 6,000 members in Chennai. Four staff have been appointed full time to coordinate the group activities and are provided office space in Sinar Jernih premise. “We now have a comfortable working environment. Earlier, we had to close down our office many a times as we did not have cooperation from group members to pay the rent,” said Jeba, Executive SHG.

Rolina Mary, Vishnu Gandhi and Stella Mary are SHG officers who visit the groups periodically and monitor their books of accounts. Besides this, the team also organizes training programs for the self-help group members in tailoring, car driving, beautician, fashion designing, etc. The training is offered free of cost and a stipend is offered during the training period.

The core objective of the SHG is savings.

Each member saves a minimum of Rs. 30 per week and some even save up to Rs. 200 a week. A separate bank account is opened for the group where the savings are remitted. Need Trust facilitates opening of the bank account and enables loans to those who are prompt in repayment. Depending on the savings that the group has remitted, the bank offers a loan amount of Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 1 lakh to the group. A nominal interest of two percent is charged towards the loan and the repayment period varies from 12 to 15 months.

“Savings help us evade the money lenders who charge more than 10 percent interest. Earlier, it was only those who were below the poverty line who were members in a Self Help Group. Now, even the spouse of a Bank Manager is a member in a self help group,” said Jeba.

Dr. Deepak, a counseling psychiatrist heads the CSR programmes of Sinar Jernih. He acted in a movie ‘Maa’ that was a pioneering effort by Mr. Madan Gabriel of the film institute, and was actively promoted by Need Trust. Dr. Deepak is also a disability rights activist and is presently in Delhi lobbying with the government to include more disabled people in the forum that works on the Disability Act. Shekar firmly believes that there is no disability in all these people who work with him as able people tend to display more disability. With Dr. Deepak’s leadership, he is confident that the vision of Need Trust will be executed in the most benefiting manner.

For more information about Need Trust, contact Shekar at: 044 43054836/7/8/9 or write to needtrust@ymail.com.

—Marie Banu



The Red Revolution

When you first meet Priya, she seems like any other eight-year-old child: she's full of chatter and spunk. She dreams of becoming the fastest sprinter in the world. What stands in between Priya and her dream is her failing health. She is thalassemic and needs blood transfusions twice a month. After undergoing repeated transfusions at a private hospital in Chennai, Priya has become immune to needle pricks. The agony of this ordeal is clearly visible in her father's eyes who fears that there may come a time when blood may not be available for his daughter's treatment. "I'm not sure I will be able to get blood for her on a consistent basis," he says.

The real red crux

India needs between 9 and 10 million units of blood every year but falls short drastically—only 7 million units of blood are collected annually. With concerted efforts across various sections of society -- colleges, corporate houses, social clubs and youth groups -- there is every possibility that blood shortage might soon be a thing of the past.

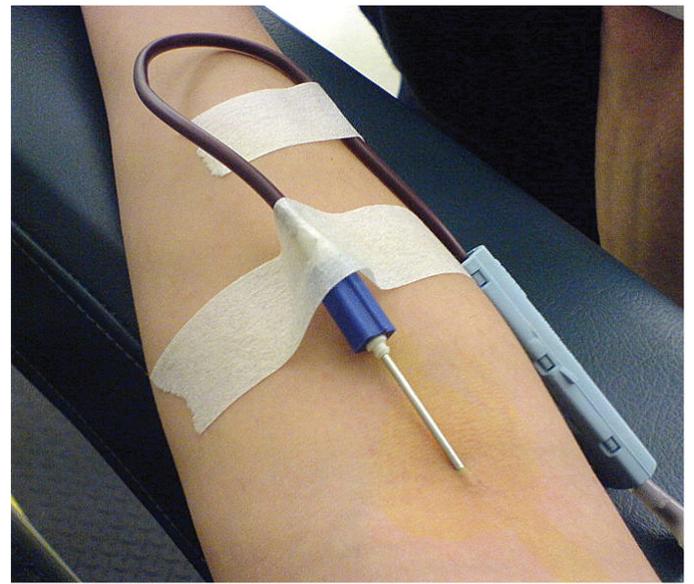
Tamil Nadu has been a pioneer, leading the red revolution by example. The state has the highest number of volunteers who are willing to donate blood and is setting standards for other states to follow. This achievement has been possible due to the efforts of several voluntary organizations, educational institutions, corporate houses and hospitals which motivate people to donate blood.

Being the capital city, Chennai boasts of mobile blood banks in public places like beaches to collect blood from donors.

In spite of the good news, Chennai still faces a blood drought in summer when all educational institutions are closed for vacations. It is learnt that 85% of all donors are from educational institutions. This means that there is a heavy dependence on the student community to donate blood. During summer holidays, when the stock of blood depletes, it becomes difficult for blood banks to replenish. The situation gets further complicated as there is a high demand for blood at this time of the year - the number of elective surgeries is high during the months of April and May, as patients prefer to get operated without disrupting their children's school schedule. Thus, hospital authorities shift their focus to corporate and youth groups during these months to help in maintaining the required stock of blood.

Collaborate, cooperate and continue

Blood donation is a community-based movement; one section of the society alone, like students, cannot match the demand for blood. While it is important that everybody contributes and shoulders the responsibility, consistency and continuity hold the key. "There's no point



in donating blood once in a lifetime," says a doctor who has donated blood 109 times. "What India badly needs is not blood donors but repeat blood donors. All of us owe something to the society, to our fellow human beings. And it's time to pay back not in cash, but in blood."

What is it that stops many individuals from donating blood? What prevents healthy citizens from being regular donors and what can be done to make blood donation a community based initiative?

Lack of awareness and various myths hinder this noble cause. "I am scared to donate blood" and "I will fall sick if I

donate" were common responses cited by people who had never donated blood before. Insufficient knowledge about blood donation seems to be holding many people back from being donors. Studies show that a single donation can save three lives. The blood can be given as it is or it can be separated into its three components: red blood cells, plasma and platelets. This can help multiple patients. If every healthy adult in India is made aware that he or she can contribute to the well-being of three people by one act of kindness, the blood drought can end.

—Latha Suresh

Myth Buster!

Myth: Giving blood hurts.

Fact: The pain experienced is no more than a needle prick. The slight soreness where the needle was poked is just a reminder of the good deed done.

Myth: HIV or other infections can be contracted from donating blood.

Fact: A clear procedure exists for taking blood from each donor. Sterility is maintained at all steps. A sterile, new needle is used for each donation which is properly discarded. Use of sterile equipment and technique limits the chance of infection.

Myth: Giving blood is time consuming

Fact: The time taken for a single donation session is normally not more than an hour.

Myth: There is limited blood in the body and it is unhealthy to give some away.

Fact: Only about 470ml of blood is taken during a donation session. There is enough blood in the body to donate without experiencing any ill effects.

Myth: Age is a deterrent to blood donation.

Fact: Anyone between 17 and 60 who is healthy can give blood.

Myth: Heavy people are healthier and have more blood to give.

Fact: Being overweight makes people less healthy. Overweight people do not have more blood than a normal person.

Myth: Health deteriorates after donating blood.

Fact: If you are healthy prior to donation, your recovery is complete in a day or two. Drinking enough liquids replaces the lost blood within a couple of hours. The body produces new cells faster after a donation. All the RBCs are replaced within 3-4 days and WBCs within 3 weeks.

Myth: Taking medication means that one cannot be a blood donor.

Fact: Depending on the medication being taken, it may halt donation for a period, though in many cases it won't prevent a donation. The person in charge or the nursing staff should be informed before donating.

Source: www.timeswellness.com

To know more, visit the following websites

www.indianblooddonors.com, www.bloodgivers.com, www.jeevan.org, www.blooddonations.org, www.aabb.org, www.redcross.org.

GIVING – as a receiving process of ‘Growing’

A Series on *Growing-Reflections for Deep Change*

In the last ‘Growing’ series we explored the power of Ego. This time, we are going to explore one of the important dimensions that trigger this Ego. That is ‘Giving’.

Social entrepreneurship has most of the times been correlated at the essence level with a sense of ‘Giving’. This ability to give and the need to give pushes people out of the box and makes them move in order to reach out to the larger world. But, ‘Giving’ develops a dangerous feeling of superiority. It slowly makes an inroad into a person’s psyche that fosters a belief that the “Giver is superior to the receiver”. This leaves behind an expectation that the receiver should acknowledge this unsaid positional hierarchy.

What is ‘Giving’ in reality?

When a sanyasi reached the outskirts of a village and settled under a tree for the night, a villager came running up to him and said, “The stone! The stone! Give me the precious stone!”

“What stone?” asked the sanyasi.

“Last night Lord Shiva told me in a dream that if I went to the outskirts of the village at dusk a sanyasi would give me a stone that would make me rich forever.”

The sanyasi searched his sack, and pulling out a stone, said, “He probably meant this one, I found it in the forest yesterday. Here, it’s yours if you want it.” The man gazed at the stone in wonder. It was the largest diamond in

the world. All night he tossed about in bed. At daybreak he woke the sanyasi and said, “Give me the heart that makes it possible for you to give this stone away.” (Sampath. J.M. story 31 Discovery – 3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998)

Giving is a state of being which comes naturally without any expectations attached to it. The

characteristics of ‘Giving’ includes:

- A deep sense of humility within.
- Thankfulness or gratitude for the people who create an opportunity to give.
- It is nothing more than sharing and this has an orientation to bring balance in the eco system.
- It is a complimentary process of reaching out with what one has, to another who requires it.

■ ‘Unconditional’ or ‘No expectations’ would be easy to use words; but very difficult to ‘live’. Because, when there is an ‘expectation’ for ‘unconditionality’, it robs the essence of unconditionality itself.

Therefore, a relationship of “giving-receiving” between the social entrepreneur and the community, is a mutual process. Unless community exists, there is no opportunity to reach out and unless they allow and value the ‘reaching out’ one cannot experience the ‘value of contribution’.

Many a time a giver also gets into the obsession of reaching, failing to understand the context and what is required to be given.

Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day.

Teach him how to fish, and you feed him for a life time..... (An Ancient Chinese Proverb)

In giving can there be empowerment? This is critical in developing the community. If giving makes the person dependent on the giver, it ceases to be a value adding process. When Giving is approached in the way described above, there is a higher possibility for growth and evolution for the individuals and society at large.

Points for Reflection:

- ◆ What in me makes me want to ‘give’?
- ◆ How much do I care to understand others before deciding to ‘give’?
- ◆ What is the nature of ‘Unconditional Giving’?
- ◆ How do I distinguish what they want vs what I think they want?
- ◆ What dimensions of my giving leaves the receiver empowered?
- ◆ How do I show my gratitude to the receiver for giving me an opportunity to give?

—J.M.Sampath & Kalpana Sampath



“*Unless community exists, there is no opportunity to reach out and unless they allow and value the ‘reaching out’ one cannot experience the ‘value of contribution’*”

Innovation in Social Enterprises



Innovations is not invention, but it is doing things in a different way so as to derive advantages in cost reduction, getting ‘more’ for ‘less’ resources input, be it monetary resources, human resources, material resources or others.

Innovation comes out of individual and or collective teamwork by the people involved. Teamwork, task forces, brainstorming, creativity are amply required in building a method, process or strategy to become innovative.

No idea is small or insignificant; the correct fit emerges when the context welcomes, embraces, and provides opportunities for

implementation.

The skills to ideate, implement new ideas either individually or collectively come from the bottom up, individual up, task up. It also becomes stronger and smarter as people get trained and developed to effectively use such inputs appropriately in a timely manner.

The organisation, which has ‘innovation’ in a leadership position, can easily be identified as best performer of excellence and it becomes their lifestyle. They cannot work in any other different way.

You see a bright light of interdependency in their lives, socially, professionally and in the community. People throng to

learn, customize and practice innovation.

The attitude of innovation and gratitude is in a pair, inseparable, strong and motivating in one’s life and team’s life. Innovation is a powerful glue that binds people together because of the thrill and joy it provides to one and all.

Innovation as a practice is challenging the social entrepreneur all the time to come up with better of the best. It stimulates the mind, intellect, reasoning, technology, and heart to get at an integrated ‘mind-body-soul’ solution which becomes increasingly acceptable, livable and enjoyable.

—PN Devarajan

Editorial

**Latha Suresh
Marie Banu
Medha Rao
Radha Jagan**

Reform in Uniform

R. Nataraj, Director General of Police, has used his position in several police departments to bring about innovative schemes and attitudinal changes in the police force. Currently, as Director of Fire Services, the IPS officer has utilized the fire brigade to render social service. He is also famous for having nabbed the Veerappan gang. In an exclusive interview with Marie Banu, Nataraj shares his experiences and challenges in his career.

R. Nataraj IPS shares with Marie Banu his experiences and challenges in his career



What inspired you to become a police officer?

India faced wars in 1962, 1965, and 1971. These ten years were very difficult for the country and there were a lot of expectations from the army. The uniform became a big attraction for the youngsters and a lot of stories were being published about heroic army men. I had a fascination for the uniform and joined the Auxiliary Cadet Code during my school days and later joined the NCC while at college. After graduation, I cleared the Civil Service examination and was selected for the Indian Police Service.

I am the first-generation police officer in my family. Most of my relatives are employed in government services, mostly in the teaching. My father being a government servant himself advised me to join duties as a police officer.

If not the police, which profession would you have chosen?

Being a graduate in physics, I would have joined Baba Atomic Research Centre when they were recruiting technical officers.

I also like to teach. Even now I address college students on public administration and human rights. Teaching gives you a compulsory opportunity to read and update your knowledge. It is only when you start teaching, you will come to know that you need to understand and reflect on the subject.

You have introduced innovative policies in the fire services as well as in the prisons. Where do you derive the inspiration from?

I truly believe that being a public servant, service should be the focus. The general attitude of a government servant is to continue with the existing arrangement as there is a comfort of job security. You should keep reinventing yourself. I believe in zero budgeting—to start from scratch. I do not criticize what has gone wrong but consolidate and bring in my own ideas to do something new. This is what I did in whichever position I was, and it has been profusely satisfying.

What was the reaction of the inmates when the bakery unit was launched at Puzhal prison? Who consumes these products?

Initially, they thought that working in a bakery was one of the other tasks that they need to do as part of their imprisonment. I explained to them the multiple benefits of this scheme and that, if they were skilled, they could seek immediate employment when released from prison.

In Tihar Jail, the products made by the inmates from consumables to the furniture were branded as 'Tihar Haat'. The chairs that were made by Tihar inmates were used by Supreme Court judges. Likewise, the products that were made in Puzhal prison were branded as 'Freedom'.

The bakery unit started as a charity along with Give life Foundation, an NGO. The bread is donated to 'The Banyan', a home for mentally challenged destitute women, and the buns and pastries

are fed to poor children. We had initially trained 20 inmates and later provided training to more persons.

What has been the impact of the 'Friends of the Police' movement?

'Friends of Police' is a very old concept which was started by the British in 1936 as a Village Vigilance Committee. The village elders were committee members and they used to conduct meetings once in a month. They also organized police-public sports functions.

'Friends of Police' is another form of cooperation between the public and police. If the Sub-Inspector of Police maintains a good relationship with the community, he will have their support when there is a problem. Enforcement of law against bootleggers is a challenge as the police are subject to pressures from politicians and succumb to corruption. In such cases, neighborhood policing is effective.

Was it easy to work with the tribals to nab the Veerappan gang in 2001? How did you gain their confidence?

I learnt that the tribals were angry with the Special Task Force personnel because they disturbed their daily routine. People found the police and the Veerappan gang a nuisance. I directed the STF officers to go to the villages and understand the problems that the tribals faced, and advised them not to ask for any information about Veerappan. Health and education were identified to be the key areas that needed support. The STF personnel were asked to teach the children, and health camps were organized.

These initiatives created a lot of enthusiasm amongst the tribals. Hospitals like CMC Vellore and Apollo extended their services to the tribal areas. The police personnel had an attitudinal change after working with the tribals. In a week's time, the tribals voluntarily started to give us information about Veerappan. We sanitized the entire area from naxalites, and the tribals were exempted from paying a price for the forest produce they collected. This proactive role had a good impact. All those who criticized the role of STF became our supporters.

Our city is filled with crimes. What are the most important issues in our society today that a citizen should be conscious of?

One should have security consciousness and this is lacking in our society today. If you see an adult walking on the road, you will invariably notice that in nine out of ten cases their child will be on the vehicle side. We do not check if we have closed all the doors and windows before we go to sleep, do not switch off electrical equipment after use, and we fail to be cautious when there is a gas leak in the kitchen.

We should be aware about cyber crimes. Many frauds are taking place through social networking sites and only a few people register a complaint. In many cases undesirable elements network through the internet. They use steganography—the art and science of writing hidden messages—while networking. One has to be very careful when disclosing one's identity as identity theft is prevalent today.

For policemen there is a need to do visible policing. The images in the camera that are kept in public places need to be monitored regularly. In London, although there are 10,000 cameras, all of them are monitored regularly. This helps in preventing crimes.