

# Conversations

*A Chronicle of Social Currents*

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Photo: Rajjana Thomas

## Cover Story >> Pg 6 Dream catchers

**An initiative that enables children live their dreams**

## From the Editor

**Dear Friends,**

For 'Social Entrepreneurship' the greatest, strongest, and positive element is 'Giving'. Giving involves giving of Time, Talent, Treasure, and Touch (the heart) from one to another.

This is the 'Social Capital' that combines Economics with Equity. This leads to higher level of flow of resources and velocity of resources thereby providing overall happiness. Hence, giving will be the only Social

Capital element that will rule the world. Let us build this social capital through the concept 'each one-reach one', and indulge in many acts of giving from today!

**P. N. Devarajan**

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Mr M. Mahadevan, Chairman, Oriental Cuisines, addressing the NGO representatives



Battle of Buffet 2010



Battle of Buffet 2010

## Battle of Buffet 2011

**C**SIM is collaborating with Oriental Cuisines in Chennai to organise the Battle of Buffet 2011 as part of 'Joy of Giving week' celebrations. This is a unique fundraising opportunity for NGOs as this is a zero cost opportunity to raise money by inviting donors who contribute Rs. 5,000 to a high-end 5 star buffet to be organized on 9th October 2011 at Chennai Trade Centre. Music

programme by leading musicians and celebrity guests form part of this event.

Three meetings were organized for NGOs to orient them on the event during the month of June 2011, in which around 50 members attended.

*If you wish to register or sponsor, please contact Latha Suresh at 9282205123 or Marie Banu at 9884700029 or write to [chennai@csim.in](mailto:chennai@csim.in).*



Battle of Buffet 2010

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**



# Partners in Giving

*“We have set ourselves a target of completing 100 eye donations, and 50 organ donations in the next three years.”*

“So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole world” goes the saying. Here is an individual who has taken it upon himself to forge friendships and unite strangers so they may lighten up the lives of hundreds, one person at a time. Thozhan Charitable Trust was registered on 13th August 2007. Its Founder Trustee Radhakrishnan hails from Kumbakonam. Having lost his parents while young, he was raised in a modest household by his maternal grandmother—his biggest influence in life. He recounts, “My grandmother showed me by her own example that it does not take extra time or money to be charitable. She hardly ever gave alms but whenever a hungry person came to her, she would always have some food, or at least bananas to give. Though her own income was meager, she would volunteer to pay for one or more of my friends’ expenses at school. She said to me that it was important to feed the hungry, because a filled stomach always inculcated a sense of gratitude and goodwill.”

Her words of wisdom stood true when years later, after she died, Radhakrishnan faced difficult times, and it was his friends who got together, paid his college fees, and helped him graduate in IT with flying colours. He is full of stories of kindness shown by friends who collectively worked and got him out of troublesome situations. “I did not quite get the Diploma certificate,” he quips. Because, I was short of about Rs. 6,000 and although I was a gold medallist with an ‘O’ grade, the institute withheld the certificate” he says ruefully.

Realizing the importance of having the right opportunities and the basic needs met to maintain a dignified lifestyle, Radhakrishnan and his friends decided to get together and help charitable organizations—particularly homes for the orphan, destitute, and the elderly. The group met on the first Sunday of every month and discussed their plans. They started out on an initial corpus fund of Rs. 1,800 and committed to contribute Rs. 25 per person per month for their activities. As the idea for ‘Thozhan’ was conceived, the activities also became more structured and today the organization runs three projects—Asan; Ashramam; and Samudayam.

## ASAN

Volunteers from Thozhan visit the Ramakrishna Mission’s Vivekananda Vidyalaya school at T. Nagar in Chennai.



These volunteers facilitate the learning of specific current topics among students by having them interact with experts in the concerned field. They have also set up the National Green Corps through which the students undertake environment consciousness related activities around the city regularly. Besides, competitions are held once in three months to motivate the children.

## ASHRAMAM

Thozhan mobilises people to visit homes, and contributes resources to meet the basic needs of the inmates of these

*It was here at CSIM that I learnt what my true calling is. My passion lay in serving as many people as possible*

homes. “We create hubs of volunteers in different localities who will regularly keep in touch with these homes so that they become self-sustained. When a lot of people start visiting, we move on,” says Radhakrishnan. The main premise for this project is that we should contain the growing number of homes in our society as it is not a good indicator of the society’s overall development. “Initially I was moved by the plight of abandoned people and wondered if I should also start a home. However, I soon realized that increasing numbers of hospitals and homes are merely indicators of greater problems in a country touted to be one of the powerful

nations of the world,” says Radhakrishnan. At this juncture he reminisces his time as a student at CSIM. He says: “It was here at CSIM that I learnt what my true calling is. My passion lay in serving as many people as possible. However, it was during these classes that I learnt how important it is to lay out short-term and long-term goals. The clarity provided by my teachers at CSIM encouraged me to pursue the work at Thozhan with greater vigour than ever before.”

## SAMUDAYAM

Thozhan volunteers have branched out in different parts of Tamil Nadu and they have gathered a database of donors who have pledged their eyes and other organs. The work of conducting blood donation camps as well organ donation drives are being carried out by his friends—Selvakumar at Tiruchy, Murugan at Tiruppur, and Pandian at Rajapalayam. Radhakrishnan’s expanding network is now 660 strong. 17 organ donations, 44 eye donations, and 90 regular blood donors have been mobilized so far. Their work has been acknowledged both in the print as well as in the visual media.

“We have set ourselves a target of completing 100 eye donations and 50 organ donations in the next three years,” says Radhakrishnan adding with childish enthusiasm, “we have also resolved to meet Dr. Kalam at least once by then. It would be highly inspirational for us to be in the presence of someone so great and to take his guidance.”

Talking about his family, which today comprises of his wife Karthika and three-year-old daughter Yaazhini, Radhakrishnan speaks with contentment and self-assurance, “My wife has been my biggest support since my college days. She manages the accounts of Thozhan and also handles most of our interactions with other organizations, leaving me with just the supervision work. Most importantly, she is the one I turn to when in need of comforting words.”

When asked to share lessons with our readers, a rather shy and hesitant Radhakrishnan says, “In giving is joy. Everybody thinks that you need to be a Gandhi to be able to change the world. I say that just as hunger and sleep are natural instincts, so is service. If only we cultivated a habit of it, we need nothing out of the ordinary to make a difference.”

—Archanaa R.



# A Family of Children and Grand Parents

*“The way they converse with their family members who visit them shows how happy and loved they feel here.”*

New Life Charitable Trust began its home for the aged and helpless children, in a thatched hut with just two inmates. As is the case with every social entrepreneur, there is a critical incident behind this beginning.

Lalitha, Founder Trustee, and Swamy, President, used to visit government hospitals in the Tambaram locality to help those patients who had none to turn to. From occasional visits on birthdays and others, they turned out to be weekend visits, where they spent more time with these patients, primarily senior citizens. Slowly, the patients began to look forward to their visits. ‘The patients were eager to see us, because we spend time with them,’ says Lalitha.

In 1991, two patients were discharged from Tambaram Sanatorium Hospital, one of whom was blind and the other was totally lame. They had no where to go and so Lalitha and Swamy decided to put them in a home. It was a time when homes did not have corpus funds or nursing facilities. Therefore, it was up to them to decide on the further course of action and so they built a small thatched hut in Erayoor, Swamy’s native, to house them.

While all their attention were on these two members, came Manoharan, with 10 kilograms of hydrosyl! On approaching the Multi Speciality Lifeline, Dr J S Rajkumar came forward to operate Manoharan free of charge. By 1996, there were 16 members in the home, and in 1997 Lalitha and Swamy registered it as ‘New Life Charitable Trust’.

As time passed by they felt the need to support children who were orphans, or lived with young widows, or were HIV positive, or mentally retarded, and also children of commercial sex workers. With the belief that basic education must not be hampered due to lack of resources they offered financial assistance to the needy children.

By 1995, there were 20 children in the New Life family. One of them is Jayalakshmi from Bangalore. Her mother had committed suicide on learning that her father had married another woman. Since then, she lived with her aunt and uncle in Bangalore who abused and harassed her. “It was my neighbor who rescued and brought me to New Life,” says Jayalakshmi.

Life at ‘New Life’ would remind us of any usual family scene. It does not feel like a home which usually has a schedule tabled and pasted on the walls and corridors. “Members of New Life can eat when they want and the children can study when they wish. The elders too can take a walk within the campus when they want. Each child is taken care by a grandpa or a grandma. The

grandparents who are diabetic give their sweets to the children who assist them in their daily routine. Such is the bond created here. Only then will they feel at home. All that they need is love and some time with their dear ones. The way they converse with their family members who visit them shows how happy and loved they feel here,’ says Lalitha.

Counselling the children of senior citizens and mothers of the children was taking concrete shape as they increasingly realized that no child or a senior citizen can be happy living in a home—each one of them longs for a family. Therefore, homes such as these must show a plummeting trend. But, on the contrary, they are growing multifold. The trust gradually supported families to take care of their senior family members and the mothers were counseled to live with their in-laws, with the promise of support for their child’s education. They have been able to successfully play the role of a ‘bridge’ between the needy children and the willing sponsors.

Education is not forced on the children here. Although they are advised to finish schooling till class X, children who are interested to pursue different vocations are allowed to decide. Those who declined to continue studies and showed interest in cattle rearing were also supported. Jaya studying in class XII, a class topper says, ‘I want to become a bank manager’.

Today, New Life Charitable Trust has 60 senior citizens and 64 children. To look at their accolades, the trust was awarded the ‘Sadguru Gnanananda Award for 2006’ for providing medical assistance to the village which has a

population of 1200. Recently, it was awarded the ‘Imayam Award’ by Makkal Santhippu, a monthly magazine recognized by the United Nations Organisation.

With more such recognition coming in, one would be intrigued to know about the future plans, which I did ask. “We have no future plans”, was the instant reply from Lalitha. The trust is sustained by public donations and contribution from friends. She affirmatively said that every donor has come back to help them in some form or the other regularly. Only three fundraising programmes in the last 20 years has been organized and this stands as testimony to the aforesaid.

The trustees have been working on proposing New Life Charitable Trust as a CSR programme of KAAR Technologies, with new members on the board. For now, all their interest is to see active youngsters playing key roles in the board. Let’s wish them all success!

—Shanmuga Priya R





# Positive Energiser

**M**ahadeva Murali began his career at Sri Krishna Sweets as a young entrepreneur by joining the predictable path of the family business, and today championed the development of this organization by extending its branches to 28 outlets in Chennai including Pondicherry. Sri Krishna Sweets has a total of 54 outlets in three southern states, as well as in Maharashtra and Dubai.

Murali spearheads these projects religiously following the principles laid down by his father Sri.N.K.Mahadeva Iyer, founder of Sri Krishna Sweets. As he has a mind set to share a part of his income generated through business with the public, he conceptualized a unique social responsibility program under the banner Chennai-365. In this, programs in the area of art, Culture, Education, Health, and Environment are organised through the year in various parts of Chennai. This novel concept aims to motivate the public to do a good deed every day.

Murali is a recipient of various awards and titles. To name a few: the prestigious Sir M. Visvesvaraya Award instituted by All India Manufacturers organization in 2002; The Loyola Environment Award 2002 instituted by The School of Entomology and Center For Natural Resources Management; Socially Responsible Corporate Award for the year 2004 awarded by the Rotary Club of Madras Chennapatna; The Lions Humanitarian Award conferred by The Lions Club of Chennai, and Prakruthi Ratna Award instituted by Exnora International.

Besides, Sri Thiagaraj Sangeetha Vidwath Samajam has conferred him with a title 'Kala Seva Nirata' for his excellent support to culture.

*In an exclusive interview with Marie Banu, Mahadeva Murali shares his journey in Philanthropy.*

## What inspired you to become a philanthropist?

I am sitting here because of the society. I want to reciprocate it. I am just sharing what I can to make people happy. This is the reason we organise various programmes, and this year we plan to conduct over 2000 events. We are not doing this for publicity!

Through our events we reach to all segments of the society—children, college students, adults, housewives, and elderly. We organise specific programmes for each of these segments and also have volunteers who serve as lifeguards in the Elliots beach. These volunteers have saved around 75 lives so far.

In 2011, we are sending our volunteers to perform cultural programmes in temples, during auspicious days like Pradosham, Chathurti, Sashti, Ekadasi and Pournami, which accounts to 108 days in a year. We have named this 'Divya Dhinangal 108.'



Photo: Marie Banu

## Mahadeva Murali shares his journey in philanthropy

We organize a monthly event named 'Magizhvom, Magizhvipom', where we would be honoring people from the downtrodden who have not been recognized for their work. For instance, a lady who has been selling flowers for 70 years; and a labourer who has been working for 50 years. Like these, we have many more events.

***I am not doing anything in a big way, but am extremely happy in what I do in a systematic manner.***

Our intention is to radiate positive vibration. Music, speech, comedy, dance, and drama give positive vibration to the earth which has life. We ourselves have felt many a times that something good has happened somewhere, and this is because someone has done good.

There are many people who render social service. I am not doing anything in a

big way, but am extremely happy in what I do in a systematic manner.

## Which of the social issues are close to your heart?

There are a lot of verticals. My priority issue would be to give love and affection to all human beings. Once you are a lovable person, and you like and treat everyone equal all problems would be sorted out. It is not possible to go and hug everybody, but you can create energy similar to the one you received from your mother. This atmosphere is enough to change the world!

## You have received several awards and recognition for your business as well as for social work. Which of them do you cherish?

Whenever I receive an award, I think of my father. I am just representing him. Yesterday's success will not get you today's applause. It is over. What is today and what is next is what you will have to look on.

## What inspired you to launch the event 'Salute to Mothers'?

A mother's love is ultimate. There is a

Jewish proverb: 'God couldn't be everywhere, so he created mothers'. This was my inspiration to organize this event.

## As an entrepreneur, what were the challenges you faced and how did you overcome them?

There were a lot of problems which I would rather term as challenges. My father had faced a lot of challenges, which I have overcome. I don't want to tell from 'where to here', but rather say from 'here to where.'

## Your advice for youth?

Youth are not 'useless', but are 'used less'. They are not 'careless', but 'cared less'.

Today's youth think that they know everything. The television and internet has widened their knowledge. The issue is that they think that only they know everything. This is because of their age. If they cross that limit, they are great! Information is good, but one should take it in the right sense. If you have ego that only 'I' know, and that only 'I' can handle, then it is a problem.



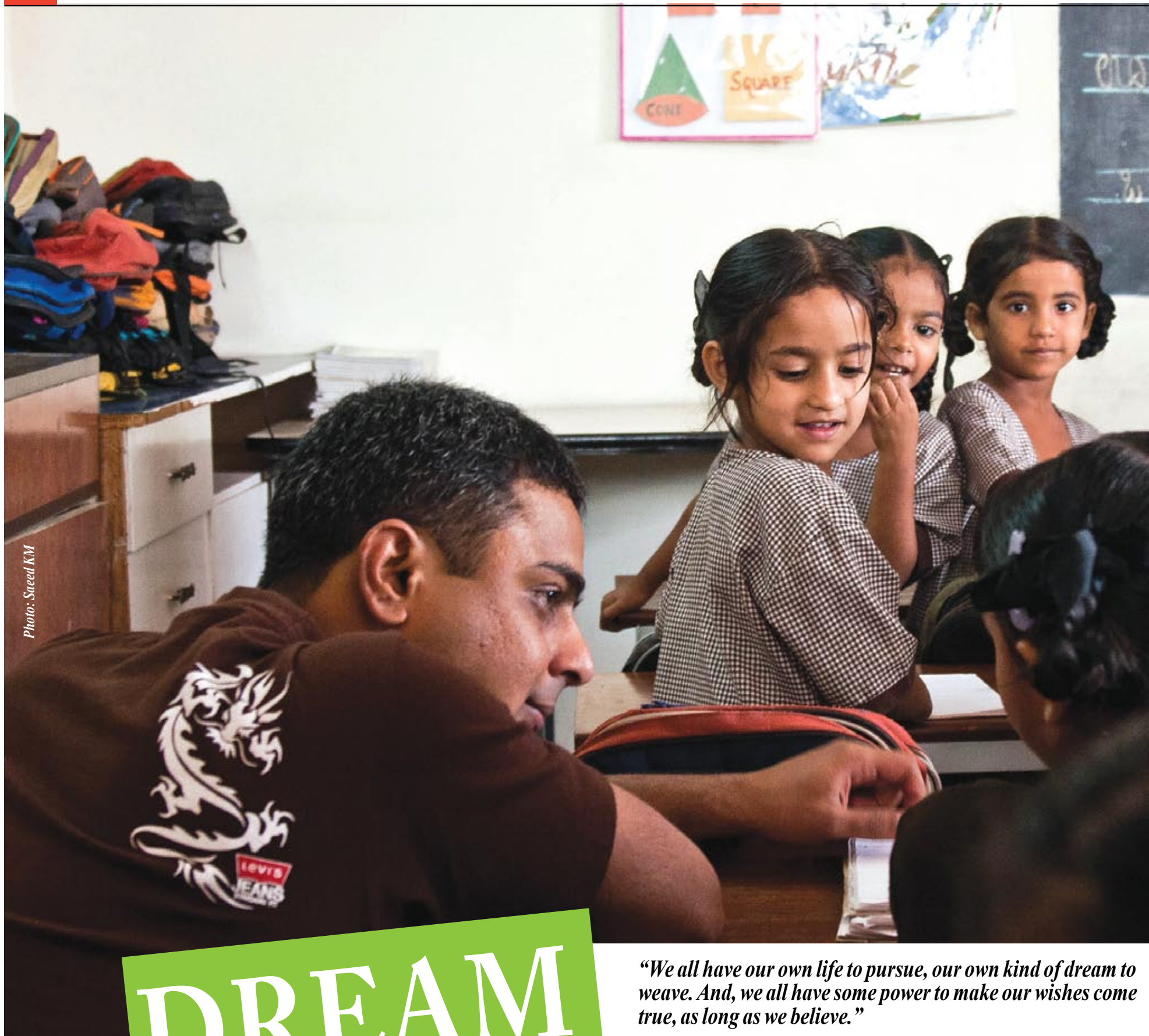


Photo: Sreed KM

DREAM

## CATCHERS

*"We all have our own life to pursue, our own kind of dream to weave. And, we all have some power to make our wishes come true, as long as we believe."*

In late 1999 Brinda Jacob started sharing her idea of the 'Power of One' amongst her friends to bring about positive change in our communities. In no time, 11 others got inspired by her idea and joined hands to start Dream A Dream in Bangalore in November 1999. They huddled in a garage and started discussing ideas to change the world. The twelve founder dreamers were Arjun Dugal, Brinda Jacob, Neha Shah, Pramod Ramprasad, Rahul Mathur, Rashmi Bajaj, Sandeep Wadhwa, Shweta Kothari, Supreeta Sampath, Vipul Chhabria, Vishal Talreja, and Vishwa Prasad. Today, Vishal Talreja is spearheading their dream with active support from the others.

Dream A Dream is a 12-year old professional NGO that provides children from vulnerable backgrounds - from low-income communities and shelter homes in Bangalore—with opportunities to have fun and learn concrete Life Skills that allow them the possibility of eventually becoming integrated into mainstream society. Consistent, intensive and long-term life skills programs using the experiential medium of Sports, Creative Arts, Computer Education, Outdoor Adventure, Mentoring and learning exposures and other opportunities offered by Dream A Dream yield visible results in the behavior and capabilities of participating children, many of whom otherwise have very limited chances for normal development. These children further develop Interpersonal skills including teamwork, communications, negotiation, and coping skills. Their cognitive skills such as decision-making, problem solving and critical thinking are also honed in the process resulting in creativity and increase in confidence levels besides passion for learning. Currently, Dream A Dream is enhancing the lives of over 3,000 children from Bangalore's disadvantaged communities. With a goal to take the program to 240,000 children in three years.

Vishal recalls his initial meeting with the team "We were all from diverse backgrounds who met through our common friends. It was a matter of meeting the right kind of people; the right minds gathering at the right time. We all had our day jobs and had to make time in the evenings and during weekends to pursue our goal. It was a struggle but it all pieced up together eventually. The name 'Dream A Dream' was a spontaneous thought from one of the members. When we coined it we did not know that it was pregnant with meaning. But yes, now when we look back we have made many a child realize his/her dream and it makes us feel happy."

The serendipity and spontaneity of the whole journey is very interesting indeed. Vishal says, "I finished college in 1999 and got a job in Xerox as a salesman. I had the opportunity to visit Finland as part of a cultural exchange program. It was during my tenure in Finland that I started to think about what my dreams and aspirations were, and what I wanted to do in life. I made a lot of friends here. I observed that all of them were extremely proud of who and what they were, and were happy irrespective of what work they did- Security Guard or bartender. That got me thinking about how many security guards in India were proud about themselves, which further led me to think about human dignity."

"It is this deep meaningful introspection where my quest to do something began. Why can't I make a choice to be a security guard? Where did the idea that the poor could play only some roles in society originate? A lot of it comes from our upbringing. Caste and class differences get imbibed during childhood and adolescence, and this is perpetuated generation after generation which finally becomes a part of the Indian psychological DNA unfortunately. But, we have to shatter this slowly

and surely. As a young adult even I had these notions because they were driven into me. And the Finnish experience changed that! Yes, I wanted to come back to India and do something about Dignity of Labour. That's when I got in touch with the Dream A Dream team. Within a month of my return Dream-A-Dream was born."

While the transformative effect on children's development is the end goal of this team, their innovative approach has been the key to their success. Volunteers were trained to encourage,

myself, 'should I also learn to get immune, or try to do something about it?' I decided that I should do something about it. During weekends, I volunteered with various NGOs that worked for children (Doorstep School, Pratham, Magic Bus, Voices for Children) in order to understand what the issues were, the kind of work they were doing, what has been the impact, and how to work with the Government. I wanted to understand the various facets involved in creating social change. I did not want to start an initiative without acquiring this



Photos: Ranjana Thomas

## Children Speak

**"We are learning to believe in ourselves and our team."**—Junaid

**"We won the match! It is a great moment for me, and a good day for me as I scored for my team."**—Rithika

initiate and implement effective projects to support vulnerable children and build strong partnerships. Today, over 1500 community volunteers from all walks of life contribute to changing children's lives everyday. Over 14,000 volunteer hours are clocked every year helping us build an increasingly sensitive and engaged community. Besides, unique fundraising efforts to attract substantial aid from individuals and business houses have been their USP.

Mumbai was a learning ground for Vishal as he joined a startup Investment Bank in 2000. "There is not a day in Mumbai which passes without encountering poverty. After staying for a couple of weeks what struck me even more than poverty was how people were immune to poverty. So I asked

knowledge, because that would just be like shooting in the dark."

"So, that particular year in Mumbai, where I volunteered with various NGOs was very crucial for me to decide what I wanted to do with my life. In January 2002, I moved full time into Dream A Dream picking up on these learning's."

"The journey thus began. We rented a small office and hired our first employees. We reached out to around 200 children who hailed from a poor background, and conducted weekend workshops, art workshops, educational programs, and medical

support programs. We networked with various NGOs, supported them in raising funds, and spent time with their children. What we understood through these initiatives is that most shelters take care of the basic needs of children until the age of 17 or 18 years. They did not keep track of what happened to these children after they left the institution. It is suspected that most of them went back to the street, despite undergoing formal education. We realized that something critical was missing which prevented their integration into the society to become Productive, contributing members in society."

"The missing element in the lives of these children was 'life skills'. An average person typically has family support, access to higher education, and access to learning opportunities which enables him to cope in the society. While we could not influence change in the first two aspects, we realized that we would be able to help in the third factor by imparting critical life skills to the children. We wanted to form a life-skills development program for children from vulnerable backgrounds. We realized that children would not learn in a conventional teacher-student model and that they can learn best if the module was engaging, fun to learn, and experiential in nature. We developed an after school life-skills program which would involve sports, games, computer education, creative arts, and adventure based programs acting as hooks for engagement."

"Life skills are very contextual. It is true that all of us possess certain life skills while we lack a few. However, whenever you or I face a crisis, say a medical emergency, we have a huge support system to bank upon and we know whom to approach; whereas a person from the street tends to panic and break down. They go through a lot of trauma and pain due to the lack of these life skills. One thing that everyone should understand is that there are appropriate ages where certain life skills have to be built in a human being, failing which there is a development collapse, i.e. the person finds it extremely difficult to acquire that particular skill later on and cannot adjust easily in the society. For example, children and toddlers can easily learn and master speaking, reading, and writing even ten languages with ease, but for a person who is in his 30's learning even a single new language is challenging. Therefore, we start our life skills programs with children who are six-years-old, an age at which they are very receptive. If they go through our entire program they get a whole gamut of invaluable skills which prepares them for life's challenges."

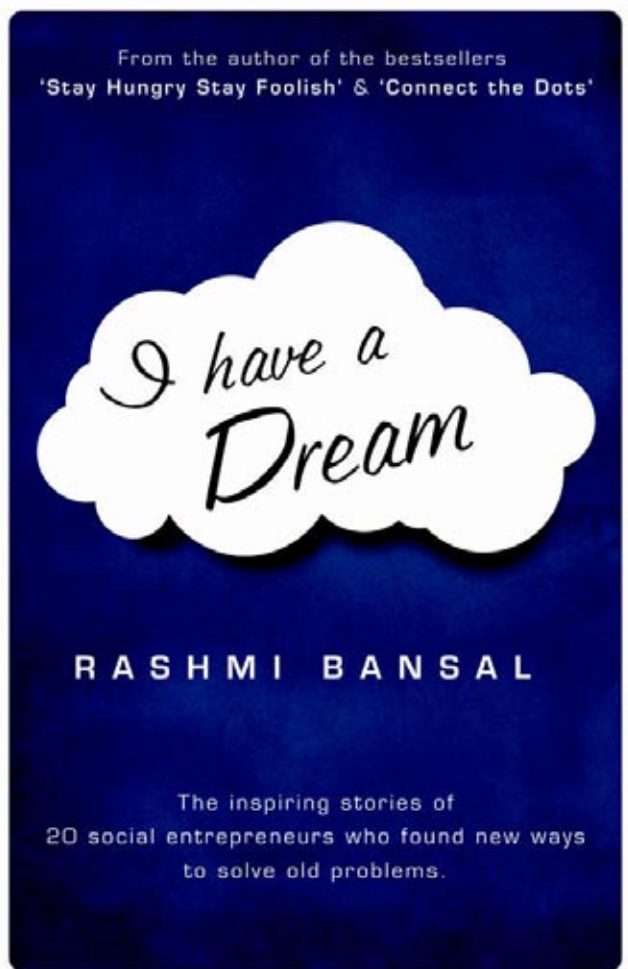
As Dream A Dream completes its 12 years in service, it has received many accolades along the way. Runner-up at the India NGO Awards for 2 years, Runner-up at the Outstanding Annual

Report Awards for 2 years and a Winner of the awards in 2011. Dream A Dream is recognized for its transparency, accountability and deep focus on creating a life-long impact through its work.

The dream is not complete yet! There are 140 million children in our country who need access to life skills and Dream A Dream is currently prototyping a few models so that they could create an ecosystem of life skills Facilitators and Collaborators who will act as catalysts to take the Life Skills model to every child in the country.

—Avinandan Deenadayalan





# I have a dream

**I** Have A Dream is the story of 20 idealists who think and act like entrepreneurs. They are committed to different causes, but they have one thing in common: a belief that principles of management can and must be used to achieve a greater common good. These stories say one thing loud and clear—change starts with one person, and that person could be someone next door. Someone like you!

The stories are categorized under three headings—Rainmakers, Changemakers, and Spiritual Capitalists.

The 11 Rainmakers featured include Bindeshwar Pathak, Anita Ahuja, Vineet Rai, Sumita Ghose, Saloni Malhotra, Ishita Khanna, Harish Hande, Santosh Parulekar, Dinabandhu Sahoo, Anand Kumar, and Dhruv Lakhra. These new breed of entrepreneurs run social enterprises which generate revenues, and profit is not their primary motive.

The 6 Changemakers featured are: Madhav Chavan, Anshu



Gupta, Trilochan Sastry, Shaheen Mistry, Arvind Kejriwal, and Bhushan Punani. They are single persons who have started social movements of different kinds. While the world laments ‘what is’, the changemaker takes a small step towards making it as ‘it should be’.

The 3 spiritual capitalist featured include Madhu Pandit Dasa, Vinayak Lohani and Shreesh Jadhav. These entrepreneurs believe that purity of purpose and selflessness of spirit can transcend every limitation.

## About the Author

Rashmi Bansal is a writer, entrepreneur, and youth expert. Her two books Stay Hungry Stay Foolish, and Connect the Dots have sold over 350,000 copies and have been translated into eight languages. Rashmi is a motivational speaker and mentor to students and young entrepreneurs. She is an economics graduate from Sophia College, Mumbai and an MBA from IIM Ahmedabad.

—Latha Suresh

# Reporting From The Roots

**W**hile India is trying hard to live up to the image of a superpower in the making, large parts of the media seems to have bought into the “India Shining” story. With reporters and editors eyeing the aspiring urban middle-class, the space for rural journalism is getting smaller and smaller. If at all there is any coverage of rural India, it is often the result of a kind of parachute-journalism, so cynically ridiculed in the 2010 movie “Peepli Live”. It is good to know that there are a few exceptions. Baba Maya Ram from Hoshangabad district in Madhya Pradesh is one of them.

“I never went to a journalism school. All I know, I have learned from being raised in an OBC family in a poor village. I have seen what it means for people to live without a single paisa,” says Maya Ram.

Maya Ram’s family hails from a small farming village between Piparia and Hoshangabad, where he lives with his wife and his son. The family property of three-odd acres hardly yielded enough money to send young Maya Ram for higher education, who was determined to join a college. After the family scraped the bottom of the barrel, he was sent off by his father with Rs. 100 in his

pocket to find a seat at Law College in Indore. “Half of the money was spent towards the bus fare, so I really was in a hard situation when I arrived at Indore,” smiles Maya Ram.

His persistence got him a job as a junior reporter at a Hindi newspaper ‘Naidunia’. Recollecting his first assignment, he says: “After they sent me out twice without giving me a chance, I insisted on seeing the editor-in-chief. I convinced him to let me write a story. On that same day, the famous cycle tour against nuclear bombs arrived from Rajasthan in Indore. As a sympathizer, I walked a bit with them, so I could write a detailed report on the event. This earned me the job!”

Although the 40-year-old freelance journalist has worked for four different newspapers, published a book on displacement of tribals, and is affiliated with the Centre for Study of Developing Societies in Delhi, he has nurtured a simplicity seldom found in the noisy world of journalism. “I am not the person to develop big theories. I simply try to write about what I see in India’s villages,” adds Maya Ram whose main interlocutor for discussing the latest events is his son, who is now



studying in the ninth standard.

For Maya Ram, who describes himself as a ‘grassroots freelance journalist’, the biggest problem of the media today is the wrong focus given to a small and rich elite, thus distorting what really happens in India. “Journalists are so much occupied with Shah Rukh Khan or Anil Ambani that they overlook what happens in large parts of our country. And if they come to see, they don’t understand. But this is India! They should visit the poor villages of Hoshangabad, where people live on whatever they grow, some of them without a single rupee to spend,” sighs Maya Ram.

According to him, this alienation is rooted in a wrong attitude among journalists who focus more on selling a story than telling story. “I do not care much about whether my articles finally get published. This is not within my control. My job is to report about what is really happening in India. If nobody wants to publish it, I say: Thank you, Namaste and good bye. In that way, I remain a free journalist.”

—Ajit Thamburaj  
Asian College of Journalism



# Where There is a Little Care...

**T**he Multiple Sclerosis Society of India (MSSI) was founded in 1985 by the then CEO of Voltas India, Mr. A.H. Tobaccowalla, and one of the pioneering Multiple Sclerosis (MS) activists, Ms. Rehmurt S. Fazalbhoy. This degenerating condition was then colloquially called the “Parsi’s Disease” because of its relatively greater incidence among the members of Parsi Community. Till date, epidemiologists have counted over 30 symptoms which may occur in any order and in any intensity to diagnose a person of having MS. While the condition is treatable, they are yet to find a cure.

Multiple Sclerosis is an auto-immune disease which affects the brain and the spinal cord (the central nervous system). When the myelin sheath, the protective covering around the nerve cells is damaged, nerve impulses are slowed down or stopped. The symptoms occur rather irregularly making it very difficult to diagnose the condition right away, and consequently making early interventions possible more by chance than through systematic investigations. There commonly occurs bladder incontinence and sometimes MS persons pass stools also involuntarily. Now, it is something to live with a condition, going to bed every night knowing that a part of your body will never function as it should; but it is a whole different ballgame when you retire for the night not knowing whether another organ or limb will give way tomorrow. While the degeneration process does not necessarily involve pain as much as it does involve increasing numbness and fatigue, the blows that it can hurl upon one’s self-confidence and buoyancy of spirit can probably not be imagined by those of us who have never met an MS person.

Mrs. Ann Gonsalvez of the Tamil Nadu Chapter of MSSI says, “MS is a disease which requires expensive treatment. A weekly dose of intravenous medicine can



cost anywhere ranging from Rs.9000 to Rs. 87000. Physiotherapy is a very important part of the treatment process. Our interventions include offering the therapy at a subsidized rate, and appointing nurses to regularly visit the patients at their homes to administer the medicine as well as to inform the MS persons of their progress. While the disease itself has been found to occur more among the relatively affluent sections of the society, it is these very people who appear to discontinue the treatment routines more often. Probably they are uncomfortable with being counseled every now and then. We ensure that we do not hamper their self-esteem in any way.”

MSSI conducts fund-raisers annually to collect funds for their operations in all of their nine chapters across the country and the two support groups in Indore and Puducherry respectively. Being the only organization in the country to exclusively work on MS, they have a brimming responsibility that they continue to toil on with perseverance.

“Creating awareness about MS is one of our major objectives,” says Mrs. Ann Gonsalvez, adding that “We regularly organize conferences and seminars for students pursuing their post-graduate degree in medicine or allied sciences. On the 25th of May 2011 which happens to be

the World MS Day, one such seminar was organized at Apollo Hospital. In the rural areas we conduct simple awareness programs so that people may look out for symptoms of MS with greater caution. If you notice a sudden (even if slight) blurring of vision, slurred speech, tremors, numbness, extreme fatigue, problems with memory and concentration, paralysis or anything unusual with your bodily functions, you must immediately consult a neurologist. An MRI is currently the only test which helps diagnose MS.”

Reassuringly she explains, “Most people with MS can lead normal lives with the help of the treatment presently available. MS is not contagious.”

Looking at the larger issues that MS persons face, Mrs. Gonsalvez says that since the Persons with Disabilities Act of 1995 does not classify MS individually, certification of MS persons has become a problem. Due to the irregularity in the frequency as well as the severity of symptoms, there is hardly any external evidence of having the condition, which makes it difficult for other people to acknowledge it. For instance, employers cannot empathise with their employees who happen to have MS, simply because the MS person does not look any different from a healthy person.

“At MSSI we are actively participating in collaboration with the Disability Legislation Unit at Vidyasagar (Formerly Spastic Society of India), Chennai in the drafting of the bill of the new Persons with Disabilities Act,” says Mrs. Gonsalvez. On the issue of involving academic institutions to impart knowledge about the disease among larger sections of the populations, she adds, “Sadly there is no lobby for making MS a part of the curriculum of any higher learning course. Presently only students of medicine have any knowledge of it. Even for them it is just a line in their textbooks. Just as information on the different endemic diseases are being carried out by media so as to reach to the layman, so should the awareness about a condition as serious as this one be done.”

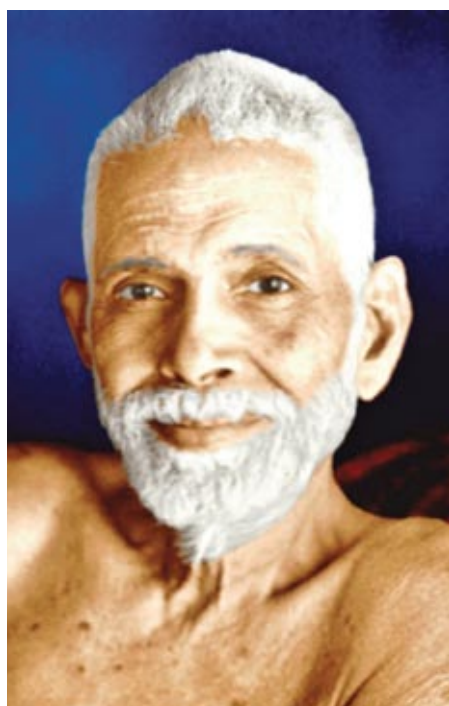
Lately the MSSI has found support from top TV channels like the NDTV and Kalaingar TV. However, according to Mrs. Gonsalvez the Tamil media has not been too forthcoming yet. “We take pride in recounting that our interventions have helped people lead their lives with dignity. One of our MSSI members got a supportive employer who understands his condition and is willing to utilize his services. Another of our members got married to a Doctor, which is making a huge statement on the acceptance levels of people today.” Getting a little reflective, she says “MS strikes doubly hard during a crisis situation. Stress can cause relapse which can lead to complications and an increase in the inflammation of the nerves. Therefore nurture and support are just as necessary as medication.”

Having been with the MSSI since its inception in 1985, Mrs. Ann Gonsalvez is a veteran in caring for MS persons. We salute her dedication and the organization’s commitment towards bringing hope to those that need it the most.

—Archanaa R.







# MIND CONTROL

the *tamas*; but when *satva* comes into play, hold on to it fast and make the best of it.

**D.:** What is the Heart?

**M.:** It is the seat (if such could be said of it) of the Self.

**D.:** Is it the physical heart?

**M.:** No. It is the seat wherefrom 'I-I' arises.

**D.:** What becomes of the *jiva* after death?

**M.:** The question is not appropriate for a *jiva* now living. A disembodied *jiva* may ask me, if convenient. In the meantime let the embodied *jiva* solve its present problem and find who he is. There will be an end of such doubts.

**D.:** What is *dhyana*?

**M.:** The word *dhyana* usually signifies meditation on some object, whereas *nididhyasana* is used for enquiry into the Self. The triads persist until the Self is realised. *Dhyana* and *nididhyasana* are the same so far as the aspirant is concerned, because they involve trinity and are synonymous with *bhakti*.

**D.:** How should *dhyana* be practised?

**M.:** *Dhyana* serves to concentrate the mind. The predominant idea keeps off all others. *Dhyana* varies according to the individual. It may be on an aspect of God, on a mantra, or on the Self, etc.

A Bengali visitor asked: How is the mind controlled?

**M.:** What do you call 'the mind'?

**D.:** When I sit down to think of God, thoughts wander away to other objects. I want to control those thoughts.

**M.:** In the Bhagavad Gita it is said that it is the nature of the mind to wander. One must bring one's thoughts to bear on God. By long practice the mind is controlled and made steady. The wavering of the mind is a weakness arising from the dissipation of its energy in the shape of thoughts. When one makes the mind stick to one thought the energy is conserved, and the mind becomes stronger.

**D.:** What is the meaning of the strength of the mind?

**M.:** Its ability to concentrate on one thought without being distracted.

**D.:** How is that achieved?

**M.:** By practice. A devotee concentrates on God; a seeker, follower of the *jnana-marga*, seeks the Self. The practice is equally difficult for both.

**D.:** Even if the mind is brought to bear on the search for the Self, after a long struggle the mind begins to elude him and the man is not aware of the mischief until after some time.

**M.:** So it would be. In the earlier stages the mind reverts to the search at long intervals; with continued practice it reverts at shorter intervals until finally it does not wander at all. It is then that the dormant *sakti* manifests. The *satvic* mind is free from thoughts whereas the *rajasic* mind is full of them. The *satvic* mind resolves itself into the Life-current.

**D.:** Can one keep the mind away from entering into the phase of thoughts before one experiences the current?

**M.:** Yes; the current is pre-existent.

—Excerpted from Sri Ramana Maharshi teachings

**B**hagwan Shri Ramana Maharishi in conversation with his disciples about mind control.

A man from Cocanada asked: "My mind remains clear for two or three days and turns dull for the next two or three days; and so it alternates. What is it due to?"

**M.:** It is quite natural; it is the play of brightness (*satva*), activity (*rajas*), and darkness (*tamas*) alternating. Do not regret

## Institutionalizing Social Entrepreneurship

*A Series on Growing -Reflections for Deep Change*

**O**ne of the most challenging issues in social entrepreneurship is in formulating and growing a team that will walk the path that the social entrepreneur has set to carve for him/herself. Also, the success and failure of implementation of an idea lies in the possibility of a team carrying the vision of the social entrepreneur. When we speak of social entrepreneurship, it is very much possible and easy to see it as an individual person's passion and connectivity to society. Even if it is a closely knit group's connectivity, there is a single person who begins the idea, and it evolves. Developing an idea into a school of thought and building an institution based on it, is what lends the action to the idea.

Building an institution is all about people. The real challenge emerges when the institution has to be based on a vision that a person conceives in his/her mind and the others have to get connected to it. When people connect to the vision and a team is being formed, it is important to recognize that each member of the team may have a personal dream, or a vision of their own and they are connected to it first. Sometimes this vision may be hazy with varied extent of clarity. Thus, enabling better clarity becomes the first step. Some may have only short term goals. They need to see those goal fulfillments in following the larger vision of the institution. Unless there is a shared vision and enough clarity has emerged around this vision, the movement of the



same from an individual to a team will remain far-fetched. Even if it moves, the sustenance and furtherance of that vision is proportional to the depth to which the team anchors and lives the vision in everyday existence.

While vision is one component, the more critical component is the values that the team would live and integrate. Every person in the team who walks into the space brings something into it and takes something from it. When team members recognize and respect what each member has to offer to that space they will learn from each other.

In a jungle the three most disliked creatures were the snake, the tortoise, and the rat. The snake was too sensitive, and would reply to the merest touch with a bite. The tortoise was too withdrawn. He would draw into his shell, unconcerned about his surroundings. And the rat was too inquisitive-nosing

and bumping into others all the time.

One day the three gathered and discovered that if each one of them learnt the qualities of the other two, they could become more sociable. So the snake taught his two friends to be sensitive, the tortoise taught how to be with oneself, and the rat taught curiosity.

Now each of them with all the three qualities had become a more desirable character, and soon all the three were part of the jungle's social life. (Sampath. J.M. story 35 Discovery—3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998)

Many a time when people become a part of the team, preserving one's identity and ideology becomes more important. This is not only preserved in oneself but they also begin to indoctrinate and incept the same in other members of the team. Each one evaluates the other based on their own paradigms. This develops into a challenging situation when the institution stands on a particular school of thought and works on reaching out to community as a team. While nurturing a team each one of them have to realize that they are the most important components of the institution, and they bring something critical into the space which can either further the cause and enhance team connectivity, or can completely destroy the cause and break group cohesion. The questions therefore are: Is the cause and context larger than self? Can I lend to the cause and the context on hand than expecting to draw from it what I want?

Most of the social entrepreneurs are creative thinkers, and visionaries who visualize spaces and want to create a pathway to reach out. They will find it very difficult to handle the group dynamics when multiple ideologies and paradigms begin to operate. The social entrepreneur would feel sapped in energy if they get into moving in the pathway alone focusing on activities and hoping that their team will follow. When the social entrepreneurs become leaders their actual role is to be the conscious keepers, nurturing and providing clarity to their team members, recognizing each ones contribution to the space, and converging the strengths to journey in the pathway furthering the vision.

### Points for Reflection:

- How aware and balanced am I as a social entrepreneur in understanding of my role?
- Where is my focus while addressing my team—on the activities or on foundational dimensions?
- How much do I know the members of my team?
- What are the processes that I have set in my team to allow learning to happen?
- What are the processes I have set within me to be a learner and allow learning in the team to happen?

—J.M.Sampath & Kalpana Sampath



# Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility



Anant G. Nadkarni



PN Devarajan



Mathew Cherian



Amita Joseph

**T**wo-Day Management Development Programme on 'Corporate Sustainability & Responsibility' was organized by Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) and Business & Community Foundation (BCF) on 28 and 29 June, 2011 at YWCA, Chennai.

20 participants from across India, comprising of senior & middle level managers who were engaged in CSR projects, academicians, research scholars and senior executives from international organizations participated in the programme.

Ms Amita, Director, BCF; Mr. Mathew, Cherian, Chief Executive, Helpage India; Mr. Brijendra Sangwaiya, Principal Consultant, Carbon Advisory Business of Emergent Ventures; Ms Aditi Haldar, Director, GRI Focal Point India; and Ms. Latha Suresh, Director, CSIM conducted varied sessions related to CSR evolution, strategies and reporting mechanisms.

Mr. Anant G. Nadkarni, Vice President - Group Corporate Sustainability, Tata Council for Community Initiatives; Mr. S Sandilya, Chairman, Eicher Group; Ms Sheetal Mehta, Executive Director, K.C. Mahindra Education Trust; and Mr. M. Veeramallu, Project Manager, Polaris Software Lab Ltd. shared their company's CSR initiatives with the participants.

*If you wish to organize this Management Development Programme in your corporate house, please contact Marie Banu at 9884700029 or write to [chennai@csim.in](mailto:chennai@csim.in)*



S. Sandilya



Latha Suresh



Sheetal Mehta



M. Veeramallu



Aditi Haldar



Brijendra Sangwaiya



Inauguration



Participants with resource persons and CSIM team



# Mission Passion

Director Jayendra tells Marie Banu how he finds time for social work

**J**ayendra Panchapakesan studied Chemistry, but found his passion in advertising in 1978. He started his career as a copywriter in Chennai and then moved to Mumbai. In his years as creative writer he worked with agencies like HTA, Clarion, Ulka, and O&M to name a few. In 1986, he started JS Films (an Ad film production House) with P.C. Sreeram renowned cinematographer and got ad agencies and advertisers turn to Chennai for ad film production. In 1993, Jayendra co-founded Real Image Media Technologies to introduce non linear editing with Avid. After non linear editing, it introduced digital surround sound and the movie experience in theatres changed forever. Today, Real Image is known across the world for its end to end digital cinema solution called Qube. A technology that even Hollywood has chosen to use.

Jayendra is associated with various social organizations and has created films to bring awareness and funding to a variety of causes. He is also on the board of Trustees of the Bhoomika Trust which focus on relief at the time of natural disasters and in the field of education; Mahesh Memorial Trust which works in the area of cancer care, especially in children; Altius Foundation that focuses on education; and Jeevan Blood bank.

*In an exclusive interview Director Jayendra tells Marie Banu how he finds time for social work.*

**Rules Kidayadhu (meaning no rules) is the byline of your movie '180'. If you were to evade a rule, what would that be?**

I meant it more as 'freeing of the mind'. Constantly our mind gets bogged down by conventional ways of thinking and that itself is in a way a binding rule on the brain. If we start thinking that there are no rules, then the mind becomes free to think out of the box on any issue. That is what I meant by *Rules Kidayadhu*.

**How do you think you can use the larger screen to bring about social consciousness?**

Actually, when you make a film you don't try to create social consciousness as a primary goal. Somewhere in the storyline it has to be buried somewhere so that people have the joy in discovering it and imbibing the values. After all, movie is for entertainment and we have to package entertainment to get the audiences to theatres.

While we are doing this, we can slip in some values that people can unconsciously take in. Because, the minute it becomes conscious, it is like a teaching that people would resist.

**About real life violence and 'reel life' violence. What are your thoughts on this?**

Violence per say is not objectionable, because it is part of our lives in a very large way. But, the way they are depicted in cinema seems to be the problem. Somehow I think this has a certain negative effect on the society, and triggers people to choose paths that they normally would not have chosen to take. So, the violence on screen—the way it is portrayed, the kind of tools they use, and the absolute nonchalant way of dealing with such things on screen—seems to have made people immune. I don't know whether violence excites people anymore on screen, but we seem to do it and that seems to have some larger effect on the society.

**You are in the board of several charitable organisations—Bhoomika Trust, Mahesh Memorial, etc. How do you find time for social work?**

I am a multitasker by nature. So, I find time for everything. My day starts at 5:00 A.M. I play golf which is a game that takes long hours. Before the day even starts for many people, I would

have finished playing.

Social work is a part of my life. It is like eating out or going for a movie. If you find time for that, then you can find time for social work as well. Social work gives me joy, and therefore it is easy for me to find time for it.

**Can you tell us about the educational portal that you are part of?**

It is called Gift a Future—an initiative of a friend of mine called Srikanth. He asked me join his Trust Altuis Foundation as a Trustee. Gift a Future ([www.giftafuture.org](http://www.giftafuture.org)) is a portal where we try to bring donors and children together. We profile the children and give their background so that people can sponsor their educational expenses in parts. For instance, if the fee requirement is Rs. 3,000 one can sponsor in portions of Rs. 500.

Our initiative does not stop there. We also counsel the children and organise face-to-face meetings once in every two months, which seems to have had a dramatic impact on the children. From the time this was started it is observed that the children have progressed well in their studies, and the success rate this year is huge. It was initiated to bridge the economic gap, but now it has ended up in the organisation motivating children to perform better.

**You have been supporting several charities by making short films to promote their cause. Which of the social issues are close to your heart?**

It is like asking what food you want to eat at what point of time. When you are facing a particular cause, you feel that one is the most important.

We have a Mahesh Memorial Trust where we support pediatric cancer care.

Whenever I am at the Cancer Institute with the children affected by cancer, I feel that this is the most important cause that we have to support. When I find staff of Ekam Trust supporting children at Egmore hospital who are dying for the want of basic medicine, I feel why others can't do something to support such children. I support Sankara Eye hospital that is doing fantastic work for the rural poor. They set up eye camps, conduct free surgeries, and offer free medications. I am a trustee in Jeevan Blood Bank and I feel that the public stem cell bank that they have launched is a big breakthrough for many Indians who may be suffering from an illness that can be life-threatening.

Wherever I am, I feel that the cause is most important. So, I cannot put my heart behind one issue alone.

**Which of these roles would you like yourself to be identified with—Writer, or Ad film maker, or Director, or Philanthropist?**

I constantly think about it myself, because when you look at my career path—I began as a writer; then I started an advertising agency; became an ad film maker; co-founded a technology company; made the first classical music film; and then a feature film. I also went on to do some path breaking work in patenting some technology in India and United States.

What am I? I would say that I stand for passion, because that is what drives me to do anything. I feel that somehow I have the passion to see anything that I take up.

**What is your message to our readers?**

Most people think that social work is giving some money, or supporting an organisation financially. Social work is lot more than that. Everybody has some skill and talent to give by which the social sector can be enriched. It requires a little bit of time from everybody. If they can give that little bit of time—it can be one off, or an interaction with a person on an occasion that requires it. I think time more than anything else is what is required from everybody. I hope they give that!



## Editorial

Latha Suresh  
Marie Banu