

# Conversations Today

*Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises*

Volume 1 | Issue 1 | August 2013 | 12 Pages | For Free Circulation Only | [www.msdsrtrust.org](http://www.msdsrtrust.org)



Photo: Marie Banu

## Cover Story - Pg 6 A Different Side

**Gandhi Study Centre - unearthing the lesser-known facts of Mahatma in Tamil Nadu**



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



### Alumni Talk Pg 3

**Social Entrepreneur from  
Goalpara makes it to Oxford**  
Manjit Nath and his attempts in  
launching community based  
initiatives in Assam



### Profile Pg 9

**Dharma sans/without dharma**  
Aseema Trust's and their efforts  
in bridging the artistic divide with  
Gandhian values



### Chit Chat Pg 12

**Not finding time is a myth;  
finding time is reality!**  
An exclusive interview with  
Smt. Qudsia Gandhi IAS



## From the Editor

Dear Friend,

For many in India, August 15, 1947 was the first day in a long time in which they could breathe freely. It was the day our country was handed back to our people by the British after nearly 200 years.

This month, as we celebrate India's Independence Day, let us remember our freedom fighters who struggled for independence and the thousands who sacrificed their lives for this motherland. It is the day to remind ourselves of the cost of freedom and how important it is to keep it alive.

Mahatma Gandhi was the spine and brain behind the Indian independence struggle. He promoted Non-violence or *Ahimsa*, and his words of wisdom were followed by almost every Indian of that age. This month, *Conversations Today* features Gandhi Study Centre as the cover story and shares the lesser known facts of Mahatma in Tamil Nadu.

We hope the changemakers featured in this publication inspire you.

Jai hind!

Marie Banu

# Struggles of our Life

Once upon a time a daughter complained to her father that her life was miserable and that she didn't know how she was going to make it. She was tired of fighting and struggling all the time. It seemed just as one problem was solved, another one soon followed. Her father, a chef, took her to the kitchen. He filled three pots with water and placed each on a high fire.

Once the three pots began to boil, he placed potatoes in one pot, eggs in the second pot and ground coffee beans in the third pot. He then let them sit and boil, without saying a word to his daughter. The daughter, moaned and impatiently waited, wondering what he was doing. After twenty minutes he turned off the burners. He took the potatoes out of the pot and placed them in a bowl. He pulled the eggs out and placed them in a bowl. He then ladled the coffee out and placed it in a cup.

Turning to her, he asked, "Daughter, what do you see?"



"Potatoes, eggs and coffee," she hastily replied.

"Look closer," he said, "and touch the potatoes." She did and noted that they were soft.

He then asked her to take an egg and break it. After pulling off the shell, she observed the hard-boiled egg.

Finally, he asked her to sip the coffee. Its rich aroma brought a smile to her face.

"Father, what does this mean?" she asked.

He then explained that the potatoes, the eggs and coffee beans had each

faced the same adversity-the boiling water. However, each one reacted differently. The potato went in strong, hard and unrelenting, but in boiling water, it became soft and weak. The egg was fragile, with the thin outer shell protecting its liquid interior until it was put in the boiling water. Then the inside of the egg became hard. However, the ground coffee beans were unique. After they were exposed to the boiling water, they changed the water and created something new.

"Which one are you?" he asked his daughter. "When adversity knocks on your door, how do you respond? Are you a potato, an egg, or a coffee bean?"

Moral: In life, things happen around us, things happen to us, but the only thing that truly matters is how you choose to react to it and what you make out of it. Life is all about leaning, adopting and converting all the struggles that we experience into something positive.

—Source: [moralstories.org](http://moralstories.org)

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

  
Oriental Cuisines Pvt. Ltd.

Head to our restaurants this season and  
be overwhelmed by the special festive menus.

Benjarong: TTK Road 24322640/ 42110061 | China Town: Cathedral Road 28112246 | Citi Center 43533582  
Copper Chimney: Cathedral Road 28115770 | Citi Center 43533582 | Cream Centre: R. A. Puram 42815777  
Nungambakkam 43561777 | Enté Keralam: Poes Garden 42328585 | Kokum: MRC Nagar 42185462  
Anna Nagar 43500181 | Zara: Cathedral Road 28111462 | Anna International Airport 22560779



## Social Entrepreneur from Goalpara makes it to Oxford

**L**ittle did Manjit Nath know that a public library started in memoriam of his father at his native village Agia, would culminate into a whirlwind of social change. Driven by his father's life-long passion for books and a dream to start a community library, Nath's entrepreneurial streak combined with his father's bibliophilic inclinations proved a perfect combination for the upliftment of 27,000 people from ten Gaon panchayats, with the inauguration of the 'Maheswar Nath Memorial Library' on 1st June, 2009.

Sharing the dismal state of the reading habit in the village, he says, "There wasn't even a single school library then. It was a completely new concept, so everyone looked at with doubt and skepticism. But, we slowly began making it more people friendly by subscribing to 4 to 5 regional magazines; children enjoyed the colour and the cheer of storybooks."

But, the turning point came when the library decided to focus on community-based initiatives. "We felt the library created a group of book-lovers of all ages and their help could be of use to help the village community through various issues. So, we started with small projects like conservation and cleanups of the rivers nearby, cleanliness initiatives and so on," he adds.

Thus, the idea of a trust took shape. With the objective of Encourage|Enable|Evolve, MN Memorial Trust ([www.mnmtrust.org](http://www.mnmtrust.org)) was established subsequently for which Manjit received appreciation letter from the Chief Minister of Assam and was categorically featured in The Assam Tribune. "After converting the library into a non-profit trust, I was confused at the direction it was taking and unaware of the scale of running the trust. I wanted to face these worries head-on and decided to enroll in CSIM Hyderabad's certificate course in Social entrepreneurship. The basics of running an organization – from preparing annual reports and accounts to developing communication skills and networking helped me understand what goes into a non-profit better," says Manjit.

Proving to be a major boost, the experience of running the library helped Manjit initiate the first ever free career counseling portal ([www.xomidhan.org](http://www.xomidhan.org)) of Northeast India with his college senior from NIT Durgapur. 'Xomidhan' has catered to the needs of more than 900 students in the last 3.4 years with a volunteer counselor base of 330 subject matter experts drawn from a range of academic and industrial backgrounds. "When students want to go for different options other than the usual engineering or medicine courses, we thought of bringing in people who are achievers in their respective fields to counsel them and answer their queries. People from over 33 disciplines have volunteered, and Xomidhan as such, has a core team of 10 people. Xomidhan, I feel, is a real solution of sorts for the current generation, we have the knowledge to connect, share and



empower each other through this concept," says Manjit who has also travelled across India as a facilitator of Tata Jagriti Yatra with the mission to awaken the entrepreneurial spirit of the Indian youth.

Manjit has always been a socially aware individual, conscious of the societal and cultural impact of Assam's communities on the country, specifically through language. After completing his schooling from an Assamese medium Government school at Agia, Manjit first amalgamated his language skills with his technology background when he contributed to the Language Interface Pack (LIP) development of Microsoft's Windows OS and Ms-Office. His efforts with e-Jonaki-jug ([www.ejonakijug.org](http://www.ejonakijug.org)) and Xahitya ([www.xahitya.org](http://www.xahitya.org)) usher a new era of Assamese Unicode e-literature among the netizens. The effort of team Xahitya to popularize the Assamese language via a Facebook group called 'Axomiyat Kotha Batora' was commended by various social media experts of Northeast India region.

Manjit has therefore, been a force to be reckoned with it when it comes to making a change from outside the government. But ask him about the power of NGOs in creating change, and he believes it has its shortcomings. "I feel when social organizations try to accomplish

everything including Government's responsibilities, the outcome is not fruitful always. For example, under e-Jonaki-Jug initiative, we appealed to Unicode Consortium for two years to give independent status to Assamese language; but not much success until Govt. of Assam intervened. People ask me to replicate my home library model across Assam. But, I don't find this as attractive as the option of tweaking the policy for the Government's already existing Rural Library program," expresses Manjit.

The search for an alternate solution takes Manjit to some new found knowledge and a tough decision to go back to student life again. In India, policymaking is mainly controlled by the officers of administrative role, be it in central or state level. But lack of interest and domain knowledge of these seasoned administrators result in biased perspectives and outsourcing most of the activities to foreign consultancy firms. But the scenario will not be the same in coming years with more and more people like Manjit opting for Public Policy courses from reputed universities like Oxford.

"Hardly any Indian universities provide a Masters course in Public Policy, and Oxford's Blavatnik School of Government is the major policy school in Europe. Of course, the decision is a bit difficult when

you are turning 29 and most of your friends are fathers. But studying in Oxford has been a long cherished dream since childhood," beams Manjit, who is vocal about his childhood experiences surrounding insurgency and his utmost love for Northeast India.

When asked about the reason behind leaving a lucrative job in Microsoft and coming back to Northeast India, Manjit expressed his desire to work in redefining the Look-East policy of Government of India. Northeast should contribute to 25 percent of India's total foreign trade and commerce, says Manjit, who has also been conferred with prestigious 'Young Engineer Award' and 'E-Northeast award-2011'.

Manjit's mother, Hiran Prova Devi who is a school teacher tells us that she is happy to see her son finally pursue his education. "For the last 2 years, he has been trying to convince me that he would get into world's top five universities one day. I was unsure how much to believe him, but I prayed to God everyday so that my son gets success," says Hiran, who is also the chief librarian of MN Memorial Library.

The first person from Northeast India to be admitted into the newly opened policy school of Oxford and to also be awarded with the highly competitive BSG-UNIV scholarship, Manjit Nath is elated at the prospect of being an Oxfordian.

But, does this new move indicate the end of a social entrepreneur?

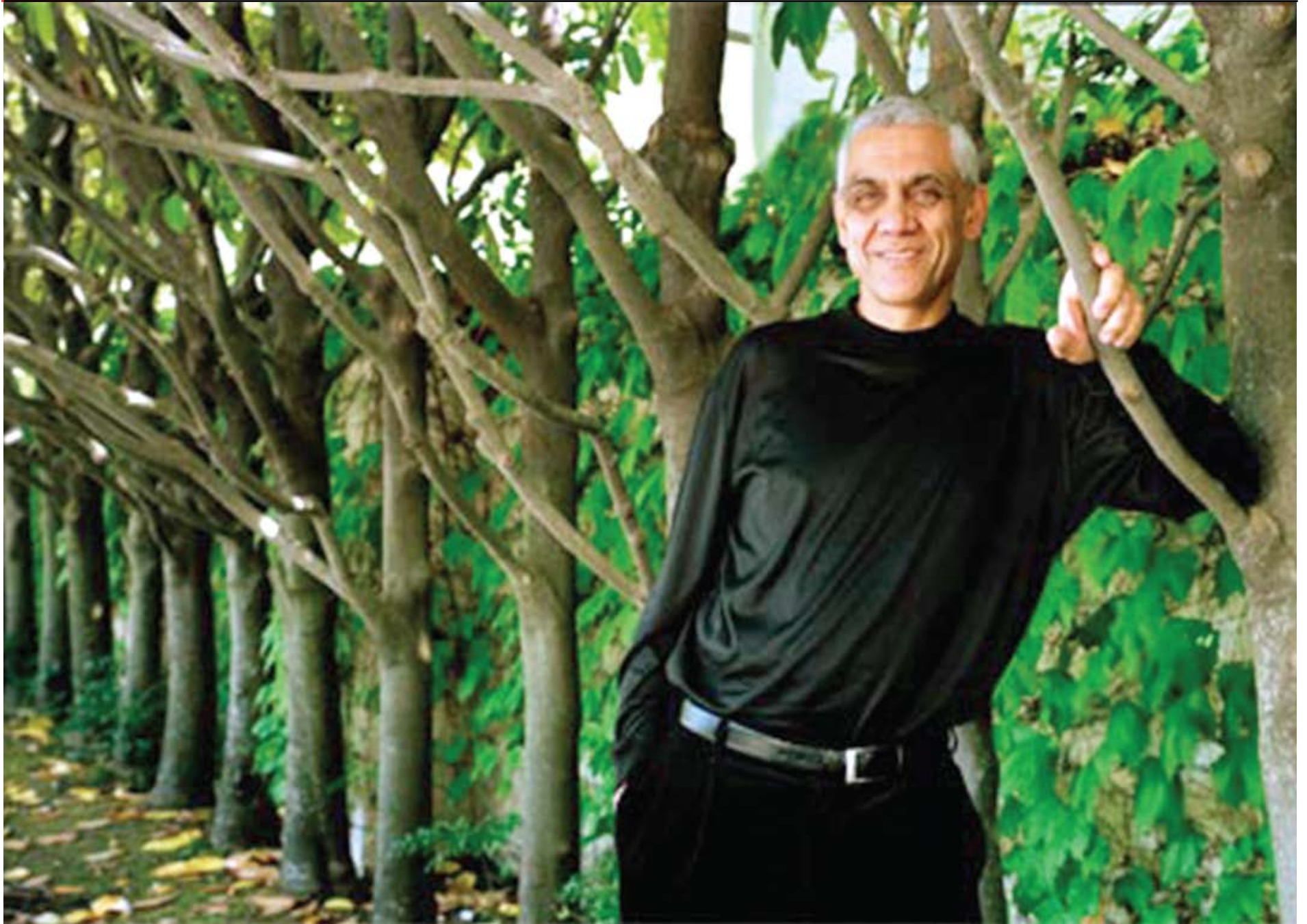
"I don't feel so. I hope I will learn a lot of things which I can take back to the Indian government. The concept of the government entrepreneur is emerging and I wish every government department begins to function as a social enterprise," says Manjit.

An ardent advocate of using technology for good governance, Manjit believes that the policies of the government like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan lacks systematic implementation and needs a technological revamp. "In 4 to 5 years, the government will change the way it looks at people's identities – a progressive approach that exploits the best scientific knowledge out there will prevail," says a confident Majith adding, "AADHAAR, the much debated about universal ID system is a testimony to this revolution, but what about the many concerns regarding its authenticity and loopholes? I think we're reading too much into it, everything has its initial advantages and disadvantages. If we don't experiment with the concept of technology influencing public policy right now, when will we?"

And that's exactly what Nath has in mind when he attends Oxford this September. "I'm set on the idea of an e-government. It can change the way citizens interact with the government for the better. Keeping at it and developing a model currently, I hope the idea comes to fruition," he signs off.

— Pranjal Kalita & Divya Karthikeyan





## Nine former Indian head honchos who are changing the world of social entrepreneurship

**Y**ou know the drill. Work hard, become a millionaire or billionaire, and now that you have it all, why not give most of it away to make the world a better place. It happens to the uber-rich including the likes of Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, Michael Dell and Pierre Omidyar. Once you make that difficult climb on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, self-actualization becomes the final frontier. It combines new challenges with the urge to make the world a better place.

At SocialStory we have scoured the universe of Indian corporate bigwigs who have scaled the heights of their chosen worlds and have now decided to make the switch to the world of philanthropy. We have left out the likes of Azim Premji and Sunil Bharti Mittal because our primary criterion is that they should have switched to the philanthropic role full-time. Read on

to find out more about these ex-corporate heroes who have now assumed avatars of social investors and social entrepreneurs.

**1) T.V. Mohandas Pai, 'non' co-founder of Infosys who nearly became CEO of the IT behemoth is now investor in social VC firm.**

Former CFO of Infosys, Pai is no stranger to philanthropy. He was a seed

investor in mid-day school meal program 'AkshayaPatra Foundation' and has always been an outstanding contributor to society winning the Forbes philanthropy award in 2012. AkshayaPatra founded in 2000 is currently the world's largest mid-day meal program for school children, feeding 1.3 million kids daily in 8,500 government schools, across nine Indian states.

But his biggest bet in social impact came earlier this year when he joined Ranjan Pai (no relative of his) from the Manipal Group and Silicon Valley legend Vinod Khosla in investing in Unitus Seed Fund. "India's biggest challenges are in the BOP (bottom of the pyramid). Government-led solutions have failed to address this fully over the last 65 years due to bad design, inadequate execution and corruption. It is

***AkshayaPatra founded in 2000 is currently the world's largest mid-day meal program for school children, feeding 1.3 million kids daily in 8,500 government schools, across nine Indian states.***



time to have new engines of execution and therefore market mechanisms in the form of social enterprises, many with a profit motive, that's what is needed to tackle this," said Pai about the investment.

Among his other philanthropic pursuits are an attempt to make Bangalore a better place to live through the Bangalore Political Action Committee (BPAC), which he co-founded with other Bangalore luminaries like Kiran Mazumdar Shaw and Harish Bijoor. He also involves himself actively doing various charitable activities in Mangalore, where he hails from originally.

### **2) Vinod Khosla, billionaire investor and Silicon Valley veteran places bets on impact investing and technology for social impact:**

Having been an early stage investor in search giant Google, you could say that Khosla has an eye for big-ticket investments. In the recent past he has been investing in social ventures from money forked out of his own pocket. Perhaps his most famous investment in India was his grant to SKS Microfinance when it was still a non-profit, which he then followed up with an equity infusion, after it turned for-profit. Since then Khosla has set up Khosla Impact, Khosla Labs and is also one of the investors in Unitus Seed Fund. Some of the investments made from Khosla Impact include Babajob, Driptech, Eyenetra and Embrace.

In 2011, he pledged half of his then estimated fortune of \$1.4 to charity, through the 'Giving pledge, an initiative started by Warren Buffett and Bill Gates.

### **3) Gururaj Deshpande, tech innovator turned grant-giver.**

Sycamore Networks founder Deshpande, at one time was the richest Indian in the world, so the US-based entrepreneur is flush with the green stuff. Deshpande does most of his social entrepreneurship related work through the Deshpande Foundation. The foundation is based in the US and India has a plethora of activities.

The Deshpande Innovation Network (DeshINet) is a network of universities that encourages innovation, supports entrepreneurship and accelerates the creation of social enterprises that have market impact. The Deshpande Foundation in India, uses a 'bottom-up' approach to build scalable solutions, and is attempting to create a mini-Silicon Valley using the 'Sandbox' approach in Hubli, Karnataka.

The Deshpande Center for Technological Innovation (Deshpande Center) was established at the MIT School of Engineering in 2002 to increase the impact of MIT technologies in the marketplace. To date, the Deshpande Center has funded more than 90 projects, with over \$11 million in grants. The 26 ventures that have been spun off into commercial ventures have collectively raised over \$350 million externally. Deshpande is the only Indian appointed by US president Barack Obama to the co-chairmanship of the National Advisory Council on Innovation and

Entrepreneurship, a group established to support the US President's innovation strategy.

### **4) Gaurav Shah, investment banker turned social investor.**

Shah is the founder CEO of Singapore-based investment-bank DeGroup DeConseil. Two years back, Shah decided to use a novel approach to venture investing by starting a fund focused on Indian social enterprises called India Social Fund (ISF). Shah is different because he's not raising his money through the usual pension or college endowment funds but through corporate donations. His plan was to raise Rs 25 crore at that time. For ISF social comes before returns and therefore expects to generate lower returns from its investments. It will seek returns of 15-18 per cent, much lower than the 25-30 per cent that most venture capital firms expect.

ISF will invest Rs 50 lakh on an average, in social enterprises that aim to improve the lives of the poor, and in patented and mass-market technologies or innovations by scientists outside government institutions. Example: ISF is backing a

innovative business strategy, helped HCL Technologies go from \$700 million to a \$4.5 billion company.

After cashing in on his stake in HCL (Rs 43 crore in 2010 and 133.58 crore in 2012) and exiting the company he has been devoting himself fully to his non-profit Sampark Foundation, which he established in 2004. He was itching for a full-time role way back in 2005, but being offered CEO's job at HCL meant that he had postpone his plans: now he's ready. Sampark wants to create a million smiles through work in livelihoods, education, climate sustainability and entrepreneurship.

His work has earned him a mention in '48 Heroes of Philanthropy List 2013', an initiative from business magazine Forbes.

### **7) Ashish Dhawan: Indian PE pioneer, currently on a path to reform India's educational system.**

When Dhawan was 30 he started private equity firm ChyrsCapital. But he promised himself that he embark on a second career before he turned 45. He made good on that promise when he started Central Square

million as part of the verdict by the US department of justice. But he most certainly will be remembered for his tremendous charitable efforts in the years to come. A self-made billionaire, who is media shy, Dikshit set up the Kusuma Trust UK (Kusuma), an independent grant-making organization in 2008 that all its work in India.

The areas that the Kusuma Trust focuses on are education and life opportunities for disadvantaged children and young people. It also supports innovation, new developments in higher education and training and advocacy. Dikshit's generosity, has helped spawn many stellar non-profit organizations, including Bangalore-based Centre for Internet and Society, an organization that has been doing exceptional work in research and advocacy.

Other partners that Kusuma supports are Sadhana, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, the Juvenile Justice Department and UNICEF, the Kusuma Seva project.

Their list of grantees can be read at [www.kusumatrust.org/funding/grantees](http://www.kusumatrust.org/funding/grantees).

***Screwvala, MD of Walt Disney, is one India's best known media barons believes in investing both his time and money into social enterprises that have potential for impact.***

scientist of a vehicle exhaust system that would completely eliminate particles emitted from cars. Another investment was in Shine Retail, which hires a team of shoeshine boys and put places them in places like airports. Their income has apparently gone up from Rs 3,000 to Rs 7,000 per month.

### **5) Ronnie Screwvala, media tycoon with a inclination to impact rural India positively.**

Screwvala, MD of Walt Disney, is one India's best known media barons believes in investing both his time and money into social enterprises that have potential for impact. He may have money to burn- he cashed in on 50 per cent stake sold to Walt Disney for Rs 2,000 crore- but time comes at a premium, especially when he logs in 70 hours at Walt Disney.

Screwvala deploys his capital through Swades Foundation, which invests in rural development, and has a team of about 200. The areas of their work include water and sanitation, livelihoods, agriculture, health and education. Their goal? Impact the lives of one million people in rural India by 2017. His foundation, which has a capital outlay of Rs 1,000 crore, over the next five years is supported by Unilazer Ventures, a company that Screwvala founded and supports with his own funds.

### **6) Vineet Nayar, the HCL man who made his company respected and feared now embarks on a second journey:**

Nayar, is a doyen in the Indian IT services industry, his philosophy of putting employees ahead of customers and

Foundation in 2012.

Dhawan was already on the boards of not-for-profits in the education sector, like Teach For India, Centre for Civil Society, Janaagraha and GiveLife, so he wasn't a complete greenhorn when he decided to turn his eye to the education sector. The education sector has always been close to his heart. He won a best teacher award when he was in school and also used to teach low-income children in the Harlem area in New York.

Dhawan's ambition is not just invest in the education sector but to revolutionize it. CSF's investment philosophy is two-fold: one, make seed-stage investments in non-profit education startups, and secondly boost research and advocacy efforts to better understand the education sector. In 2012 he was one of the winners at the Forbes India '2012 Philanthropy Awards'.

CSF already has made a few investments: 3.2.1 Schools is a network of affordable schools, Mindspark Learning Centers, offers blended learning for math and hindi, India School Leadership Institute (ILSI), is a programme for training existing and aspiring school principals and Akanksha, is a network of 13 high performing schools in Mumbai and Pune.

### **8) Anurag Dikshit, co-founder PartyGaming, shy multi-billionaire using the power of grants to make the world a better place.**

Dikshit maybe infamous for having avoided jail time while pleading guilty to having violated US laws through his company Partygaming and forfeiting \$300

### **9) Madan Padaki, successful entrepreneur turned social entrepreneur.**

Padaki co-founded MeritTrac in 2000, and turned it into one of India's most most successful training and assessment companies. After Manipal Education bought a 70 per cent stake in MeritTrac, he continued to manage the company but relinquished his role in April 2013. Now he has decided that he wants to change the face of rural entrepreneurial ecosystem through Head Held High, a social enterprise focused on villages.

Padaki's eyes light up every time he talks about his latest project HHH, where he first started as a mentor and investor, but then decided to become on a full-time role because he saw the tremendous potential the startup had. He's proud of the company's progress so far. The first of which was to take a bunch of uneducated youth, put them through a rigorous 12-month training, through their subsidiary Village BPO Pvt. Ltd and turning them into white-collar BPO employees servicing MNCs.

He believes he's just begun and has a great big plan to change the face of rural India through entrepreneurship. Padaki has even coined a term for it: 'rubanomics', a combination of rural plus urbans and economics. His goal for HHH is to make a hub for all village entrepreneurs, create employment opportunities for rural youth and boost trade in villages.

—Nelson Moses

*This article was first published at [www.social.yourstory.in](http://www.social.yourstory.in).*



# A Different Side

Gandhi Study Centre in Chennai has embarked on unearthing the lesser-known facts surrounding the travels of the Mahatma in Tamil Nadu.

A team from the Gandhi Study Centre has embarked on unearthing the lesser-known facts surrounding the travels of the Mahatma in Tamil Nadu.

While it's common knowledge that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi made nearly 20 trips to Tamil Nadu between 1896 and 1946, what most people of Tamil Nadu aren't aware of, is the fact that one of these trips included a trip to an orphanage in Poonamallee. It was here that the Mahatma spent a great deal of his time with volunteers and children, actively promoting social progress and through this, a freedom struggle of sorts. It was a freedom struggle that wasn't as simplistic or restricted to winning independence from the English; neither was it a freedom struggle that could be brought about by arms. Like Gandhi once said, it was a struggle that had to be approached from the bottom up — a freedom from within.

In an attempt to chronicle Gandhi's many trysts with Tamil Nadu, a team from the Gandhi Study Centre has embarked on a project that aims to bring out Gandhi's relationship with Tamil Nadu. "Right from his days in South Africa, Gandhi-ji had great respect for Tamil Nadu, and nothing but admiration for its people," says A Annamalai, Director, Gandhi Study Centre, who heads this project. "Not many are aware that Gandhi actually visited this State quite frequently," Annamalai continues, "Our project aims to tell the people of this nation and the State, just that." On its last leg now, the research project, carried out by nine members of the Gandhi Study Centre — Mohan, Vitranarayanan, Shivakumar, Nithyanandam, Shivalingam, Dr Prema, Dr Devadutta, Saravanan and Annamalai himself — will be ready this Gandhi Jayanthi. However, Annamalai is more than eager to give us at *Conversations Today*, a preview of what the team's work is all about.

"At a basic level, our work comprised of a great deal of information gathering," he says, "A lot of information about Gandhi-ji himself, is available at the Gandhi Museum in Madurai. But what aren't as ubiquitous, are his journeys to Tamil Nadu and his interactions with our people." In fact, it is this missing link that has now become the focus of the study carried out by the Gandhi Study Centre, and Annamalai. "Near Palani, there lies a village called Vaneer Valasu. You probably won't even find it on the map today," says Annamalai, narrating yet another anecdote from Gandhi's



Photos: Marie Banu

journeys in Tamil Nadu. "During the freedom struggle, the Mahatma wanted to visit this village, which didn't have a road by way of which one could access it. So, just when Gandhi began to have second thoughts about stopping by, the villagers of Vaneer Valasu started doing something unheard of before. Overnight, the village-folk lay a brand new road, all by themselves; just so that they would have the honour of hosting the Mahatma." In fact, when the Gandhi Study Centre team visited the place, the team was more than surprised to even find a little monument that marked Gandhi's visit to the tiny little hamlet. "Not many people know about such little things," says Annamalai.

When the compilation of the study is expected to be completed in two months from now, be ready to view its

presentation like never before. According to Annamalai, an audio-visual avatar for the presentation of the documentary is currently being worked on. "We are planning on having a map of Tamil Nadu that will represent pictorially, the areas that Gandhi visited." Through the course of its research, the team made use of audio-visual equipment to record, holistically, every tiny bit of information that the study came across.

***He was the kind of person who could bring about a sense of unity between a commoner and a barrister. That was what made Gandhi special: simply the fact that he united people, united communities.***

"In a way, this is our gift to Gandhi-ji for the great man that he is. Believe it or not, even today, the people of Vaneer Valasu respect his memory in a manner that is unheard of before. Such is the greatness and enigma of the man, even today," Annamalai says.

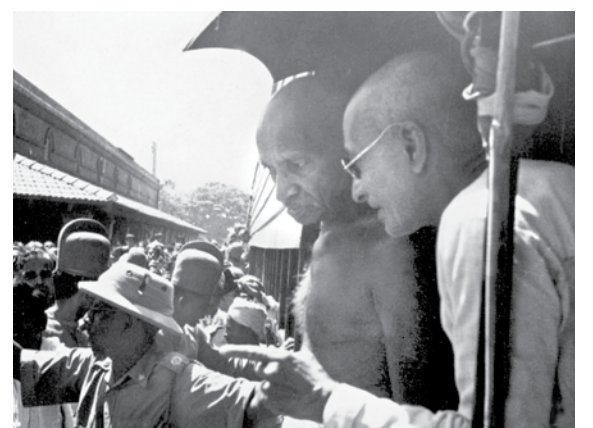
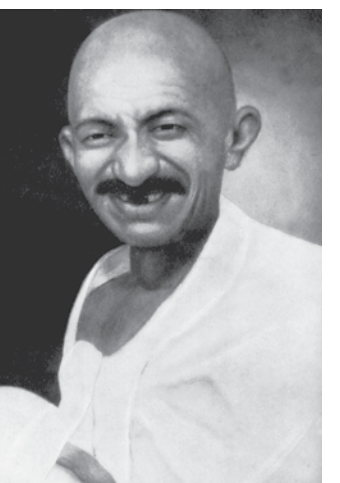
This Independence Day, it is perhaps apt that Gandhi's memory be brought to the fore. For were it not for his personal struggle for freedom, the very term

'freedom' would in all probability, be

missing from our vocabulary. "In fact, that is pretty much what our study also focuses on: Gandhi's approach to gaining freedom — through social progress," says Annamalai, echoing the effectiveness of Gandhi's famed Bottom-up approach to gaining freedom. Through the documentation of the Gandhi Study Centre, the people of this nation are also given the opportunity to learn the lesser-known facets of this bottom-up approach, in addition to imbibing those qualities of the great leader that made him the persona that he is today. "His simplicity, fearlessness and honesty are certainly qualities to emulate. These are definitely facets of his personality that the entire nation could do with a bit of," says Annamalai. Needless to say, the other aspect of Gandhi's that world leaders would do

well to emulate Annamalai feels, was the sense of unity he brought about through his fight for freedom. "He was the kind of person who could bring about a sense of unity between a commoner and a barrister," he says, "That was what made Gandhi special: simply the fact that he united people, united communities."

This Independence Day, before we decide to be just a bit more patriotic than we are on most days, it would definitely be worth our while to remember with love and pride, the one man who fought so that we may be free. No doubt, Mahatma Gandhi is the reason we experience freedom today. Such documentation of a lesser-known side to his work, one hopes, will go a long way in infusing a greater sense of pride in all Indians, especially those who live in the State.







## Prakrut: A student initiative for eco-conservation

“How many tonnes of garbage does Bangalore generate every day? How many vehicles ply on Bangalore roads? How many lakes existed in 1961 and how many lakes exist today in Bangalore?”

These were some of the interesting questions that were posed to the teeming audience at PRAKRUT, an interactive exhibition on eco-conservation, organized by the students of the 14th Batch of CSIM Bangalore, at Jyothi Nivas College, on 6th August 2013. The exhibition was organized as part of Manrita, the Social Sciences Symposium of the college.

Rapid increase in population, unplanned development, a phenomenal rise in the number of vehicles on the roads, and indifferent local authorities, are putting huge pressure on Bangalore's fragile Ecology. The main focus of PRAKRUT was to

1. Sensitise and make the students of Jyothi Nivas College aware on the daily damage that is being caused to the environment.
2. How they can play a role in driving conservation in their day to day activities.
3. Create a platform for select NGOs who work in the areas of recycling and conservation, and to showcase both their products as well as philosophy.

The day long exhibition saw a large number of students visiting the NGO stalls participating in the event, each of which had unique solutions and products to display to promote eco-conservation.

While the Greenpeace stall advocated use of alternate energy in lieu of fossil fuels, Ajji Mane showcased how daily trash could be easily recycled into items of daily use like bags, table coasters, etc. Daily Dump showed how simple and easy it was to create compost at home while Vriksh showcased and explained their organic products. Eco-watch championed the need to plant more trees by giving away free saplings, and KL Pavithra showed how to create trendy fashion accessories by using waste paper. The publications of Karnataka Rajya Vignana Parishath aimed at creating a scientific temper among students, were on display and sale.

Hundreds of visiting students and teachers also articulated a personal “Green Pledge” on a specially created stage. They pledged to save water, to switch off lights, to keep the city litter free, and to spread awareness about saving the environment. This clearly showed that the exhibition and the participating NGOs had touched the right chord with the students.

At the end of a highly engaging and fun filled day, it was evident that the seed of Eco conservation that had been planted in the minds of these students will surely grow over time and hopefully, the ecology of Bangalore would be in safe hands.

—Sreekrishnan M V

## Editorial

Latha Suresh  
Marie Banu



# Dharma sans/without dharma



Today, an unattached world is a laughable and preposterous concept, and time and time again the corporate world reiterates for us the ease and comforts of complying with market forces. The recent catastrophe of the Rana Plaza collapse in Dhaka has prompted a global discussion on working conditions and wage payments of and to sweatshop workers around the world, and the once simple idea of mass production and consumption faces ethical hurdles today.

A former educator by profession and a teacher at heart, Dr. VR Devika formed the Aseema Trust in 1998 to bring together art and education through puppetry, dance, theatre and music, and the Trust has evolved to accommodate Gandhian values through various activities. Lectures aside, Dr. Devika has worked towards emphasising the spirit of self-reliance free from market forces as evident in Gandhi's teachings. "Driven by Gandhi's idea of education and economics, I decided to propagate the activity that would demonstrate independent, dharmic way of production and imbibe knowledge in *charkha* spinning. The activity makes you re-examine dignity of labour and respect for your country's culture."

Of the many awards and accolades in her kitty, her most significant are a honorary citizenship from the Governor



of Maryland during her participation in US State Department's International Visitor Leadership programme in the US; British Council's Charles Wallace Award for Arts in Education in UK; Kalasevabharathi award from Bharath Kalachar for contributions to arts and education; a lifetime achievement award from the Amir Khusro music academy; and Vocational Excellence Awards from Rotary clubs. Her work has taken her to interact and deliver lectures to students of various schools in the city. She has also extensively travelled for conferences and lectures in Cambodia, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and Sri Lanka.

Dr. Devika's views on consumerism strike strong, with the current economic scenario of our country often a theme. "Today, we spend money on something

that gratifies us for a few minutes. But, do we know what we're spending our money on? Toxicity of a product? Air in a chips packet? Are we ensuring dignity of labour? But, the finished product of a *charkha* is more than just a loin cloth, it's a symbol of self-reliance and the glorious heritage of Indian handloom," she explains.

Her tryst with education can be summed up simply as fate's will to guide her passion of teaching. On her arrival to Mysore in 1974, her application for a Master's program at Madras University did not materialise, but an opportunity to work as a teacher at an upcoming school arose. Falling head over heels in love with teaching, she made the choice to be in education forever. "Once I was smitten by the field, I made sure that even when I left teaching as a regular job, I would find ways and means of working for children. One of my student's parents were dance teachers, and I was wondering how I could use *Bhartanatyam* as a tool for education," she says. Post her teaching stint at PS Senior Secondary School in Chennai, she noticed a considerable amount of myths on rural performing arts amongst cityfolk and decided to move in the direction of awareness of rural arts. "Due to the urban-rural disconnect, there are bound to be misconceptions. So, I joined as Director of Education at Dakshin Chitra, wrote columns, and choreographed performances to help

bridge this divide and promote the rural arts using story-telling mediums such as puppetry and dance. Dr. Deborah Thiagarajan, the current art and culture historian for Dakshin Chitra, and I then joined hands to draft a proposal to the Ford Foundation for an organisation dedicated towards reinterpreting rural art for the urban audience. So after my 11 years with Dakshin Chitra and Madras Craft Foundation, Aseema Trust gained shape and I decided to focus my time towards addressing and bridging the artistic divide with Gandhian values."

Making time for Dakshin Chitra and the Madras Craft Foundation whenever possible, Dr. Devika began studying Gandhi's philosophies and education policies. "I wanted to see how relevant it was in today's world, and well, we're currently going in the opposite direction. Gandhiji emphasised on the importance of earning and learning from class one, examining facts and concepts through one's own unique perception and consuming only Indian products." Wildly successful in her interactions with children, she is overjoyed at the children's fascination with the *charkha*. "The *charkha* is a looking glass for the ideal Indian country. It's a symbol of rich history and culture, spans a vast geography, and tells us the story of the true Indian spirit of economics, and children bumble with questions every time. I also take the time to tell them that of the 10 clothes they buy throughout the year, at least two should be handloom. It's okay if I reach out to only 5 from a group of 100; I deem even that a success."

Five important ideas of Gandhian Philosophy that Dr. Devika feels should be lived by are: Examine everything through different angles; Avoid all intoxication; Respect all Indian languages; use and buy nature friendly and indigenous products; and bring in *dharma* and truth in our daily lives. Talking about the relevancy of Gandhian philosophy she says, "It's a very foolish idea to even think Gandhi's philosophies would be relevant today. It's very contextual—the application. But in a way, it is possible. I feel Gandhi was extremely clever when he assessed the possibility of *satyagraha* protests getting violent, hence the *charkha*. It is a form of self-rule, and symbolises ultimate *swaraj*. Today we're in a crisis, because the more technologically dependent we become, the more we are at risk. We call ourselves modern for harnessing atomic power when we can simply harness solar power. But, the political power struggle is taking its toll on power as a result, apart from other issues."

Let go of this temporary power and everything is likely to fall into place," she signs off.

—Divya Karthikeyan



# Conversations with Shri Ramana Maharishi

**S**ri Bhagavan explained to a retired Judge of the High Court some points in the Upadesa Saram as follows:-

1. Meditation should remain unbroken as a current. If unbroken it is called samadhi or Kundalini sakti.
2. The mind may be latent and merge in the Self; it must necessarily rise up again; after it rises up one finds oneself only as ever before. For in this state the mental predispositions are present there in latent form to re-manifest under favourable conditions.
3. Again the mind activities can be completely destroyed. This differs from the former mind, for here the attachment is lost, never to reappear. Even though the man sees the

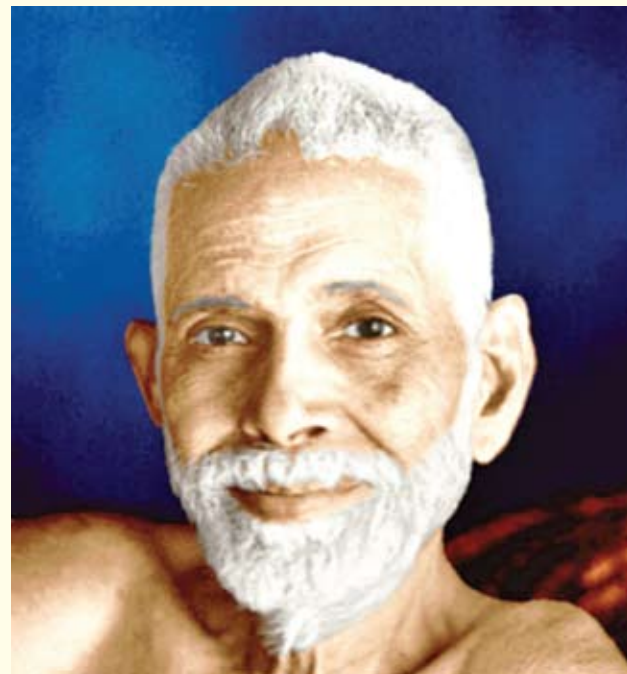
world after he has been in the samadhi state, the world will be taken only at its worth, that is to say it is the phenomenon of the One Reality. The True Being can be realised only in samadhi; what was then is also now. Otherwise it cannot be Reality or Ever-present Being. What was in samadhi is here and now too. Hold it and it is your natural condition of Being. Samadhi practice must lead to it. Otherwise how can nirvikalpa samadhi be of any use in which a man remains as a log of wood? He must necessarily rise up from it sometime or other and face the world. But in sahaja samadhi he remains unaffected by the world.

So many pictures pass over the cinema screen: fire burns away everything; water drenches all; but the screen remains unaffected. The scenes are only phenomena which pass away leaving the screen as it was. Similarly the world phenomena simply pass on before the Jnani, leaving him unaffected.

You may say that people find pain or pleasure in worldly phenomena. It is owing to superimposition. This must not happen. With this end in view practice is made.

Practice lies in one of the two courses: devotion or knowledge. Even these are not the goals. Samadhi must be gained; it must be continuously practised until sahaja samadhi results. Then there remains nothing more to do.

—Excerpted from Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi



## Belongingness Dimensions – Learning and Development

**L**earning and Development is one of the key sustainability dimensions of the social organization. This is also the compromised dimension in many social organizations which are dependent on funding. There is an assumption that every penny has to be saved and therefore any wasteful expenditure is not appreciated. Many a time learning and development is termed to be the last priority and a wasteful expenditure until it directly relates to the work, or is a mandatory proposition from the funding agencies. The other challenges are that being a social organization there is an unsaid expectation that learning and development too have to be charity work that the rest of the society should offer to the members of the organization. Only when it comes with that tag the time, energy and effort spent by the members are justified.

*A hard-working, young man was engaged to fell trees in a forest. The first day, he felled seven trees in eight hours. The next day, he managed to fell only five, though he worked eight hours. The third day, he felled only three trees. The fourth day the number of trees felled came down to one. Puzzled by his failing performance, he sought his supervisor's advice, the supervisor asked, "When was the last time you sharpened your axe?"*

To ensure efficiency and effectiveness the social organizations need to be learning organizations. The question is to decide what kind of learning and development needs to happen.

Social organizations being mediums to reach out to people, people maturity becomes one of the greatest limitations in its efficiency. It is one of the most

important learning and development initiative. The process of addressing maturity enables space for clarification, deepening the perspectives on life and living. It is an assumption many a time that an investment in self-development needs to be done only when people stay for long time and therefore these investments are not a priority in social organizations where the timelines are dependent on the project and funding. But in reality when the timelines are short and budgets are stringent it calls for very high level of maturity to build strong performing teams. Without the willful personal growth organizational maturity cannot be deepened. The organizational maturity is dependent on the people maturity. Their clarity on purpose and process affects the way the organization would progress in its vision and achieve the original intent.

Tapping organizational maturity is an important development activity. Criteria that define the organization have to be identified. This has to be mapped to the organizational values. An evaluation in terms of time, speed, performance, belongingness, conflict resolution, decision making when evaluated will show the way the organization is able to walk on the path of its vision, ensuring integration of values within the system.

Doing a thorough project based competency needs analysis is critical for efficiency of the project. The need analysis is mapped to the competency available in the team as against the requirements of the

project. The gap has to be identified and addressed. Equal priority needs to be given for enhancing the competency right in the beginning of the project. Mostly the pressure to show results on the ground will make this challenging. If the project calls for new recruitment then this

mapping has to be made available so the right people can be selected and deployed in work that they are capable of. In a social organization where passion and vision bring people together, the openness to know what one is capable of and what one needs to build in oneself is important. Interventions and training built on the lines of addressing this gap will be more effective. Therefore

interventions and training cannot be standard modules but has to be customized. They cannot be mere activities that are tied to the budgets available but have to be well thought out and mapped programs.

Many organizations are stuck with training as an activity. Social organizations are also no different. This has to be replaced with learning and development as the focus. There are enough and more methodologies available now to reach the learning to the members of the organization. The knowing – doing gap becomes wider when the impact and evaluation strategies are not built along with the learning strategies. The follow up in any intervention to ensure it is integrated into the person and organization is one of the biggest challenges. The ROI (return on investment) needs to be tapped. If it is treated as a separate activity it is

likely to be dropped. It has to be integrated and addressed as a part of every program design.

Further the creation of a learning environment and culture becomes critical. High priority is given to review of projects in terms of its performance but not so much to the learning that gets captured through the organizational functioning. Every conflict and a problem have the potential opportunity to leave behind learning. This learning orientation has to become a way of life within the organization.

Learning and Development as a HR activity therefore is not a separate stand alone activity that the social organization has a choice to do or not to do. It has to be seen as an integral part of culture building organizational maturity process. This requires continuous interventions that are aligned to every project in the organization that would evolve the people and the organization over a period of time.

### Reflections:

1. What are the learning and development strategies of the organization? To what extent are they aligned to the organizational vision and values?
2. What are the next two years organizational plans and how is the learning plan integrated into it?
3. What methodologies are used to ensure the competency required for the projects is built in the people while executing the project?
4. Where is the organization currently in its maturity process and to what extent is the progress tapped?

— Dr. Kalpana Sampath, PhD





# Finding Families For Children

“We are loved and we are cared for.” This is the message that invariably flows as one walks into Vathsalya Charitable Trust, Bangalore, which is welcomed by smiles of little children here. More comforting and surprising is the voice of its Director, Ms Mary Paul, who is 56 years old. Her voice and looks just don’t go with her age. With a warm smile, she begins to introduce me to the Trust’s work and her association with this institution.

Upon completion of her Masters in Social Work, Mary Paul worked with the Christa Mithra Ashram in Ankola situated in North Canara (coastal belt of Karnataka) for a year. Then, she joined Macmillan in Bangalore as an Editor. “By 1987 I was sure I wanted to get back to Social Work,” she says. This is when all her certificates in Counseling (family and Marriage, career, and addiction) helped identifying the next step. In 1989, the Board of Trustees hired her as the Director of the Vathsalya Charitable Trust that was registered in 1988. “Setting up the infrastructure and starting the work was truly fulfilling,” recalls Mary Paul.

Under her leadership, the Trust initiated a range of programmes for children. The Education Sponsorships for girl children from poor socio economic backgrounds gave them the confidence to work in the area of child care. Adoption programme was launched soon. All programmes at Vathsalya were evolved on a need basis, and so was the adoption programme. The Trust received orphan children through a legal body, who were then placed in families (domestic and international) through the court. “We at Vathsalya believe that every child deserves a permanent loving family of his or her own. From adoption, we forayed into Family Foster Care programme,” she continues.

With things beginning to take a concrete shape, it was time for Mary Paul to take a break. This is when she founded the ‘Kutumba’ in 1991, in Doddagubdi, Bangalore. Kutumba is a rehabilitation centre for physically challenged women from the rural parts of southern India. The centre takes care of all the needs of its residents, including transport facilities to undergo vocational training at different centres like the Association for People with Disability (APD). As she rightly puts it, “Kutumba is a home away from home. The centre is all theirs’ until they are placed in a job, after which they move out.” Soon, the circumstances in the community insisted the need to establish a day care centre for the children in the village.

Whether it was Vathsalya or Kutumba, counseling has been an integral part of the work in both these centres. “Counseling is a very challenging job. Not all individuals are the same; each has his or her own levels of adaptability and openness,” says Mary Paul while elaborating on the need



for counseling for the residents in these centres. Almost a decade after the establishment of Kutumba, Vathsalya’s Board of Trustees wanted her to come back to the Trust and streamline the activities there.

“By 2001 the situations in which the programmes of Vathsalya were planned had changed. New challenges, and along with them new opportunities had opened up,” says Mary Paul, reasoning out the decrease in the number of children available for adoption. She attributes this scenario to two reasons – an increasing number of couples looking at abortion as an option and the government starting its own adoption programme, taking over what NGOs were doing over the decades.

This is when she decided to develop the foster care programme on a full swing. Earlier in the 90s, most of the children were under child care and only 15 percent were placed on foster care. With persistent efforts in the decade after 2001, the situation changed – almost 85 percent of the children were in foster care now. Foster care for more than 1,000 children over the years has been a herculean task. “It has never been easy. However easier is not necessarily

better,” says she immediately, seconding my thoughts.

The year 2005 had a whole new experience in store for this counselor. In the aftermath of Tsunami, she along with two of her colleagues went to Car Nicobar in Andaman Islands to train the heads of government departments on Grief Counseling. “It was so touching to sit with people who had lost everything. Imagine losing everything overnight and starting life from scratch. We felt with them the pain they experienced,” she recalls. The 20 days spent in the islands, she believes, is a highlight of her career as a counselor. Today, she is an Associate Faculty with the institution that organized this programme – PtoP (Person to Person Institute of Christian Counseling, Hyderabad).

To Mary Paul, working with kids has been very joyful and fulfilling. Over the years, from planning and managing the programmes in these centres, she has moved to spending more time in administration. “I feel that I have come to the tail end of my work at Vathsalya. I will need to spend more time at Kutumba,” she expresses. Mary Paul is very appreciative of her teams in both these centres who have consistently worked in the best

interest of destitute women and children.

“Vathsalya is in the 25th year of its establishment and is blessed to have donors committed to the cause. On the other hand, Kutumba is completely supported by contributions from friends and well wishers. More than two decades of work has been possible only because of the dedicated teams and the almighty’s blessings,” says Mary Paul, reiterating gratefully that both the centres are now managed in their own facility, since 2006 and 2007.

In all these years, over 2,000 children had been received, out of which around 1,000 are with families in adoption and approximately 400 have been repatriated back to birth families. Those who are disabled cannot go for adoption and will remain with the centre forever. 8 children from here are placed in group foster care at Swanthana, a home for children with special needs.

Mary Paul is a recipient of the Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhini, Sadguru Gyanananda Award for women in social service excellence in 2002. She feels strange about receiving awards and says, “We do what we are here for. Receiving an award, followed by the appreciation and recognition it calls for, is no doubt wonderful, but I would prefer that our good deeds glorify God.”

The future does not intimidate her. Confident that good work will find its way, she shares that like before, even the future interventions will be need based. “We are working on the need to establish a day care centre for the children of migrant population in Bangalore. Soon, we might also work with the elderly. We are constantly exploring the needs of the community.”

Truly, Mary Paul has carried the message – every child deserves a loving family – all through her journey.

—Shanmuga Priya T



# “Not finding time is a myth; finding time is reality!”

**Smt. Qudsia Gandhi IAS shares with Marie Banu her views on women—yesterday, today, and tomorrow.**

**S**mt. Qudsia Gandhi is a senior IAS officer in Chennai. She has held several portfolios including that of being Additional Chief Secretary / Chairperson and Managing Director, TN Power Finance Corporation Ltd. She has also served as District Collector of Sivagangai and Managing Director of SIPCOT.

*In an exclusive interview, Smt. Qudsia Gandhi IAS shares with Marie Banu her thoughts about Women—yesterday, today, and tomorrow.*

**Can you tell us about your childhood and education? What motivated you to pursue IAS?**

In the early days, I studied in different schools, as I followed my siblings. When my mother took ill, I was admitted at St. William Anglo Indian High School at Royapettah in Chennai. My mother passed away when I was five-years-old, and after that my father re-married. As my stepmother was teaching at Government Hobart's High school, I was asked to study here. Being Urdu medium school, I found it difficult to comprehend. But, my father took extra care in teaching me and by the time I reached the fifth standard, Urdu became my passion.

I studied Geography at Presidency College and won the gold medal. I went to Aligarh University to pursue medicine, but had to discontinue due to communal riots. I studied psychology at SIET College and did my Masters in Psychology at Presidency College and obtained the University second rank. While teaching psychology for the post-graduate students at SIET, I wanted to pursue research. My brother advised me to appear for the IAS examination, as Mrs. Yasmin Ahmed, who used to teach me English, became an IAS officer.

My subjects were psychology and sociology. As I was teaching these subjects for the post graduate students, I did not have to learn much. I had to only prepare for General Knowledge, but as I used to read the Illustrated Weekly magazine regularly I was confident of writing this paper too. I availed just 15 days leave and cleared the IAS examination in the first attempt. I ranked 60th all India!

Frankly, I did not study hard to clear the IAS examination. I always tell people not to take me as a role model to prepare for the examination.

**Being a senior bureaucrat officer in our country today, how do you find time for social work?**

Not finding time is a myth; finding time is reality! Even while working in the Health and Planning and Development departments, where I was in charge of the budget, I used to be in office until 2 in the morning. I used to go home to feed my children and return for work.

What does one do in their spare time? Watch movies or television serials? I don't do that; instead I choose social work. I do not have time for high-profile parties, but always find time for my family.

**About your association with REEDA NGO?**

When I served as the District Collector of Sivaganga District in 1990, I found many villages bereft of able bodied people. Owing to drought they used to migrate to places like Thanjavur, Chennai, etc., in search of jobs. I wanted to do something for them. I learnt about REEDA, an NGO that provided vocational training for underprivileged children and health interventions to women and children.

I brought Reeda to Chennai in 1991, and we worked together in providing the migrant educated youth who were above the age of 18 years of age with training in computers, and gem cutting and polishing. Most of the migrant boys in Chennai worked in kothavalchavadi vegetable market, while the girls were employed in brick kilns and as domestic servants.

It was in the early 90s and the computer era was just starting. I requested Government of India for support in training 100 youth, belonging to SC and ST category. Computer training, of course, caught on, but, as gem cutting required precision work, it was not quite successful in Chennai. With the permission of the Government, we shifted this programme to Trichy, being the hub for cubic zirconia (American diamond).

Students attended the training in the mornings, and work in the evenings. All of our trainees have sought placement, and some work in the Intellectual Property Department in Chennai, Income Tax Department, Excise and Custom Department, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and many such State and Central Government Departments. Some of them have sought jobs abroad too. Yet, some became self-employed.

Besides this, we also offered sessions on leadership qualities, career guidance, and right to information. We coordinate self-help groups in Chennai and Sivaganga Districts and conduct medical camps and awareness camps on alternate months. We also provide HIV/AIDs interventions to MSM/FSWs and transgenders in Perambalur, Sivaganga and Ramanathapuram Districts.

**Women—yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Your thoughts? What is the balance you can bring in while talking in terms of empowerment/ tolerance/ equity/equality?**

As far as India is concerned, I think women are better off here, in education at least. We went for a one-year course in Manchester in 1989, and in the whole University found only one woman Lecturer who had completed her PhD. But, during the same time, we would have had at least 20 to 30 students pursuing their doctorate in a single college at Erode district.

By and large, I feel that the women are empowered. At least, in the households, women have a say and are able to decide on their children's education. But, there are cases where women are kept totally in the dark about what is happening in their man's life. I have known of several men who have died and not letting their wife know where he has kept the money, whether he had any money at all, or to whom he had given his money to.

We cannot generalize the issue of women empowerment in our county, as the situation is different in the North when compared to the South. Both are diverse in

values and attitudes. I feel the southern part to be much better. Love has become now skin deep and this is because we have a wrong concept of empowerment, freedom, and rights.

About equity and equality—boys are still given more importance in the family. We are equally to be blamed for making a male dominant society. We should give equal responsibilities to both our sons and daughters. We should teach our children tolerance and good values. Some are not successful in marriage due to lack of tolerance. Men and women should have understanding between them. Ego does not work in relationships—whether family or friends; marital or non-marital.

**Which of your portfolios in the government has been memorable?**

Collectorship is always memorable, because you are the authority there and the government has vested a lot of powers. It is the time when one can personally help somebody. While serving as the District Collector of Sivagangai from 1990 to 1992, I ensured that I was accessible. I used to visit all the villages and even the children knew my name. The villagers had my phone numbers and gave me information on rice smuggling, and illicit liquor. I did receive death threats too, but that did not deter me. I had good support and cooperation from the police. Madam Jayalalitha, who was the Chief Minister also then, appreciated my work and asked for a standing ovation at the time of the Collector's conference for having eradicated illicit liquor at Sivagangai district.

During this period, I pioneered the literacy mission—Arivoli Iyakkam—across the country. Sivagangai district was the first to achieve 100 percent literacy amongst people belonging to 15 to 45 years of age.



Photo: Marie Banu