

# Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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## FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

Everyone has heard about responsibility. It is something that every person should cultivate in themselves and become a part of his/her personality. One is not born with the sense of responsibility nor does it appear at once like magic. So, what is it?

The Oxford dictionary defines responsibility as “The opportunity or ability to act independently and take decisions without authorisation.” It is one of the traits of our character which means that a person is able to respond for his actions, is able to take some duties, and face the consequences of the actions that may occur.

Social responsibility goes one step further. It is a good act that needs to be embraced not only by an individual, but also by an organisation. It is a modern philosophy that states that all individuals and organizations are obligated to help the community at large.

An organization’s social responsibility or rather Corporate social responsibility (CSR) as we call it, is a company’s commitment to manage the social, economic, and environmental effects of its operations responsibly and in line with public expectations. Today, CSR is no longer defined by how much money a company contributes to charity, but by its overall involvement in activities that improve the quality of people’s lives. It is a social obligation that goes beyond the requirements of law.

Individual Social Responsibility is a moral belief where we as individuals, have a responsibility towards our society. Some people claim that responsibility is not in their nature. It may seem that people who are responsible are often too serious, tensed, and cannot enjoy a normal life. This is not true! Responsibility does not exclude happiness. You can be a responsible and joyful person at the same time.

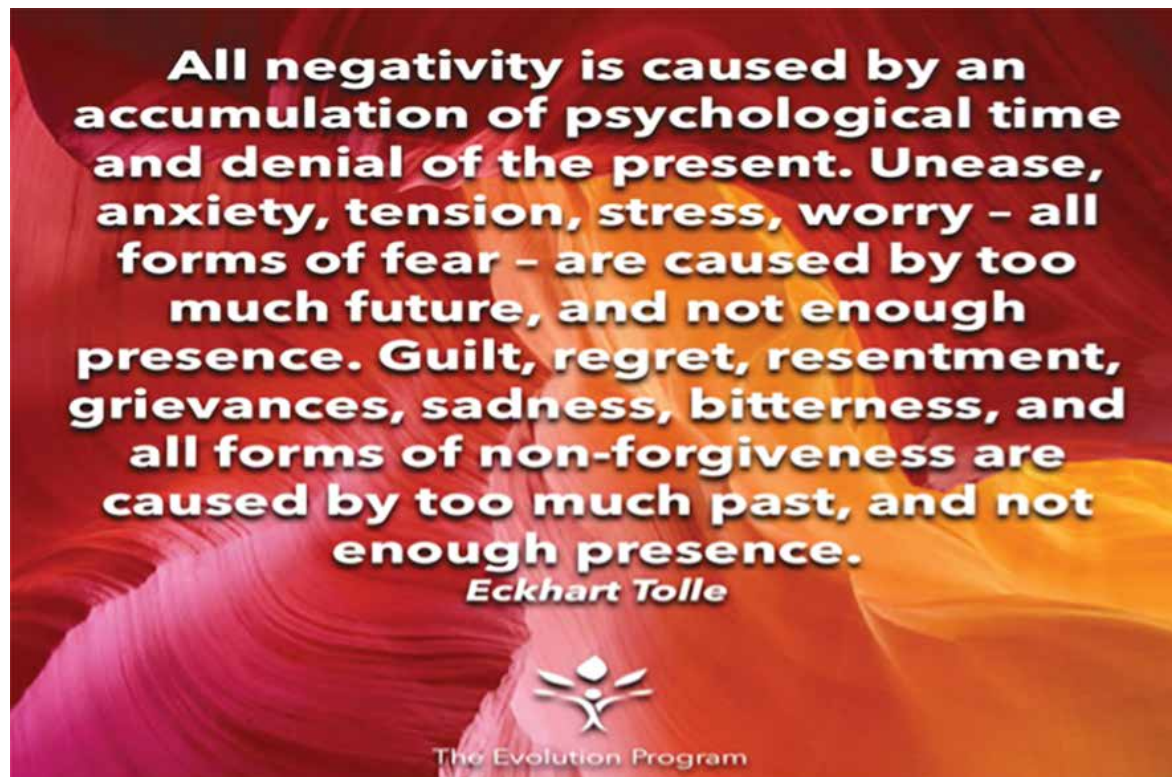
There are many levels of responsibility and they differ from person to person. Only you can decide what your level is, whether you are responsible or not. Everything is up to you!

Marie Banu

## EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh  
Marie Banu

# Psychological time and Clock time



The title of the article draws from “The Power of Now,” written by Eckhart Tolle. This distinction of time enables one to make time his or her partner. One of the important dimensions of life is time. The way we undertake things—whether thinking, doing, achieving, planning, engaging—everything requires time and increasingly we all need efficiency and effectiveness. More with less is the mantra. It applies to time as well. Taking charge of this important dimension of life, is to be more in clock time.

Psychological time is the time spent judging, worrying, indulging in regretting the past, experiencing guilt and so on. While we would be doing things in the outer world, our inner world is engaged in psychological time. This split in attention undermines our capacity to deliver effectively and efficiently in the outer world. It cuts off our experience of the here and now.

On the other hand, clock time implies being present to what the current moment is offering one. As

psychological time is on auto mode for most of us, we become aware of how our thoughts stayed in the psychological realm once clock time is “lost”.

Clock time might involve activities such as preparing a report for a meeting on Friday, or getting the kids ready to take them to a doctor’s appointment in the afternoon. Psychological time by contrast would be worrying about possible outcomes of presenting your report on Friday, or fretting about what the doctor’s report will be this afternoon.

Acceptance is a segway to clock time. Every time there is a trigger that takes one into judgment, regret, compulsiveness, or worry, creating acceptance offers the possibility to smoothly transition into the clock time. In other words one can perceive the happenings in the moment, generate deeper connect without coloring one’s views and experience.

Take the first step—observe and then accept!

*Yours Energetically*

*Ms. Bhuvaneshwari Ravi is trainer, facilitator and coach of the Positive Energy (PE) program. She is a spiritual seeker with a vision of transforming her own energy state from surviving to being. In this journey she has gathered deep insights and is continuously working towards creating a pathway for more seekers. With years of exposure to spiritual practices like yoga, reiki, and personal development interventions like coaching, she is working in the Organization Development and Leadership Development space.*

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# Reinventing the wheel

Sanjay Vomkarey has been in the Education sector for over 20 years. A proud alumnus of the prestigious Hyderabad Public School, Vomkarey exhibited a love for teaching, training and mentoring from a very young age. His exuberant nature shone through in his active participation in extra curricular activities such as debates, elocution and quiz competitions all through his school days. A member of several service organizations, Vomkarey lent himself to organizing constructive activities for youth through the Jaycee's Club, Round Table 148, and the Rotary Club. During his tenure as the Director of the Rotary Club of Bhagyanagar he organized a massive inter school fest for government school children. 109 schools from the Rangareddy District participated in this event and over 1200 children took part in the various literary and art competitions. His active engagement in these types of service oriented activities has earned him several awards of recognition from each of the organizations he has served so far.

One of Vomkarey's first ventures which aided in his future ones is his educational products company, Acme Instructional Technics Pvt. Ltd. It was manufacturing "first of its kind" products in India such as "Encapsulation of Specimen Study Technology in Biology Media". This was a product that proved a boon to biology students as well as medical students alike. The product was so popular it earned them the Best Entrepreneur Award by the then Education Minister. While working on this product, Vomkarey met and worked with government schools, Zilla Parishad schools, Navodaya Schools and Kendriya Vidyalayas. Says he, "Having studied in a premier private school, I had assumed that the quality of education would be just that high in every school. But, working with these schools opened my eyes to the reality that the system is so skewed."

It is while working with these government schools and charitable institutions that Sanjay Vomkarey came up with an idea. He questioned whether the current system did justice to the cause of learning. "Children should get quality education, at affordable costs, be equipped with today's skills, in a stress-free learning environment," he says adding that "Education needs to be student-centric, not teacher-centric."

With this mission, in 2013 he started Potter's Wheel Education Services, an organization committed to improving schooling systems by training teachers and students alike on current day skills and stress-free learning methods. Potter's Wheel is a playground for kids, where they dribble with thoughts, ideas and imagination. It is a place where curiosity is encouraged and children are free to explore their subject.

When asked what is the reason behind naming the organization "Potter's



***Children of today urgently need to be taught real life skills, such as leadership, problem solving, organizational skills, exploration, innovation, creative skills, to name a few.***

Wheel" Vomkarey says, "It is on the wheel that the potter turns raw clay into something exquisite. It is world class, yet it is very much grounded and tied to nature."

During the early stages of his journey into setting up an institution, Vomkarey came in contact with CSIM and signed up for the certificate course on Social Entrepreneurship. "I'm from the 25th batch of the Hyderabad chapter of CSIM," he says proudly. When asked what impact CSIM had on his journey, he says, "Prof. K.L. Srivastav's motivation and guidance was of immense help to me. What also helped me a lot was meeting with peer groups and understanding the huge social impact they were making; that was a driving force for me to continue with my own mission in the education sector."

At Potter's Wheel, they believe that the school is the second best place for a child to learn, the first being the child's home. "Children of today urgently need to be taught real life skills, such as leadership, problem solving,

organizational skills, exploration, innovation, creative skills, to name a few," opines Vomkarey. What should parents do in order to provide the optimal learning environment for children at home? We ask. He says, "Stop believing in grades and marks. Insist on outdoor play. It is an essential aspect of learning. Believe in your child's potential and give them the freedom to find their passion."

The Potter's Wheel pre-school curriculum is based on the theory of Multiple Intelligences. It draws on the UNICEF Charter for Children's Rights and Learning, and is a unique combination of Playway Method, Montessori Method, the Waldorf method and the High-Scope method. Experiential learning is very much a part of this curriculum. Periodic training sessions and workshops are conducted for the teachers of Potter's Wheel schools. Teachers are also encouraged to try out their unique ideas and diverse learning methodologies, ranging from Vedic math to student parliament.

Summer camps, science fair and a lot of extra curricular activities are organized throughout the school year. Workshops are also regularly conducted by trainers from the Council for Creative Education (CCE), Finland.

When asked his opinion on the role of technology in today's learning environment, Sanjay Vomkarey says, "I believe in less is more. When children are still young, they shouldn't lean too much on technology. We ought to rely more on the natural processes of learning. While it is inevitable that children will have access to gadgets in today's times, these can be introduced gradually and with precaution. Technology can be a boon if introduced in the right way at the right time."

Potter's Wheel is on a drive to bring in the best education practices to affluent as well as not so affluent schools all across the country. Apart from their online teacher, student, as well as school development programs, they also offer educational exchange tours in partnership with CCE Finland.

We ask Sanjay Vomkarey what his vision for the future of Potter's Wheel is. "I will establish a hundred schools all over the country, focusing on rural India, in order turn the world's attention to the ingenuity and creativity of our rural students. I will make my mark in the education system and build my legacy here. Think Indian, Impact Globally!" he says.

—Archanaa Ramesh



# Leader & Leadership Matters...

## 14. Credibility : Walk the Talk



**Meaning of Credibility in Leadership: The Leader has the ability keeps his/her commitments and ensures that there is no gap between what s(he) says and what s(he) does. (LOI, www.discoverself.com ).**

**Credibility is the quality of being trusted, convincing and believed in. The synonyms are integrity, reliability, validity, trustworthiness, realness and so on. The antonyms are improbability, unreasonableness and so on...**

*Credibility is a leader's currency. With it, he or she is solvent; without it, he or she is bankrupt - John C. Maxwell*

One of the most valued attribute for Leadership is Credibility. This is considered a core value that runs across the sector, position and context for a Leader. A person with all expertise, technical qualification and knowledge may obtain Leadership position; but sustaining and growing in that position is possible only when he is experienced as credible by the people who work with him within and outside the organization.

We often refer to Credibility as 'walk the talk'; 'saying what you do and doing what you say'; Keeping commitments and standing up to one's words. The word Credibility has a deep connection to being reliable, dependable and consistent in actions.

To discuss about Credibility as a Leadership attribute, I spoke to Shri ISN Prasad, Additional Chief Secretary to Government of Karnataka, Finance Department. Shri I.S.N. Prasad, is an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of 1986 batch - Karnataka Cadre. He is a Civil engineering graduate from Delhi College of Engineering, and has also a Master degree in Development Management from Asian Institute of Management, Manila, Philippines. He has held various positions in the last three decades from Assistant Commissioner (Kumta) to being the Principal Secretary to Chief Minister, Govt. of Karnataka, and Principal Secretary to Government, Department of Information Technology, Biotechnology and Science & Technology. He has always been experienced as a straight forward, honest and thought leader in the cadre. He is also most respected for his ability to connect to people and task on hand with high credibility, paving way for growth and development.

**Thank you Prasad, for giving me this opportunity to dialogue and understand from you, all about Credibility. I would like to know what Credibility means to you and what aspects do you see connected to Credibility.**

Shri ISN Prasad with his characteristic smile and the usual air of majestic confidence shares his points with clarity. He says, "Credibility itself has many facets. In the context of leadership, credibility is being able to inspire the confidence in the people you interact with. Confidence itself has many dimensions-

- First being approachable: he/she can approach you is the first confidence because you lose out on the relationship if that person is hesitating to meet you;
- Second, Being Open: they are confident that you are not going to be judgemental about what they

are going to suggest or ask or request; because if you are stereotyped, judgemental or opinionated it is not good for leadership. You may have your own views because you have a larger vision in the whole thing and it is very easy for you to express your view, but you still have to be open; and the stakeholders should have the faith that you'll be open.

- The third important part lies in committing adequately and realistically – it should not be an over commitment or an under commitment – 'leave it to me, I will see' is not a part of the commitment. Be clear.
- The fourth is the ability to listen carefully and understand what is expected of you. Express to the person what you have understood. The person should have the confidence in you that whatever thing he or she has told you, you have understood it in the way he/she wants it to be understood."

**Prasad, how do you connect being honest with Credibility? Do you think people will understand you are credible if you honestly share with them the possibilities?**

"Actually, you giving a commitment is not adequate. You will have make the person know what I can do and what I cannot. If you want to be a little more positive, you can even try for something more. It is important to be honest. But it is not brutal honesty; in leadership you will have to convey the right way; even if you are being conservative or realistic, the realistic should not amount to being interpreted as being negative or pessimistic or disrespectful. It's a fine balance."

"What makes honesty credible, is that after having committed, you should genuinely make the attempt to do that work. It should not be that 'I have met the person, I have told her, and ok let me see and wait for reminders'. That is not correct. We need to look into it genuinely with an open mind and with an attitude of resolving the problem rather than doubting the issue."

**Prasad, what if you make an honest attempt and the problem does not get resolved, will Credibility not be at stake?**

"Of course, there are times that you make an attempt and it does resolve; there are many times where you cannot do that much or anything at all. In such a situation a leader who has to be credible, first should satisfy himself that he has exhausted all options. It is not that I tend to resolve in the first attempt; I should try more attempts, with more people or different ways. Even after all the attempts, if the situation is not resolvable

or is partially resolvable then how I convey it to the original person who came to me is very important. That person must feel that you have tried it genuinely, with an open mind and attempted to resolve it and only then the success has been partial or zero or full. What is important in leadership is that the person who has come to you should have the faith that you have truly attempted to resolve. That is how you build credibility. If the person has to follow you or work with you, the faith in you is very important. The main thing is how you have handled that person."

**How do you establish Credibility or being credible as a leader?**

"In my years of experience, I have been dealing with a multiple stake holders. As a leader, you have people above you and below you, plus peers within your work space and people outside your work space. It is very important to establish credibility with all these layers. And this comes only if you are able to be effective; you don't over commit; you are able to deliver and respond. The larger the system gets, it is very important to respond in a timely positive manner.

Shri Prasad connects credibility with Integrity next. He says, "In my experience, in all sectors including government one of the major contributing factor to establish Credibility is Integrity. Integrity has to be 100% in terms of your work or your personal value system. It has to be really above board. Not just financial integrity, but integrity in all facets; if not upheld, then directly credibility is affected. If integrity is less, credibility is also proportionately less."

Whether it be organized or unorganized sector, people who come to you should think that you will stand up for them and they should feel secured. In very small or informal or unstructured organizations, people have other avenues. But in formal organizations or larger organizations, the avenues are stratified, structured, and limited. They can approach you but they cannot jump and go. So it is very important that you stand up for the people who are relying on you and working for you or with you in whichever way.

It is not enough you are honest and have integrity, it is also important that you make effort to support that person and protect that person for right causes. That is what builds credibility.

Shri ISN Prasad asks us to question, why should others listen to us? That will show the credibility index we hold. He says, "When I go and talk even if it is not my work or connected directly, people listen because they know if he has applied his mind and is taking up this cause it has to be something worthwhile. I have had experiences where I am standing to tell the entire cabinet that this

should be done like this and this is this or this is that and they are paying attention. The amount of weightage they are giving is different from the weightage they give to somebody else in whose eyes he/she is not credible, either in terms of honesty or in terms of having no personal interest or ego issues, so on. I have had many experiences where people said the cabinet is never going to listen, but some officers have stood up, spoken and the cabinet have listened to them and acted upon their advice. So even if we say we are a bureaucracy or a corporate sector, in reality it is never just impersonal. People do carry their subjective opinion about the person and their credibility.”

In leadership, the connection between consistency and credibility is very high. You have to be consistent to be credible. Behaviour may be contextual. But consistency in values has to be there. People judge a person not through his behaviour, but his core values.”



“In government we work closely with political leadership who have their own way of looking at things, deal with political issues and most of the things are not in our control. But despite that, all of them know, whom they are dealing with. And if you are credible there is a far better chance of the right things happening or your advice being accepted. I believe that even though their goals or interests may be different than what you are looking at, by and large they all know, respect honest and good people and good leaders. Every organization, not just the government, they do need these people, they cannot ignore them every time, all the time. The more credible the person is the chances to deal with the outside environment is high.”

**Prasad, I have seen you being highly credible in both personal and professional front. Who has been your inspiration? How do we build the attribute of Credibility in youngsters?**

“It is very difficult to say that any one person has inspired me. But I learnt to see credibility with various people around me. Credibility could be a helper in the house, who is so punctual, good at their work and you know that you can rely on them. For example a small shopkeeper in your neighbourhood, you know who opens up every day at 8 o’clock. Credibility is when you know your vegetable vendor is doing a mental math, writing on a small piece of scrap paper, but his math is right. I have recognized and learnt about credibility through reliability. I always remember noticing people right from school days. Helpers, relatives, support staff and so on. I had started internalising it in very subtle manner. I also think with work experience when I reflect on the way I work and the way others react to me; where I stand and how I’m growing, the value of credibility shows up. With regard to personal and professional front, if you are credible in your workspace you are credible in your personal life too. Credibility cannot be compartmentalised. Credibility is an integral part of your life. Generally people who are credible are credible across.”

“People of any age must understand the utility of credibility. If you sell credibility as a lofty value or lofty goal, particularly to youngsters who have not gone through many experiential situations, will understand, if we are able to explain to them as how credibility improves their ability to grow, ability to succeed, ability to perform and get things done and their growth as a leader. Credibility should be shown as one of the required talents or attributes. It should not be made into something abstract. In today’s world we are full of challenges and one of the armoury they have in their scope to face the challenge is their credibility. Take an example, would like to hire someone who is incredible in technical skill, brilliantly educated, coming from the best institutes in the world but not honest or has no credibility? It’s a core value.”

**Prasad, many think being always credible is constraining, what do you say? How do you feel internally when there is a slip in the credibility?**

“Not necessarily. If you are a credible person and therefore an honest person, you are also expressing and saying what you feel and think. You cannot be credible if



you are saying something you don’t mean. Credibility comes from by your being open about yourself and about others. When you respond to situations with credibility, none of us fit all expectations that you are dealing with. In my experience, most people actually necessarily don’t judge you by one off incident. By and large, people do look for consistency. It also depends on the context. If they have dealt with me in the past and I have been credible, they will take context also into consideration. But suppose this is the first situation and they have never dealt with me in the past and they don’t know, and there is a slip in credibility. If they are judging immediately and have frozen their mind on that, it is their problem. But if it is in work context and you sense it and you have to work with them on a regular basis, it is also important that you have to make amends. Which means you will have to call that person and explain to them the

why of the slip in credibility, explain the problem thoroughly and accept if there are lapses assure it will not happen again.”

**Thank you Prasad for your valuable insights. Can you leave behind a message for our readers?**

“We often underrate Credibility. In leadership, credibility is the key! I cannot think of anything more important than that. It is the bed rock for every other thing. With Increasingly complex environment one thread which will keep you going if you want to see yourself grow as a leader is credibility. It takes time to build credibility; it has to be earned; it has to be nurtured; it is not something that can be switched on and off; it is something which comes with practice and something which you have to continuously work on to make it grow. I find that by and large there comes a stage when by and large if credibility is acceptable, it becomes easier. There is a multiplier effect there. You become more credible and more effective much faster.”



Credibility gains power when coupled with involvement. We will explore the attribute of task and people involvement in the coming month of Conversations.

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath



## Centre for Social Initiative and Management

**C**entre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) is a unit of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani. It is a learning centre that promotes the concept of social entrepreneurship.

CSIM offers **training and consultancy to social enterprises** – for-profits and non-profits to facilitate them to apply successful business practices and yet retain their social mission.

It also offers training and hand holding support to prospective social entrepreneurs and enable them to launch their social initiatives.

For more information, please visit our website [www.csim.in](http://www.csim.in)

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CSIM also facilitates **Social Accounting and Audit** for social enterprises, CSR projects, and NGOs through Social Audit Network, India (SAN India).

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# REVIVE, RESTORE, RENEW



Did you know that the modern day prevalence and continuity of a traditional art form is crucial to the development and human resource indices of a region? A World Bank study has indicated that performing art forms help advance development and human progress.

“Sadly, globalization has led to decline of many lesser known Indian performing art forms. These art forms help in strengthening communities by bringing people together, they boost economic activity, community development, cross-cultural understanding, they create common experiences and a sense of identity and belonging,” says Priyanka K Mohan who runs Yakshadegula, an organization focused on reviving performing art forms in Karnataka, specifically, Yakshagana. “Given the importance of preserving and appreciating local art forms, we chose Yakshagana as our focus area,” says Priyanka. “Through our journey we came to realize that several more local artistes need support. This let us kick-start a process of looking for support from various stakeholders to reach out to artists in Karnataka to collect data, compile them onto a digital platform, connect artistes with each other, map the needs of artists and create various pathways to resolve issues.”

Yakshagana has found prevalence and patronage in costal Karnataka. Yakshadegula, however, was instrumental in introducing Yakshagana to Bengaluru, as a means of reviving the art form. However, to sustain this revival, the organization has had to adopt various innovations. This ranges from free Yakshagana classes in the city as an incentive to learn the not-so-popular art form to using Yakshagana to narrate stories with social messages surrounding right to education, HIV and dowry among others. “We also began recognizing artistes,” says Priyanka. “Usually a lot of recognition is reserved for the lead actors and musicians, although there are several other artistes who have given their life to Yakshagana. We’ve made an effort to recognize these lesser-known artistes, every year.”

The organization has also helped release books on various aspects of Yakshagana, including contemporary stories. “We’ve also popularized other art forms native to costal Karnataka, like Talamaddale and have documented lesser-known aspects of these art forms like percussion and costuming,” says Priyanka.

Given art’s unique status as a vehicle to bring communities together, storytelling is a strong ally. “As we evolve, we need to narrate stories that keep these art forms alive and relevant,”

says Priyanka, “Innovation in any sector helps keep pace with the changing times.”

However, in Priyanka’s words, “Being mindful about what aspects of art forms needs to be kept traditional and what can be evolved plays a crucial role in preservation.” She adds: “We need to leverage technology to build awareness on Indian art forms and increase our reach, and then continue to find innovative methods to document and preserve our traditional art forms.”

Yakshagana is an ancient form of folk theatre or a dance drama typical to coastal Karnataka, usually performed in the open. It is also called Bayalata, which translates to: field play. “It’s a nifty amalgamation of song, dance and drama with flamboyantly dressed characters, often war-like, with valour and passion,” explains Priyanka, “It’s all about revelling in the finery.” Interestingly enough, Yakshagana is called Gandu-Kale (which literally translates to “male art form”) as it is predominantly performed by men. “Even female roles are played by men,” Priyanka says. Oftentimes, performances are staged through the night and on paddy fields. “These days, with time being the biggest constraint, the plays are shortened to just a couple of hours,” says Priyanka. There are three styles in Yakshagana – Tenkutittu (Southern Style), Badagutittu (Northern Style) and Badabadagutittu.

Priyanka explains how the art form is interwoven with stories. “Tales from epics like the Mahabharata, Ramayana and Puranas are taken to narrate in the unique style of Yakshagana,” she explains, “The Bhagavatar, who is the singer, accompanied by percussionists sing a verse, to which actors dance after which the actor explains the meaning of the verse through dialogues. Each character has a different costume and make up.”

In Yakshagana lies multiple art forms, like dance, drama and music, all interwoven in one. The mere volume of work, Priyanka explains, is a testament to the many decades that have gone into perfecting the entire art form. However, she feels limited funding and support makes it difficult to enhance the revival of the art form itself.

“We have been able to work extensively on one form of Yakshagana,” says Priyanka, “Talamaddale and Hoovina Kolu are some of the associated art forms of Yakshagana in which we have done work. Creating awareness through various channels, documenting our work and innovating in the traditional art space has helped us achieve this. Working with educational institutions, artistes, Government, and art lovers has helped us achieving our goals.”

After having worked with several artistes, Yakshadegula now realizes the importance of reviving other art forms as well. The plan is to replicate the work done with Yakshagana, to other art forms of Karnataka. “There are several local art forms we have lost and many others are under threat today,” says Priyanka. “At Yakshadegula, we aim to revive and popularize all art forms of Karnataka. In 2019 alone, we are looking at working with at least two or three art forms.” The focus, as she explains, is to revive art forms and thereby help artistes to derive their livelihood from art. “State and central government support alone has helped us so far in our journey,” Priyanka says, “However, now there is a need for more organizations and individuals to join hands to make a larger impact.”



# Scattering seeds of change across India

*HelpUsGreen goes from thriving start-up to inspiring others to join its mission: empowering marginalised women while saving India's rivers.*



As success stories go, HelpUsGreen hit the ground running from the get-go.

Its model of recycling waste flowers from temples — while empowering a marginalised community — attracted enthusiastic media coverage and grants from the likes of Tata Trusts and DBS Foundation.

But in the months after Our Better World told its story last year, the social enterprise has seen its unique idea bloom in new ways, planting seeds of hope across India and beyond.

Some 560 enquiries to set up similar facilities elsewhere in India poured in, while a group of passionate students, scientists and entrepreneurs invited HelpUsGreen to Nepal to discuss the possibility of bringing the social enterprise there.

And a second HelpUsGreen facility is in the works in Tirupati, a holy city in Andhra Pradesh, sometimes compared to Vatican City for the sheer number of devotees that visit daily (50,000 to 60,000). Its municipal commissioner got in touch after watching the OBW story.

The new facility will employ 128 women and recycle 12 tonnes of flower waste a day — taking HelpUsGreen's dream of uplifting marginalised communities and cleaning India's rivers to a new level.

This dream has also captured the imagination of consumers: its incense products sold out after the story was launched. Even now, HelpUsGreen continues to sell a product every minute, and sales overall have quadrupled.

"Previously, we didn't have something that could show the impact of what we do, which is the impact of how lives have transformed," says Ankit Agarwal, co-founder of HelpUsGreen. "The story allowed us to tell people, 'This is the true picture.'"

## Growing business, growing respect

For Ankit, what stands out amid HelpUsGreen's

runaway success is how the women they hire now see themselves in a new, transformed light.

"They realised theirs was a story worth telling, people were interested in their stories, that they are respected, and their confidence just grew," says Ankit.

HelpUsGreen employs women from the Dalit community to make its artisanal incense products — a community some deem "untouchable" under the caste system.

Working as cleaners of human waste (manual scavengers) and dead animals, leather workers, street sweepers and cobblers, Dalits face social discrimination and even violence, despite caste discrimination being illegal in India.

Ankit recalls his surprise when Ranjana — who shared her story — approached them one day, asking to buy the incense so that she could use them when making her own offerings.

"This was powerful because Rs165 is half a day's wages for her, but she refused to take it as a gift. It was about respect for the product and support for the cause, and that she could do it," says Ankit.

## Paving the way for future generations

The idea of more HelpUsGreen facilities sprouting across India, transforming lives and environments, is a thrilling one.

But Ankit is circumspect about growing HelpUsGreen, which requires more than just funds. "The people whom we hire, we partner with, they should have the right mindset... some people just want to do business, but don't care about impact," he says.

This year, HelpUsGreen plans to build facilities in two more locations, in addition to the one at Tirupati.

It's also seeing growing interest from other businesses; not just to buy their incense products, but also for their signature FloraFoam, a material akin to Styrofoam produced from the waste flowers, to be used

as packaging material. "We got three very big orders, signed a month after the video," says Ankit.

Some 1,800 people also wrote to HelpUsGreen after watching the story offering to volunteer, even though the social enterprise did not call for volunteers.

"The feeling is great, these people are our early adopters, they talk about the products, and what we do, and they're important to us," says Ankit.

He hopes to set up groups where people can contribute in different ways, such as independently studying the volume of temple waste, or posting about HelpUsGreen on Facebook.

At the heart of all this growth remains the marginalised women whose lives HelpUsGreen hopes to change for the better. The Kanpur facility now hires 93 women, up from 79 women previously.

Sharing his thoughts at the Our Better World community event in Mumbai in November last year, Ankit says: "I still have not figured out how things will go, or how it will be, but...I want to change at least 5,000 lives."

"Change will come in the next generation, it will not happen in this generation, but at least the women's children will go to school, and they will not have to go the way of their parents."

## ABOUT HELPUSGREEN

HelpUsGreen is a social enterprise that collects about eight tonnes of waste flowers from temples daily, to recycle them into eco-friendly products - which are handcrafted by women from Dalit and other marginalised communities, providing them with fresh livelihoods. It plans to employ 3,700 women by 2020 and recycle 50 tonnes of flowers daily.

—A story by Our Better World  
(the digital storytelling initiative of the Singapore International Foundation  
([www.ourbetterworld.org](http://www.ourbetterworld.org)))



# UP-CYCLED SUSTAINABILITY

If you were to summarize the work of Umeed in a nutshell, calling it ‘self-sustainable’ would perhaps be the most appropriate term. For four years now, the organization has been training women to develop a unique skill set, which in turn has created a sustainable community. Based in Hyderabad, Umeed has touched the lives of 30 women and their families (totalling to around 100 people) in the last year, alone.

“What we do is train women in making handicrafts out of upcycled newspaper, to create beautiful, handmade and eco-friendly lifestyle products,” says Gauri Mahendra, Co-Founder, Umeed, “Our range of newspaper products are hand-crafted by a group of women from marginalized communities of Hyderabad who are determined to change the social and economic conditions for the better.”

The products that come out of the programme are truly reflective of the work Umeed does, with women. For instance, the use of newspaper is an indicator of the reluctance for wastefulness while the vibrant colours of the products reflect on the journey of self-empowerment embarked on by each of the women who have been trained. “It’s all been ingrained through love, hope and courage,” says Gauri.

How does it all come together? Umeed begins by running a series of community surveys once a year, to understand the need of a given community. The purpose of these surveys is self-explanatory — to determine whether the need of the community in question is the same as that of the solution the organization hopes to be working on. It is of course also reflective of the need of the women and their families. “Apart from connecting with women in this way, we also get a lot of women to join us through word of mouth given that we’ve been around for the last four years,” says Gauri.

The initiative itself draws inspiration from The Barefoot College in Tilonia, Rajasthan. “It’s one of the world’s best examples of how sustainable communities run,” says Gauri, “We learnt how newspapers were being used by the community to create various kinds of products. We realized that a lot can be done with newspapers.” What was of course a major advantage was the fact that using newspapers as raw material meant that input costs were zero since readers and homes that subscribed to these newspapers were willing to donate their used stacks of newspaper. “That’s how these newspapers became a unique raw material, which gave us the flexibility to create various kinds of household utility products,” says Gauri, “What’s also wonderful is the fact that it also helps up-cycle waste, and thus saves the environment from the devastating use of plastic.”

Umeed’s goal is rather simple: make the venture completely run by women belonging to the community. “We have been focusing on not just skill-training but also the development of a very



progressive mindset of our women,” says Gauri, “Along with the focus on skill and mindset, we have made sure our women are given enough exposure opportunities to explore a world in business beyond skill-training and hand-crafting of products.”

The organization’s biggest goal in 2019 is to equip these women with resources to manage an enterprise and allow it to grow sustainably.

Hand-crafting isn’t the only avenue of work that Umeed is planning for. The organization will begin a holistic programme for unskilled women belonging to low-income communities, which focuses on skills, values and the mindset for local industry. “The programme would be more like a fellowship for the women of the

community, who would then become more employment-ready, post-intervention,” says Gauri.

The question, however remains: what is the scope of scalability and how challenging is it, to scale up? “It’s always challenging,” says Gauri, acknowledging that there will be a great deal of effort to make it happen, “It’s more challenging when you are diversifying your operations with the aim to reach more women and increase impact, but without diluting the quality that comes with any of this.”

For now, the organization is working on the challenges that come with scaling up, such as bringing on board like-minded partners in the social and industry sectors. “We believe that only collaboration among sectors can address

the challenges we face, while fighting for the cause of empowering women,” says Gauri.

While that task may not exactly be the easiest one at hand, the results are more satisfying than one can imagine. In the last year for instance, Umeed has supported nearly 20 women towards earning a living for themselves, which in turn has contributed to family income. Given the vast presence of women along the length and breadth of the country, many of whom are breadwinners for their families, the potential to do good work, is simply endless. Helping these women help themselves and thereby providing each community with a much-needed boost is perhaps what Umeed will continue doing, in the pursuit for creating self-sustainable communities.



# What is the object of Love of an Atma-sadhaka?

But to whom do we exhibit this Love? What is the object of this Love?

To whom does one give himself up? If it is to other people, other places, the nation, or the world – these things are out of place at this stage.

For, such an action will germinate an attachment and a consequent danger! One need not forget the story of *Jada-Bharata*.

In earlier stages, service to others, to the nation and to the world are all good self-effacing acts that will result in the cleaning up of the mind and so turn out to be very good.

That belongs to Karma Yoga.

But now one is going on the *Jnana* path towards the discarding of everything that is *Maya* and, love or service towards the to-be-discarded *Maya* world is inconceivable.

Of course it is true that a *Jnani* after he has attained Brahman realisation sometimes does perform worldly service by the prompting of the Almighty of the *mayic* world.

Our *Acharya* himself was one such.

But that was, after the stage of influence by *Maya* – in other words, one has established himself as ‘*Maya*-proof’!

That *Jnani* is not doing things on his own volition; he does them as an instrument of *Ishvara*.

Thus love can be expressed or exhibited either before one begins any



such thing as *advaita-Sadhana* or, after one has attained Realisation, in the form of service to the world or to individuals – but not at the present stage of *advaita-Sadhana* that we are discussing.

One in a million who has engaged in this *Sadhana* not doing worldly service is also not a big loss to the world. In fact it is the other way.

It is we who have to do service to him with the thought: “We have got ourselves into the mire of *samsara*.”

At least some rare person is struggling to get the Release. Let us do whatever we can to smoothen his journey of life”.

Thus neither to individuals nor to the society does this *sadhaka* have to show his love. That does not mean he has to be inimical to society.

There is neither love nor hate. Non-

violence is his first characteristic – by the very fact that he has taken a promise at the time of taking *Sannyasa*, that not a single being shall have any fear of me – in other words, “I shall not harm in any way any living being”.

So he cannot have any hate towards any being or society.

This absence of hatred, however, which has come as the effect of the strength of his *Sadhana*, is not to be shown as an explicit love in the outside world.

However, when Love is sprouting from inside, that nectar of love has to be poured to some one to whom one should be giving oneself up – then only one can hope to reduce the ego and enter the innermost small recess of the heart.

Who should be that some one, if not the *Atman* itself?!

*Atman* should be wooed – that is what we said when we were talking about *mumukshua*. The wooing should become a surrender to the *Atman* in a spirit of dedication of the self.

The *Atman* should not only take over the individuality but actually ‘vanquish’ it to nothingness – that should be the attitude of Love towards the *Atman*! Maybe before the *Atman* reveals itself, one has to go through severe testing.

The readiness for such testing is to be shown by the attitude: “Am I keeping anything with me without being offered to you? Then why all these tests? I am

ready to be consumed by you”. This is where Love turns into *Bhakti*!

Love placed in the noblest of objects is *Bhakti*.

Love placed on our equals is friendship.

Love reposed in elders whether they are noble or not, is respect.

Love placed in younger ones, or those below us, is grace.

Love placed in those who suffer is compassion.

Love placed in noble ones with humility is *Bhakti*.

The noblest object is God and so if we humbly submit to Him with Love that is *Bhakti*.

This *Bhakti* then becomes *Guru Bhakti*, *Matru Bhakti*, *Pitr bhakti*, *Bhakti* towards our nation and so on.

Among these, only God and the *Guru* can really take our Love as well as our individual ‘I’ and melt it in the universal ‘I’.

The *sadhaka* on the *jnana* path is supposed to have his God, not with attributes, but as the nirguna-atman. So he has to show his Love, *Bhakti*, only towards that *Atman*.

–Source: ADVAITA-SAADHANAA  
(Kanchi Maha-Swamigal’s Discourses)

## Credibility

Ramu, like some others in his village Musori, got addicted to eating a herb which tasted good, but was injurious to health. He would not listen even to his grandmother when told to stop the habit. So she took him to a *Swamiji* in the same village and requested him to advise Ramu. Instead the *Swamiji* asked the old lady to bring the boy back after a month.

A month later the *Swamiji* asked Ramu to abandon the habit and as he was obeyed by the whole village, Ramu gave up the habit. Now, the grandmother wondered why the *Swamiji* did not give the same advice a month back and asked him. The great man replied, “A month ago, I myself was addicted to the herb. It took me a month to give up the habit.”

Explicit Learning

- Practice before you preach.
- Our credibility improves when we practice what we preach.
- Those who only preach will have only listeners, not followers.

Introspective Learning

- What is the nature of ‘Credibility’?
- What gives credibility to my words - my preaching or my practicing?
- How do I reduce the gulf between what I say and what I do?



# CSIM 2019 Convocation



CSIM Chennai organised its 17th Annual Convocation on Saturday, 27th March, 2019 at 11:00AM at MOP Vaishnav College for Women, Chennai. Shri. Alan Kay, Co-founder, Social Audit Network, UK, was the Chief Guest for the event and Dr. Uthira.D, Vice Principal & Head PG Department of Commerce M.O.P Vaishnav College for Women was the Guest of Honor.

Shri. P.N. Subramanian, Chairperson - CSIM Governing Council, presented the Annual report. Shri Alan Kay delivered the Convocation address and the PG Diplomas and Diplomas were conferred upon the Prospective Social Entrepreneurs. He also released CSIM's Annual Newsletter 'Prajyoth'.

Shri P. N Devarajan Pathfinder Distinguished Alumnus Awards – 2019 was conferred on: (1) Ms. K. Ponni who uses dance as a medium to illuminate the various causes affecting the transgender community; (2) Mr. S.M. Manimaran of Safe Charitable Trust" who has been conducting various environmental protection programmes like tree planting, training programmes for the students, youth and women for the past 10 years; and (3) Mr. A. Balamurugam, Founder, Inter-caste Marriages Foundation, Dindivanam, who has

coordinated movements, fasts, and protests demanding implementation of government orders for the couples of inter-marriages.

The PND Pathfinder Distinguished Faculty Awards was presented to Mr V. Balakrishnan of CWDR who is actively involved in making education as a fundamental right and has rehabilitated nearly 2000 children working in match and cracker industries.

CSIM also recognized the support offered by NGO partners who facilitated the field work for students. Mrs. Bhanu Suresh of CONCERN, a de-addiction home in Chennai and Mrs. Renuka Balakrishnan, Founder, of CWDR were felicitated on the occasion.

CSIM has been conducting social entrepreneurship training programme in city colleges as well. In appreciation of their support, a memento was offered to the College representatives of MOP Vaishnav College for Women, Queen Mary's College, SSS Shasun Jain College for Women, Madras School of Social Work, Stella Maris College and Sri Kanyaka Parameswari College of Arts and Science for Women.

CSIM Academic and Governing Council Members, CSIM Faculty and Alumni besides several other college students and well wishers attended the event.



## “The success of a person – be it a speaker or writer – is directly proportionate to the reading habit of that person.”

### Bharati Bhaskar shares with Marie Banu her thoughts on gender equality.

**B**harathi Baskar is a Tamil Orator and is popular for her debate talk shows called *Pattimandram*. She is also a Senior Vice President at Citi Bank, Chennai. A Chemical Engineer from Alagapa College of Technology, Chennai, she pursued MBA from Anna University.

Bharathi Baskar started to participate in debate competitions since her school days. She is also a good writer and has written many short stories that were published in the Tamil weekly magazine *Kalki*. She pens many motivational articles in various magazines including *Dinamani*. She has authored a book named *Nee Nadi Pola Oodikondiru* which was serialized in *Aval Vikatan* magazine.

*In an exclusive interview, Bharati Bhaskar shares with Marie Banu her thoughts on gender equality.*

**Does the debating platform offer solutions to societal problems? What are your favourite topics to debate on?**

I don't know if we provide solutions, but we can definitely give a perspective and awareness about the problems and get people to think about it. My interest lies on issues related to women. It could be about women empowerment, safety of women, or about how women are seen by the society. These topics are very close to my heart. Hence, whenever I get the opportunity, I prefer to select one of these topics to debate on.

**Your thoughts on gender equality and women empowerment?**

Women empowerment is about the overall human empowerment that one is talking about. If a very large share of the human population is always constrained and restricted to kind of satisfy the other part of the society and not pursue the path of freedom that they think is very important for them, then I think it is a blur on humanity as a whole.

In the last 20 years, that I have seen, quite a lot of changes have happened. A lot of questions have

gone away in the way we see ourselves. For instance, when I was 15, widow remarriage was an issue that was talked about, discussed, and approached with a lot of hesitation. But now, when I see the society around me, at least the urban society, I don't think there is anybody who treats this issue differently. The issue of chastity, is also viewed differently today. Things are changing, but problems are appearing in new dimensions for women every day.

**How can we ensure safety of girl children/women today?**

The brutality of crime against women has most certainly grown up in the last two decades. I think a very significant contributor for crime against women and children is liquor. When we were young, there would be one odd drunkard walking down the street, or lying on the pavement. Today, this is a common sight, especially in the state of Tamil Nadu. In every crime scene, you will definitely see a bottle of liquor being present. Unless, as a society, we stand strong and fight against liquor, the crime rates will not come down.

The abuse of social media and easy access to obscenity have caused a moral derailment in the society. The way we bring up our children—sons and daughters—is also a reason. There is an unconscious bias. While we take a lot of care to see how our daughters are spending their time, who their friends are, what they are

doing, and what they are viewing on their screen—we don't exercise the same caution with our sons. This difference is really the key to the solution that we are speaking of.

Boys should be brought up by asking the right set of questions and values need to be imbibed in them since birth. They should be made to understand that a girl should be treated like a friend, another human being, like a sister or a cousin. They are not creations of God made for man to enjoy and be served with.

Given the recent Pollachi incident, one of the culprit's mother is shown arguing that her son has done no wrong and that he has been victimized. This is how blinded one can get! For the mother, her son is a nice person and someone who cannot do anything wrong. Her own son is now a stranger to her. She does have a daughter, and I am sure that she has known her more closely.

Such are the deterrents and unless addressed, I don't see the crimes against women going down.

**Your advice to the budding debaters?**

The success of a person – be it a speaker or writer – is directly proportionate to the reading habit of that person. Gone are the times when people used to have one or two ideas, and five or six jokes that they keep repeating in every place and claim to be a speaker.

Now, you are on Youtube all the time. People watch you and you cannot repeat what you have said before. You are constantly driven about talking about new ideas and only books can do that.

There is no prescription to a reading habit as all of us naturally tend to seek something which we are very close to. For developing language skills, I recommend people to read in the language that they aspire to speak or write. They can start with reading books they find attractive - like fiction - and slowly move on to reading non-fiction and philosophy.

Reading habits should be cultivated when one is a child, else it is extremely difficult. If you want your child to be interested in reading, you have to read first. The child should see his or her parents reading books every day and discussing about the books they read. Advising the school to have a reading hour would not suffice.

If you start reading early, you will see your interests evolving. Start with bed time stories, child stories, and then graduate to mysteries, and teenage romance. You then search for a genre which interests you deeply.

I almost don't read fiction now. Whatever fiction I read is for memories of my past which I have enjoyed and I want to relive. What interests me is biography and deep philosophy.

It is not necessary that one has to choose only one type of book so you can choose what interests you.

