

Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

RNI No.TNENG/2013/52428 | Volume 1 | Issue 5 | December 2013 | 12 Pages | For Free Circulation Only| www.msdsrtrust.org



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Published by P.N.Subramanian on behalf of
Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani,
391/1, Venkatachalapathi Nagar, Alapakam,
Chennai - 600 116 and printed by him at
Express Press, Express Gardens, No.29, Second
Main Road, Ambattur Industrial Estate,
Chennai - 600 058.

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**"I would say that we still
need NGOs, in fact
genuine ones!"**
An exclusive interview with
Shri. D.N. Kar, IRS

From the Editor

Dear Friend,

The International day for persons with disabilities is observed on 3rd December. It is a very special day, as on this day the world reaffirms its commitment to build an inclusive society and rededicate itself to this cause.

It should not be forgotten that over one billion people, or approximately 15 per cent of the world's population, live with some form of disability. Persons with disabilities, "the world's largest minority", often face barriers to participation in all aspects of society. The result is that persons with disability do not have equal access to social services, including education, employment, health care, transportation, political participation or justice.

India is a country where most of the population live in rural areas and accessing health and rehabilitation services has always been a challenge. The commemoration of 'International Day of Persons with Disabilities' therefore provides us with an opportunity to address this exclusion by promoting accessibility and removing all types of barriers in our society.

It is time to see disability as a public, and not a private issue. People with disabilities do have the right to live with the same choices as everyone else.

Let us stand up for people living with disability!

Marie Banu

Positive Energy from Looking Deeply

Compassion is always born of understanding, and understanding is the result of looking deeply. —Thich Nhat Hanh

Our world today is pushing us toward immediacy and rapidity. We have identified ourselves with breadth and range in our pursuit of success. We do not adequately value depth and mastery within a contained zone. We believe we have looked at something and choose to move on, but only looking deeply can give us a complete view of it. Just because something is available instantly to our vision does not mean that it is also instantly available to our consciousness. In other words, access is not synonymous with knowing. What turns access into knowing is looking deep, patiently and with awareness.

We are all aware that our existing knowledge about nature and science have taken us eons to study and understand. Similarly, there is great value in looking deep – with critical attention, patient investigation, and skepticism about surface appearances. This skill becomes more relevant and important in the twenty-first century, where life is on a fast track and every piece of knowledge is like fast food.

Here is our personal experience, as we journey the Positive Energy path and look deeply into its very essence.

"My journey with Positive Energy gives me direction about actions that help me move forward my experience of being. When I started my spiritual journey, I felt that there was some place to reach, something to achieve. Now, the realization is deep that this journey is what it is - how aware I am, how much of my past I erase from my mind, and how much of my present I immerse myself in. This journey continues and everyday becomes abundant with grace and gratitude.

Recently, I read the book, "Peace in Every Breath" by Thich Naht Hanh. He talks about 'practicing looking deeply' to increase the capacity for deep insight. And when I read this phrase, something inside me stirred. It became obvious to me that looking deeply is the key to being in the present, in the here and now.

Now, as I write about 'looking deeply', I'm, looking deeply at what it means to me. Why does it resonate so much with my being?

I am experiencing looking deeply at several levels and each having a profound effect on the other.

- Looking deeply to heal
- Looking deeply to understand where my suffering comes from
- Looking deeply so that others can experience my presence
- Looking deeply to slow down with awareness
- Looking deeply to immerse myself in my work
- Looking deeply to find where and how I can add value



Bringing it all together, I know it means:

1. To go inward by reducing distractions from my external pursuits
2. Immerse myself in whatever I'm doing - getting focused
3. Look into the depths of 'space', to come in touch with my positive stories, unresolved issues, limiting beliefs, and other elements that I have stored in the 'space'.

The experience of 'looking deeply' is very empowering. I suddenly feel that things around me have slowed down - I can experience the beauty of every situation and it surfaces my ability to forget my ego-self and become myself. There is no hurry to reach anywhere. Looking deeply, I am engaged everywhere with my entire existence - with my body, my emotions, my mind, and my consciousness. And that releases positive energy for me.

The care and devotion that emerges from looking deeply, ensures that I'm available for my family and my team. To illustrate, "A ten-year-old boy was asked by his father what he wanted for his birthday. The boy didn't know how to respond to this question. His father was quite wealthy and could afford to buy almost anything that he may want. But the young boy only said, "Daddy, I want you!" His father was too busy - he had no time for his wife or children. When the father practices looking deeply, it will naturally be known to him what his child longs for deeply and how he can fulfill it."

We are used to the practice of looking deeply; however, we do this in places where it does not bring us results. For example, when I have a conflict with an associate, I'm looking deeply about what he has done that brings the conflict. Instead, when I shift my perspective and practice looking deeply at how I am contributing to the conflict and what I can do to address the conflict, then, the entire practice brings results.

Every feeling that I experience, I filter through the practice of looking deeply. When I do that I'm able to touch the chord that causes suffering. I often discover that others do not bring about my suffering – but it is my forgetfulness, anger, or jealousy, my words or actions that have created my suffering.

Similarly, looking deeply also shows me the positive seeds in me. This is the starting point of self-love, when I begin to accept myself. I live with aliveness and radiate positive energy unconditionally.

The Nine Prayers

Looking deeply I experience...

1. Being peaceful, happy, and light in body and spirit
2. Being free from injury and living in safety
3. Being free from disturbance, fear, and anxiety
4. Learning to look at myself with the eyes of understanding and of love
5. Learning to recognize and touch the seeds of joy and happiness in myself
6. Learning to recognize and see the sources of anger, craving, and delusion in myself
7. Knowing how to nourish the seeds of joy in myself, every day
8. Living fresh, solid, and free
9. Being free from attachment and aversion, but not be indifferent"

This staying capacity, coming from looking deeply, allows us to explore the depths and see the unseen and experience the hidden and rich bounties of one's self. And from that space it becomes meaningful to connect with others, with nature, with the Universe – and then the wisdom of nature becomes available to us.

This personal discovery is the essence of looking deeply. May you also practice looking deeply as you live your life and enjoy its beauty to it's fullest.

—Dr. Bhulakshmi V and
Ms. Bhuvaneshwari Ravi

All Work And All Play

For every child it takes on, cultivating a clean work ethic is first on the agenda for SAI Trust.

Reminiscing on the common adage of standing on one's own feet, a glimpse through statistics that spell doom for the engineering clan abound - 95 percent of engineering graduates are unemployable. The usual perception hammered into the minds of many is that the possession of a degree or a professional one renders a person immune from the rat race for employment. The concept of employment however, holds much more depth.

Occupying one self is by human nature, a show of self-sufficiency and independence and less of monetary gain or societal acceptance, and this very occupation of the self does not see physical or mental ability, or even educational qualification. Reiterating the essence of this concept is Hari Krishnan's brainchild, SAI Educational and Vocational Trust, now in its 9th year of functioning. "After a stint at adult vocational education and helping special needs children for over 16 years, a vacuum for holistic vocational education for the differently challenged persisted. This was motivation enough for me to get the trust up and running," shares Krishnan.

At first glimpse, Krishnan measures his words with care, and answers in a straightforward tone, but reveals much when I attempt to grasp his definition of holistic vocational education. "Employment comes in varied shades, and according to me there are 5 forms. Self, support, sheltered, open, and group. But, to even execute the forms of employment, behaviour is important. Regularity, punctuality and ability to work in teams – all of these qualities are equally imperative," explains Krishnan.

For every child it takes on, cultivating a clean work ethic is first on the agenda for SAI Trust. "While the focus on skills is immense by vocational educators, we give an equal importance to presentation." The educational training focuses on ADL, functional academics, and psychomotor skills which prepares them for vocational training. The vocational training is a structured 3year program for adults with special needs and



training primarily focusing on work skill (psychomotor and job related tasks), work behaviours.

Upon achieving the readiness for vocation the individuals are placed in simulated workstations to give them real work exposure. Following their successful completion they graduate and are in the market for mainstream employment opportunities. At the trust, a swathe of choices await the students – computers, catering, gardening, weaving, carpentry and packaging to



"40-45 people have been successfully employed. From provision shops to carpentry, what matters is that they love what they're doing and feel independent."

name a few. They are however, acquainted with everything to assess where their strengths and weaknesses lie. "Most really don't come to us with an idea of what they are passionate about, and we can't expect them to know either. So it's good to dabble," he says.

The myriad choices are generously balanced out with leisure and recreational activities such as sports, yoga, arts and crafts, thereby ensuring the learning process is relaxed. But, let's talk employability. The trust is committed to the idea that no work is ever pointless or mediocre. "40-45 people have been successfully employed. From provision shops to carpentry, what matters is that they love what they're doing and feel independent."

Krishnan plans on starting a multiproduction unit called SAI industry and create SAI Workers Quarters where workers can live in a



supportive environment as well earn their living.

Here's hoping the Trust challenges the conventional picture of an employee in today's world - sans an engineering degree, with a physical or mental disability that they never allow to get the best of them, and a whole lot of confidence and capability.

—Divya Karthikeyan

From Tsunamika to Janaki,

Upasana's Uma has spawned seven social businesses from Auroville

Upasana Integral Design's (Upasana) founder Uma Prajapati is a woman of slight build. In 2004, when she turned up to help in the aftermath of the devastating Tsunami, she realized that she couldn't assist with the heavy lifting required to clear the debris. Undeterred, she pivoted and in February 2005 started providing the women affected with trauma counseling. Soon, she began employing them to do work with Upasana. Out of that was born Upasana's most famous creation – Tsunamika. A set of female dolls made from old cloth, that were carved out of the devastation of the 2004 tsunami, came to be celebrated as a symbol of hope. She cannot be bought or sold, but only gifted. To date more than 6 million have been gifted and Tsunamika has made her way across oceans and continents. Her story is studied in schools ranging from Spain to Singapore.

Upasana's origins:

Uma graduated from the design school National Institute of Fashion and Technology (NIFT) in 1994. Before starting Upasana, she worked as design head with textile company Auromood at Auroville, a self-contained community, which is home to individuals from more than 47 nationalities. Sometime in 1996 she decided to start off on her own with Rs 2000 in her pocket and a dream to bring alive the heritage of India's local textile industry. "I had no experience in the social sector. All I knew was that I wanted to bring grandeur of nation and vibrance to Auroville. In India the cultural language in textile is still embedded and is perhaps one of the few countries where the textile sector has not gone industrial. The local industries in Kanchipuram and Benares are still alive and millions depend on them for their livelihoods. Each state has own culture and textile. I wanted to bring the diversity of this into my area of work by infusing a sense of design that is sustainable," says Uma.

The Tsunamika project was just one of



the forks in the road for Uma's Upasana Studio. Every single project that's she's undertaken so far has to do with a response to a social situation that moved her emotionally, to which she has responded by carving out a separate project in the process. To date, there have been seven major projects that Uma has undertaken, each with her typical eye for detail, employing local communities, and with a strong emphasis on sustainability, aesthetics and design. Other than Tsunamika, the other projects include Small Steps, Varnasi Weavers Association, Kapas, Tranquebar, Paruthi and Janaki.

"We have always responded to a need and saw ourselves as a pioneering brand driven by design and social responsibility. The community did not know what designers can do, we have proved it with

all projects about the power we wield," remarks Uma.

Upasana's seven projects:

1) Tsunamika (2005):

As mentioned earlier, Tsunamika started as a trauma counseling effort for the fisherwomen in February 2005. Out of the 500 women who were trained to make the dolls between February and May of 2005, 200 have made it their livelihood. Since the doll cannot be bought or sold, a bank account was created to receive donations; the project continues to be completely self-sustained through the contributions of thousands of donors. Uma claims that Tsunamika is the only project post tsunami that is still active. When CNN was looking for story of hope post the Tsunami they

decided to go with the story of Tsunamika story. Unesco has recognized the doll with a special endorsement. A storybook on Tsunamika has been translated into 7 international languages.

2) Small Steps (2007):

Uma, who was born in Bihar, was traveling back home for a family function, when she saw strewn piles of garbage everywhere. Although, this wasn't exactly the first time that this had happened, something snapped inside her, and she decided to do something about the problem and that's how Small Steps was born. In India alone approximately 5,600 tones of plastic waste is generated daily that is a hazard to the environment. Uma realized that everybody were not doing anything not because they were not



interested by did not know how to help. So they started a campaign that brings awareness to this cause saying one tiny step by every person by carrying their own shopping bag could make a big difference.

She formally launched Small Steps on Earth Day in 2007. Uma expects 10 million handcrafted bags that fit neatly into a little pouch to be made, out of which 1 million have already been delivered. "It is a tiny effort to change planet ourselves, a smart bag for a smart planet," adds Uma. Small Steps has resulted in providing a livelihood for 140 women in 14 villages. They stitch these bags at home when they are free and don't have to travel to a place of work to do this and on an average between Rs 1500 to Rs 3000.

3) Varnasi Weavers Project (2007):

Initially started as a small project by Upsana, to make 13,000 banarasi silk scarves were made as New Year gifts 2006 for Denmark-based Best Seller Company became a full-fledged project involving the weavers from Varanasi in 2007. The weavers of Varanasi are suffering like many other artisans involved in the traditional arts and crafts in India. Rising production costs, cheaper imitations and a drop in demand has added to their woes. As part of the project, Upasana worked with weaving groups (2500) and provided them with design, marketing and sales channels. The products have been presented in international and domestic fashion shows. Upasana buys, brands and sells the Benares weavers brand in India and overseas.

4) Kapas (2008):

Kapas is a sustainable business collaborative striving to protect and promote the fragile cotton communities of Tamil Nadu. Failed crops, increased competition, and unfair business practices have driven thousands of cotton farmers and weavers to despair; over 2 lakh

cotton farmers have committed suicide in the past decade.

As a member of the fashion community, Upasana Design Studio could not silently witness such destruction. Kapas leverages partnerships with several local organizations to: choose only organic and indigenous crops nurtured by all-natural fertilizers; employ a fair business model that improves the livelihood of farmers and weavers; use natural dyes to create top-quality basics with a higher level of consciousness. We are working with Covenant Centre of Development (CCD), and Bestseller Foundation, among others.

From seed to sale, Kapas is socially and environmentally sustainable project using only the most ethical practices for the earth and the cotton communities of rural India.

5) Tranquebar (2009):

Upasana launched this in close partnership with Bestseller Fund, I N T A C H (Indian National for Art and Cultural Heritage), and Saint Joseph Development Trust. Tranquebar lies 150 km south of Pondicherry, after the 2004 Tsunami wrecked the architecture of the town and the lives of its inhabitants.

Upasana true to its philosophy of responding to social problems, hoped to transform Tranquebar into a cultural tourism destination by highlighting its beautiful heritage. They are engaging with the local population to enhance their skills in craft and help market their wares. They also help with boosting incomes by promoting the concept of homestays.

6) Paruthi (2011):

Upasana launched Paruthi as a local organic brand to support India's organic cotton farming community. Uma believes that if India adopts an organic approach when it comes to clothing and food, that it can move towards a sustainable future. Upasana works with farmers from seed-to-sale stage by making garments for ladies, kids and gents, and also has separate lines for home furnishing, accessories and yoga-wear.



At present the movement to save to save our environment is growing slowly, but for real impact it needs to go mainstream, Paruthi strives to do this through the products it sells.

Paruthi changed Upasana as an organization, it is now striving to be a more sustainable, organic company itself.

Upasana tries to no longer buy normal cotton and is instead switching to 100 per cent organic.

7) Janaki (2012):

To complete the loop from seed to sale, Upasana launched Janaki (house of conscious living) as its first retail initiative in Pondicherry to sell home furnishing and organic food. They also organize a farmer's market every Saturday morning.

Janaki, the brand is based on the concept of the Indian 'grand mother' who was looked at in the Indian family as a wisdom tree. Janaki bring the message of a sustainable lifestyle, as a shopping experience, paving a path for the future. One of Janaki's sub-brands is Prakrit, which is a furniture line that was born after the cyclone Thane hit Auroville in December 2011.

Present perfect but what does the future hold?

Uma's vision for Upasana future is one that is disconnected from profit maximization and serves people but one that is always self-sustained financially. During most of Upasana's existence 60 per cent of its activity was non-profit and all its various initiatives have been self-funded. When I ask Uma whether she has had any investors. "Luckily no. Living in Auroville has helped me learn about the strengths and weaknesses of money and if I'm not careful, I can be taken for a good ride. I fear that the organization's ideology; sincerity and brand could be overridden. We are looking at attracting investment but not from mainstream investors but from angel investors. Money is not for multiplying money, but for multiplying goods," explains Uma. Angels have not yet been identified.

Profits generated by Upasana is plowed back into the business and into the various activities supported by Auroville. "Our focus is on social business because its the hope for the planet and large scale transformation, otherwise we will stagnate in human evolution. In a nutshell what is important is what difference can I bring? Instead of cribbing, I am interested in creating a world that is better and fair," concludes Uma.

—Nelson Moses

Editorial

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu

CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INITIATIVE AND MANAGEMENT



Centre 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. CSIM operates in Chennai, Coimbatore, Hyderabad and Bangalore.

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Rajas And Ranis For Easy Commutation

The resource persons from CSIM introduced me to social enterprises as an alternative to solving social issues.

Experts say that 80 percent of people who share their ideas do not work on them. Clearly, there is no dearth of ideas. There are individuals who have contemplated on ideas, categorically defined indicators of change and remain focused on money as the complementary component. Such enterprises are becoming the order of the day, inspiring many from the business and government quarters. One such Social Enterprise is Auto Raja, founded by Anubhav Agrawal and Aishwarya Raman in April 2013, in Chennai.

Aishwarya, CEO and Co-Founder of Auto Raja is a post graduate in Sociology, who studied the lives of auto drivers in Chennai for her UG dissertation. “I visited their houses, largely located in slums, interacted with their families, union leaders who have the greatest influence on these drivers to learn the economics of surviving through auto rickshaws,” shares Aishwarya. These visits also helped her understand the influence of socio-economic background in choosing a career in the organized sector. With this came up a volley of questions – is there a support system for workers in the unorganized sector? Particularly, auto drivers? “These questions took me to people I never imagined I would meet, yet turned out to be very resourceful – liquor shop owners, bureaucrats, union leaders and others,” she adds.

Interviewing 75 auto drivers and 25 customers across the city brought in new answers to reflect upon. Incidentally, this was a first of its kind study looking at how customers rated auto drivers. “This thesis was a very unique experience, in the sense that I was facing questions at every turn. The reflection on which has brought me to where I am today,” recalls Aishwarya. The findings of her study introduced her to the possibility of organizing unorganized workers like auto drivers, fixing this whole sector wherein the survival strategy adds value to the lives of these drivers. With no ready answers and persistent contemplation, there were only two words ringing in her mind – ‘What next?’ During her post-graduation days at the University of Oxford, “Anubhav Agrawal, Founder, Auto Raja, was already working on this idea. He had come across my profile in the blog and wrote to me about his line of thoughts. We began brain storming and finally decided to start a for-profit social enterprise to address the problems faced by customers by addressing those faced by auto drivers. Thus was born Auto Raja!” she revels.

A holistic analysis of the target groups’ profile, openness to new models of

organization and other factors brought many facts to light. “Globally, 75 percent of the auto rickshaw population are in India and 229 million customers use auto rickshaws on a daily basis. We then looked at customer profiles across cities and states in India. Realising that there was scope in what we were trying to embark on, we began to meet experts in the field, other social entrepreneurs, NGOs that worked with auto drivers, think tanks working on sustainable transport solutions, etc,” she says.

Aishwarya knew about CSIM during her UG days at MOP Vaishnav College for Women. “The resource persons from CSIM introduced me to social enterprises as an alternative to solving social issues. Thanks to CSIM for introducing me to people working with multiple perspectives. Their hand holding is guiding us even today. Ms. Latha Suresh, Honorary Director of CSIM is one of the honorary members of our Board and Mr. P.N. Subramanian is our Advisor,” says Aishwarya. It was soon clear for the team on what they were trying to do — provide a seamless, hassle free, economical service to customers across the country. And this required them to work with auto drivers, Rajas.

Auto Raja works on a three pronged strategy – facilitating access to institutional credit, affordable health care and quality education. As a call auto rickshaw service, their networking has led to sustainable partnerships with social organisations and corporates. “Facilitating access to institutional credit through the All India Bank Officers’ Association made sure that our Rajas did not go to money lenders who charged high rates of interest. This sense of ownership created a behavioral change in them, encouraging them to think of moving up the social ladder.” Auto Raja is also providing soft loans to help them repay money lenders, build a house of their own, etc.

Networking with hospitals for regular health camps led them to the adoption of Kannagi Nagar – where more than half of the 15,000 families depend on auto rickshaw operations. Free health check-up for auto drivers and Auto Raja cards for treatment facility at discounted rates are on cards. Quality education for women and children from the Rajas families introduced them to opportunities that the families had hardly thought of. Women are offered training in computer skills, spoken English, optometry, home nursing and driving. Besides, children are sent to an organization that provides after school activities. Bringing back Rajas to the focus, and improving their literacy was

seen paramount as some of them could not even write Tamil fluently. Rajas are also educated on gender sensitization, family dynamics, significance of financial health, customer relations and safety trainings.

All these efforts also led to a partnership with the Manual Labourers Welfare Board under Government of Tamil Nadu to provide socio economic security for unorganized workers. Only a little over

10,000 drivers in the State had registered with this Board while Chennai alone accounts for more than one lakh registered drivers. Auto Raja is trying to get its Rajas registered with the Board so that they can avail benefits like pension, scholarships for children, maternity benefit for their wives and moratorium. A beginning with just 13 Rajas in their fleet, Auto Raja today has 550 Rajas enrolled.

Based on call service model, mobile triangulation limits their ability to engage only 125 Rajas on a daily basis.

With a mobile app and online booking services in the making, Auto Raja has stepped into introducing its women fleet of Auto Ranis. “We are in talks with TVS to manufacture autos with different colors for women exclusively.” Reflecting on this journey of 8 months, Aishwarya says that

working in Chennai has been the most challenging, as there was no standard rates fixed or a formula in use. “While there was a campaign to reintroduce meters in autos revealing 25 rupees per kilometer as the present slab, we came up with 12 rupees per kilometer proposition. Going at half the regular rates and convincing Rajas of our system was a huge task then,” she recalls.



recruiting a driver manager. With this positive result, we are now on to recruit physically challenged individuals at our call centre.” Auto Raja’s success has inspired many institutions to seek partnership with them. The most rewarding mile stone came immediately after Auto Raja was invited on board by the Tamil Nadu Government when it decided to revise auto fares in the State. “Our proposition of 12 rupees per kilometer was accepted unanimously and is now implemented across the state,” she proudly notes.

Going back to customers to learn their attitudes towards the Rajas, and recently their drivers from the transgender community has been an inherent strength of this enterprise, allowing them to work on establishing equal opportunities for all. With no second thoughts, one can admit that Auto Raja is definitely an exemplar to show that immediate public transport works.

—Shanmuga Priya. T

Aishwarya feels that the most unexpected outcome was the integration of sexual minorities with mainstream. Auto Raja has transgenders and sex workers working with it. “We did not envisage this as a livelihood project. It just happened when we came across a profile for

Food security, rain fed agriculture, the legislation and all that

Just 60 kms from the throbbing city of Bangalore – aka as India's Silicon city, I am in the back yard, so to speak, in Kodahalli hobli, a Block in the District of Ramanagaram in Karnataka. The villages, some of which look spectacular with green hills and water overflowing with more than expected rains in the old water bodies. As I soon found out, the beauty hides the real struggle of the peasants here with very small patches of lands on the undulating and treacherous hill path, as though hanging in the air. Narayana, 45, the farmer with few guntas (40 guntas makes an acre) held my hand, as I was slipping and failing to climb. He casually mentioned that walking up and down the hill is almost a daily activity, and most times just carrying a bag of manure up can be a killer!

Why do you struggle so much? You can just sell and move to town as many in this East side of the capital do? I asked as I recently learnt that the villages on other side of the National highway 241 were swallowing these villages in order to provide luxury homes to the new rich. Narayana replied saying: "After all the struggle, I am feeling a bit hopeful. We have formed groups which collect and support each other in reclaiming small patches of land."

He showed me a few guntas of healthy looking ragi, the finger millet crop that he planted on his newly reclaimed land. "I will harvest 8 to 10 bags which will give me enough to eat and also sell," he smiled with pride and confidence.

This new found confidence has arisen out of the technical and financial support from DHAN Foundation, an organization that works across the country on livelihood and poverty issues. DHAN more recently decided to work with the rained fed agriculture community by undertaking a number of actions.

The positive feelings that has gripped this community in the past few years are because of the facilitation, inputs, community building efforts, and the small successes they experienced from the land they possessed.

Sujaya, a team leader is a full time staff of Dhan. He is willing to learn and is active in supporting and enabling the group members. He hails from a lower middle class family and is a graduate from Forestry College in Ponnempet at Madikeri. "I was keen to join the DHAN Academy, but could not make it. I feel happy to work as a coordinator here," said Sujaya.

While supporting and developing leadership among men and women is of priority, one of the reasons for DHAN's success is to develop a cadre of professionals to work and bring as much



learning from the commune as much as bringing fresh ideas and innovation to the villages.

I find this aspect of DHAN, in integrating different sections of population to address poverty and exclusion, exceptional and worth studying for any actor interested in sustainable rain fed agriculture.

Land reclamation, even if small patches, and land rejuvenation has started to show results in providing better food security at the home front.

I was never prepared for what happened next!

We went to meet Mahadevayya, 37, who was tall, elegant, a bag of energy and an unsurpassed host. He was multi-talented—from Dollu Kunitha to Kosale Kunitha (spiritual-cultural expressions) and has been called upon to sing and dance by the Karnataka Government and many others. Despite his wide travelling, he remains deeply rooted in his village. Native chickens, goats, and pet dogs run wild around his big home which has a front yard large enough to play cricket!

Mahadevayya's father and grandfather are known for their knowledge on native herbal medicine and are also acclaimed for integrated cultivation.

"For each plant I grow, a remedy or a cure for any ailment from constipation to

cancer is hidden," said Mahadevayya.

He took me around and showed a range of organic solutions that he had prepared. The fish paste was his favorite concoction, and smelt almost like eatable molasses. "Apply this paste to any plant and it gets an army of buzzing bees. This not only helps pollinate better but also prevents any other pests from attacking the crop," said he.

He then showed me collections of valuable minor millets and local onion that he stored in a separate building. The collection, preservation, and propagation of his work is done with the help of DHAN.

Deep faith is something that sustains the peasants here and it is something that makes them feel that irrespective of having a bad year, they hope that the next year will be better.

DHAN has a great ability to identify and support such individuals and take their traditional knowledge and good practices to other farmers through their farmers groups. They also propagate through various events such as the Seed Festival in Bangalore.

After what was looked like more than a sumptuous all-organic meal, Mahadevayya served ground nuts and took us to show the formidable crop of local Ragi (Finger Millet) at his plot, a

little away from home.

This plot, along with a dozen others, were provided with rich silt from the local water tank. This boosted the crop and its ability to retain water, and seemed ready for Harvest. "This crop is the only one that survived the recent high wind and rain, whereas the other millet crops that was grown in an inorganic way did not," he said with pride.

From supporting rain fed farmers federation to documenting community bio-diversity registers and community seed banks; from providing small critical grants to providing quality ground nut seeds; from identifying native millets to providing groundnuts through participatory selection process; from soil health enhancement through tank silt provision to land levelling; from solar fencing to protecting crops from wild beasts; from developing solidarity among groups of men and women to improving knowledge, skill, competency, and leadership of local community—the women and men of Kodihalli are bringing a silent revitalization of the natural and community resources.

The work is just a few years old. But, it shows promise and has made a breakthrough in sustainable rain fed agriculture.

—Pushpanath Krishnamurthy

The Fight For Inclusion



The United Nations commemorates December 3 every year, as the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The relevance of this day becomes all the more important with every passing year, simply because the differently-abled continue to remain bereft of acceptance from within society. This year, Aim for Seva's Krupa Home worked towards correcting just that. "It's perhaps the biggest challenge that we face today: the fact that those with developmental disabilities are subconsciously not looked at as belonging to the community we live in, and represent," says Dr Radhika Soundararajan, Director of Aim for Seva Krupa Home. She continues: "Those who have developmental problems are like other human beings, but often miss out on being treated like other people. Our aim, this year, was to change that."

It was with this mission that the Krupa Home worked towards a sensitization drive on World Disability Day, this year. "We visited schools and colleges and got the residents of our homes to talk to students of these institutions, and show them how they were also part of the world they lived in," explains Dr Radhika. "This, we hoped, would encourage these students to change their attitudes towards such children with developmental challenges." But by her own admission, Radhika feels that the real victory is only when acceptance turns into action: "You see a movie that you appreciate, go home and forget about it all," she says. "Similarly, the big concern is that a similar occurrence might arise here as well. We have done our best in spreading awareness and sensitizing children about what it's like to be a child with developmental disabilities. But how far will it remain? How much action can be expected from such awareness? I believe that is the question we need to ask ourselves." What she does believe needs to be done, is nothing short of more sensitization and awareness, in the hope that someday those with developmental disabilities may be treated without discrimination.

According to Radhika, there are three categories of developmental disabilities that exist: mental retardation, autism and cerebral palsy. "At Krupa, we do our best to be care-givers to our residents who

suffer from all of these conditions," says Radhika. "Our residents' ages start from 21 and go up to 58, and our staff is a team of 20." But one of the more heart-warming aspects of Krupa's work in the area has been the manner in which the home encourages residents to care for each other. "The extent of one's condition may not be as significant as a fellow resident. What we do in these cases, is encourage this person to care for someone who may be able to care for themselves, or may suffer from a worse condition," she says. Not surprisingly, the results are for all to see. The Krupa Home has successfully managed to do its bit in inclusive care and attention for all its residents. But Radhika still maintains that attitudes need to change for the better, and change quickly at that. "Take physical disabilities for example. If you take a look around you, there is no supportive infrastructure for people who are physically challenged," she says. "Right from our ATMs to the steps on our buses, our infrastructure isn't disabled-friendly. There is an urgent need for

ramps at such facilities."

Caring for residents at Krupa Home is no doubt, a mighty challenge. However, Radhika believes that the key to making it work is to allow individual growth and decision-making. "We desist from telling our residents what to do or imposing a set of strict regulations for them to follow. However, we do encourage discipline by way of hygiene; there is also a time for prayer and visiting temples. It has worked."

The future certainly looks bright for the NGO that has its plans laid out and hopes to achieve its goals in due course. One of these, of course, is to bring about greater participation in vocational activities. "This includes weaving, paper mache; and we even recently got into a partnership with Nizhal to encourage the planting of trees and thus bringing about environmental sensitivity. We also hope to expand and take on more residents in the future," says Radhika. One of the major goals that the home plans on

achieving in the near future is early intervention – caring for young children with developmental issues.

"So far, our youngest resident is just 21. We hope to care for younger people and thus help them cope with their condition. The earlier we start caring for them, the easier it probably gets."

No doubt, the biggest challenge to inclusion and caring is sensitization. "Such a condition means that there is little chance of such people living normal lives. However, it is important that we allow them to live as close to normalcy," concludes Radhika. "We have jobs based on our individual ability. If we could figure out a way by which those with developmental challenges also find jobs according to their individual ability, it will certainly go a long way." It is in this respect that the Krupa Home has gone about furthering its mission – a mission that it hopes will see its accomplishment sooner than later, in the interest of the society we live in today.



Conversations with Shri Ramana Maharishi

Explaining a stanza in Aksharamanamalai Sri Bhagavan said that *mowna* is the highest form of upadesa. It signifies 'silence' as master, disciple and practiser. Three *sanyasins*, who were visiting Sri Bhagavan, began a discussion.

D.: If one remained quiet how is action to go on? Where is the place for karma yoga?

M.: Let us first understand what Karma is, whose Karma it is and who is the doer. Analysing them and enquiring into their truth, one is perforce obliged to remain as the Self in peace. Nevertheless the actions will go on.

D.: How will the actions go on if I do not act?

M.: Who asks this question? Is it the

Self or another? Is the Self concerned with actions?

D.: No, not the Self. It is another, different from the Self.

M.: So it is plain that the Self is not concerned with actions and the question does not arise.

D.: I agree.

Another asked: What is the state of the realised man? Is he not acting?

M.: The question implies that the realised man is not the questioner. Why should you concern yourself with another? Your duty is to look to yourself and not ask of others.

D.: The scriptures hold him up as the ideal.

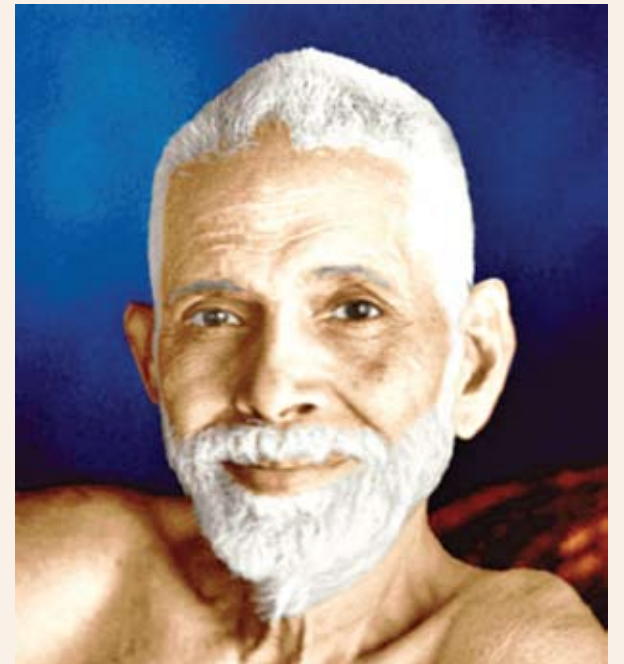
M.: Certainly. He is the ideal. You should realise the Self. Even if his state be now described, your

understanding of it will be only according to your capacity. You admit that your capacity is limited. The scriptures say that the realised state admits of no limits. So then, the only way to understand his state is to realise the Self and experience the state. If the question arises afterwards the answer will be found.

Another visitor asked: There is differentiation made between the sentient and the insentient (*chit* and *jada*) in the opening verse of Upadesa Sara.

M.: The Upadesa is from the standpoint of the hearer. There is no truth in the insentient (*jada*). One whole consciousness (*chit*) prevails all alone.

—Excerpted from *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*



Belongingness Dimensions – ‘heart connect’ing to retention

While attracting excellent talent may be a challenge, retention is even more so in social organizations. One of the key roles of the HR is to ensure employees remain with the organization and contribute their best during their tenure. Employees who come into social organization are of different shades – those who come with passion; who come to make a difference to themselves and society; who come as a stop gap; who come to keep themselves busy; who come as volunteers to feed ego; who come to explore and find out what they are seeking in life; who come to fill the large vacuum in their life and hearts... and so on. What would be the key focus points to keep the employee engagement at its best so the retention is also ensured?

Research has shown that work-life balance, proper career development opportunities, process to sustain the passion, personal vision of the employee, professionalism in terms of proper systems and processes along with this job satisfaction and job clarity have a direct impact on employee satisfaction which indirectly impacts retention. Along with all this and the belongingness nine dimensions, the heart-connects are very important. The meaning of belongingness that has been discussed in these articles is stated as “a state of being born out of a relationship, in which one experiences value for oneself, being cared for, with a space for continuous evolution leading to the need to fulfill the expectations of the relationship and beyond.” This brings in the need for synchrony of the head and the heart. Most of the organizations miss this

out. Most of us wish that we have a workplace where it feels like being with family and friends. But, the efforts to create a space like that are not sufficient.

There is a myth that control, logical conclusions and hard wiring are not functional where the heart is functioning. In reality, employees are humans and not machines. They go through a series of emotions in a day and if that is not addressed and stimulated adequately we are left with a set of robots at the end of the day. Especially, in a social organization the need to feel the passion is important. Passion emerges the best when there is a blend of the head and the heart. HR of an organization has responsibility to ensure the synchrony of head and heart.

In organizations many a time heart connects happens in cliques. Clique formation could be based on language, region from where they come, educational background, college affiliation, gender, common issues faced in personal or work-life, travel, and so on. HR mistake this connect usually as employees being connected. But, that is not so. Cliques are always a bane to growth and evolution of organizational culture. The grapevine issues are highest within the cliques. More the cliques within the organization, lesser would be the flow and synchrony across the culture. The employees who are not able to be a part of any clique are usually left out as loners or rebels or as misfits in the system. The human issues between the cliques can be difficult to handle creating an in-secured, suspicious, closed culture.

The HR needs to become aware if there is real connect of the heart within the

organization. Processes have to be formulated where employees have the space to relate, share their emotions, to articulate deeper value conflicts, make friends not necessarily because they are work colleagues. For this to happen, the HR needs to ensure there is a higher level of:

- Expression of feelings, emotions and thoughts with each other. Expression does not mean employees have space to voice their opinions. Employees may speak a lot on various topics but not about themselves. Expression also does not mean being open about personal problems. It means that when employees communicate they share in equal measure the feeling and the thought dimension.
- There is sufficient freedom for employees to be themselves. Employees feel they are accepted for who they are. There are no judgements imposed on them and there are no masks to peel in order to relate to each other.
- The employees standby each other and are willing to support each other in times of need beyond the tasks.
- There is a high level of sensitivity for each other's feelings and emotions. There is empathy and acceptance in the culture.
- There is a deeper awareness of appropriateness and sense of timing with regard to context, place and time when employees relate to each other (*adapted from value profile instrument (VPI), Sampath J.M. 1992*).

These have to be carefully woven into the beliefs and behaviour of the organization through processes of meetings, outings, during lunch and tea time. The space to know each other through the expression of their talents; in the way each employee is treated by leaders; the way the leaders encourage and conduct their teams; the celebration of success moments; support in facing difficult challenges are all spaces where these five elements of relationship can be built into the culture. It has to be integrated into the culture. It cannot be an annual activity, but a perennial flow of energy through the veins of the organization. Retention is not something to be handled just by systems built based on logic, but also by connecting the hearts and making the place truly a loving abode.

Reflections:

1. What is the level of expression and freedom experienced in my organization?
2. To what extent are people willing to stretch and support others in matters other than work?
3. To what extent do I know the people from other teams or departments and how much do I spend time in knowing them?
4. What are the activities and processes that exist in my organization that brings me in touch with myself and others? What is the frequency of these activities?

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath, PhD.

CSIM Convocation



The twelfth annual CSIM convocation event was held at Loyola College on 23rd November, 2013. Dr. Prateep V. Philip IPS, ADGP - Economic Offences Wing was the Chief Guest and Dr. K. Prabhakar was the Guest of Honor.

5 students received the Post Graduate Diploma in Social Initiative and Management. The best Outgoing Student Award was presented to Ms. N. Fathima and the 'Best Field Work Practice Award' was offered to Ms. G. Pramila. 25 students received their Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Programme diplomas.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Prateep said: "Fortunately or unfortunately, we belong to a country which has regions of greed as well as regions of need. The social entrepreneur will play a role to create a bridge between these regions. It is not just a geographical location, but a mindset."

The way the economists and managements have traditioned entrepreneurs is that they need to get all they can, can what they get, and

what is in the rest. That is the philosophy. If you see the recent economic recession, you will ask the question who led the world into recession again and again. They were the people who were dedicated in the highly reputed universities in the world- Harvard and others.

This shows that management itself does not have a solution for a major crisis faced in the world. That is why 16 World Major Universities, including London School of Business have studied on the recession and reinvented and redefined management. That gave me an opportunity to host my idea -Management Version 2.0 - "Excenomics". The pursue of excellence should be the priority.

Excellence, as I envied out is one of the ideals of CSIM." Dr. Prabhakar released CSIM's Annual Newsletter "Prajyoth" and Dr. Prateep received the first copy.

Mr. Elamurugan, Commissioner of Income Tax graced the occasion and over 100 NGO representatives and CSIM alumnus participated in the event.



“I would say that we still need NGOs, in fact genuine ones!”

Shri D.N. Kar, IRS shares with Marie Banu the need for more NGOs in our society.

Shri D.N. Kar was born in the year 1964 in Odisha. After completing his Post Graduation in Political Science from Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, he completed his M.Phil Degree from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and obtained LLB Degree from Delhi University.

His professional career began as an officer in Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited. He then joined Indian Revenue Service in 1988. After probation, he was posted as Assistant Commissioner of Income Tax in Vishakapatnam. He has held several posts including that of Joint Commissioner of Income Tax, Additional Commissioner of Income Tax to Salary Range, Business Range, and Corporate Range. He also worked as a Departmental Representative in the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal. In 2009, he was promoted as Commissioner of Income Tax and presently is the Director of Income Tax (Exemptions), Chennai.

Shri D.N. Kar, IRS has been invited as a speaker for many trainings and conferences organised within and outside the department. He is a recipient of several awards including ‘Distinguished Citizen Award’ from American Biographical Institute. He has also received cash award from Income Tax Department for conducting quality search and seizure operations and unearthing black money.

He is associated with various social, cultural, and sports bodies and is the Secretary General of Korfball Federation of India, a National Sports Federation.

In an interview, Shri D.N. Kar shares with Marie Banu the need for more NGOs in our society.

It has been estimated that there is 1 NGO for every 400 people in India. What are your thoughts on this?

Out of the applications that I have received for registration, I find that over 40 to 50 percent of them are

religious Trusts, mostly Christian Trusts founded by Pastors and Reverends. They register a Trust even for the sake of erecting one church and do not engage in much charitable activities.

About Charitable Trusts, there aren’t too many! Out of that, many are in the education sector. People think that there is a lot of money in this sector as education is allowed under charitable activities.

I will not say that there are too many NGOs. I think that there are not many who are actually doing good work! Because, despite having several NGOs, we still have issues like poverty, disease, etc.

I would say that we still need NGOs, in fact genuine ones!

How many NGOs get registered in Chennai Income Tax office in a month?

I look after whole of Chennai city and five adjacent districts—Vellore, Kanchipuram, Chengalpet, Thiruvannamalai. Every month, on an average, I receive 100

applications for new registrations and about 50 applications for 80G approval.

Chennai has a large constitution of NGOs. Historically, Chennai has been a city where large number of people are inclined towards charity or religion. Also, due to the fact that most of the Founders or Authors of the Trust reside in Chennai. People who have migrated from villages 50 to 60 years ago, feel that it is time to give back something to the society or village where they hail from. They register a Trust in Chennai and engage in charitable activities in villages that are located far away.

How does a person choose between the 3 Non-Profit organisations—Trust, Society and Section 25 company—to register?

For convenience of registration and managing it, I would say that formation of a Trust is easiest in comparison to Society or Section 25 Company.

Registering a Society would be a better option if more people are involved and it is going to be run more democratically. Because, once you register as a Society, you will have to follow the rules and regulations of the Tamil Nadu Societies Registration Act, 1975. This casts a lot of responsibilities on the members like periodical elections, proper maintenance of accounts, documents to be filed with Registration of Societies, etc. All this will lead to better governance.

Many people form Trusts as they want to make it more family oriented and managed only by their kith and kin. This is a kind of scenario where not

many outsiders are involved.

Section 25 Company is most regulated, as the compliance under Companies Act is heavier than Registration of Societies Act and have better governance norms.

About Social Enterprises. How best can they be registered?

A Social Enterprise whether registered as a Trust or Society or Section 25 Company gets similar benefits when it obtains exemption under section 80G of the IT Act.

But, if a Section 25 company obtains approval under Section 35 (1) (ii) or Section 35 AC of the IT Act, then the donors get more tax exemption benefits. In such a scenario, the success rate of the company would be higher. Donors will always look at institutions which have better governance norms and are better regulated.

How many of the NGOs comply with the norms outlined by the government? Do we have a regulatory body to monitor the NGOs?

We have a regular monitoring system to track defaulters. Our system generates a list of non-filers and we issue notices to those who have not filed their returns. We are also looking into Trusts and NGOs which are not complying with their objectives as outlined in their deeds.

Almost 2 to 3 percent of the NGOs are scrutinized every year. Their books of accounts and activity reports are scrutinized by the Assessing Officer. If it is found that they are violating their objects or giving direct or indirect benefit to their Founder/Trustees/relatives, we deny them exemption.

About the Companies Act 2013 bill. Will this increase scope for corporates to network with NGOs?

It is too early to forecast what changes this bill would bring in the behaviour of major corporate houses. Some may do it through registered and good NGOs, while some may choose to do it themselves as they might find the NGO administrative expenses high. A clear contour has not yet emerged. We have to wait and watch.



Photo: Marie Banu