

Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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Cover Story - Pg 6

Lost and Found

About SATHI, a national-level NGO working towards rehabilitating street children



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Alumni Talk Pg 3

Abilities and Learning Curves
Kavitha's efforts to provide
medical support and free
health care services to the
marginalised



Profile Pg 9

Sanitation and Dignity
About Environmental
Sanitation Institute in
Ahmedabad



Chit Chat Pg 12

**"Social silence will no more
be acceptable."**
An exclusive interview with
Lakshmy Ramakrishnan

From the Editor

Dear Reader,

We act in ways which are considered respectful, and we also feel respect for some. We can also sense when we are respected or not. This is because the feeling of respect is more important than the behavior itself. It is said: “when the feeling is there, the behavior will naturally follow.”

Until a few decades ago, respect played a very important role in our society. People who were not respected were considered to have no worth, no importance, and no values. On the contrary, it seems possible to survive today without being respected.

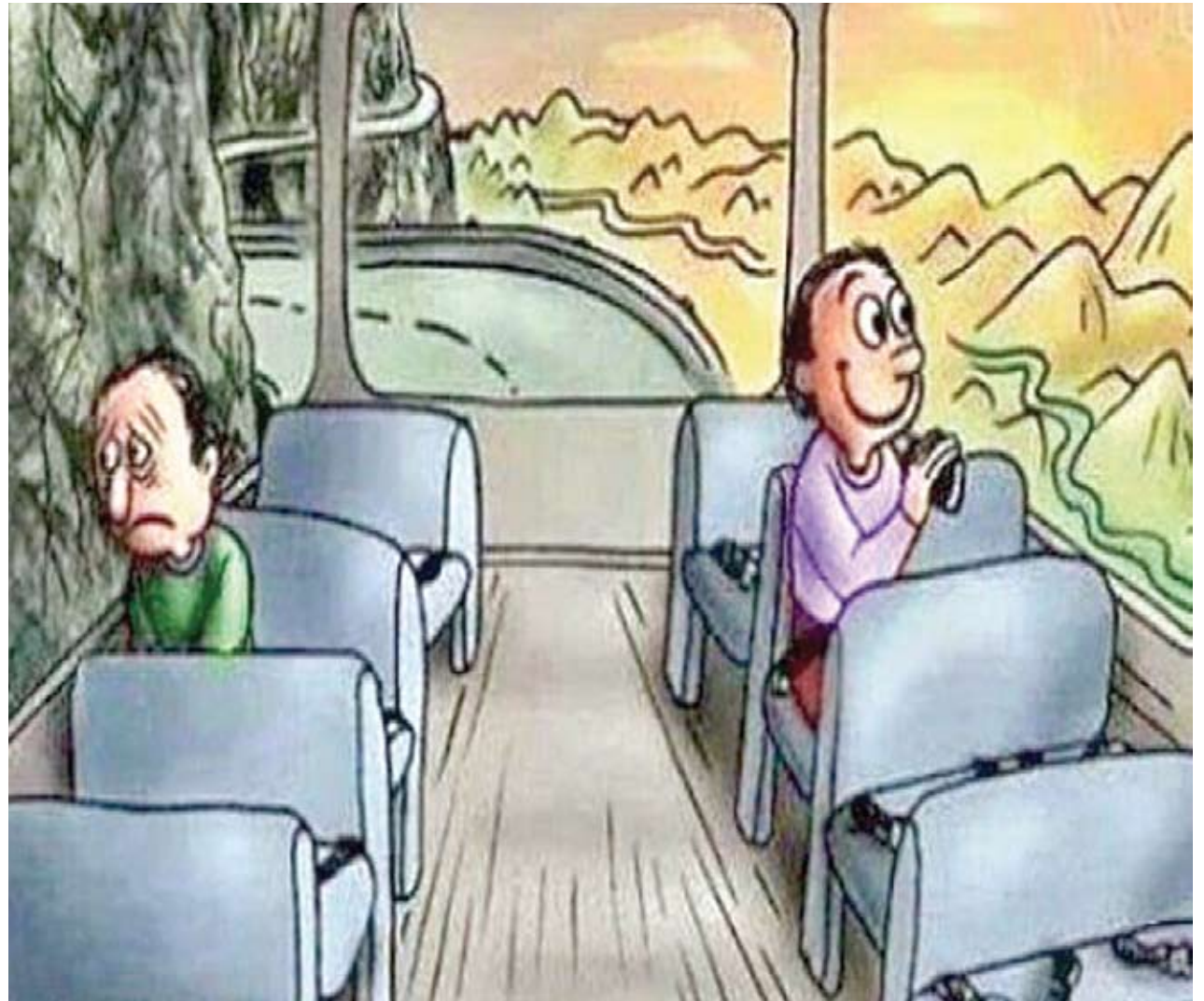
You earn the respect of others by the way you respect and treat them. It seems to be like a boomerang where you must send it out before it comes back to you.

Respect cannot be demanded or forced. We have our duty to teach our children while they are young the value of respecting others and should lead by example.

The changemakers featured in Conversations Today are all noble people who have gained respect from the society. Their way of life teaches one how to be respectful and be respected.

—Marie Banu

Continual Choosing



What is the meaning we give to life experiences? We run or not run our lives, living in the cocoon of the meanings we have derived. These meanings are never the absolute. In other words, a same situation would be interpreted differently by two people. The meaning we create is drawn from past experiences, our judgments and our assumptions. These meanings generate feelings and in the process keep us driven or immobilized.

We witness our construction of reality when we realize that we habitually assign meaning to nearly everything and then operate as if those meanings were “really real”. Why stay trapped in something that isn’t reality at all?

What if there were no meanings in our minds? Would we move towards possibilities and optimism? Would it unleash the mind’s capacity to create versus comply, protect or control? The meanings we carry obstruct acceptance,

create expectations and much of the living is “in the mind” and choiceless.

Practising continual choosing enables one let go of the meanings. The choosing takes courage and real work to give up old, unproductive ways of being. When we choose courage—it creates possibility. It gets made up as we go along. Choosing sustaining frameworks that offer possibility, that prompt for giving up what doesn’t work, stops the process of past forward.

Editorial
Latha Suresh
Marie Banu

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.

She can be contacted at bhuvaneshwari@teamthink.co.in for arranging Positive Energy training and Coaching sessions.

Abilities and Learning Curves

The journey from acquiring knowledge to skill building is a process that is both interesting and precarious. “Knowledge and skills result in abilities that allow us to use them in circumstances of our choice. Unless knowledge results in abilities, the choice of application is not in our hands. We then become responsible for the status quo in our society we often question about. Abilities is what can make a difference at an individual level and in an organisation,” says Dr G.Kavitha, Founder of SPOT Healthcare Research and Training Centre in Chennai.

As the eldest among four siblings, Kavitha grew up in an austere atmosphere. She could not even choose her favourite subject in graduation. “My father forced me to choose Chemistry for my under graduation while I loved Mathematics. I could not overpower his decision, but promised to just get through and then look at career options of my choice,” reminisces Kavitha.

Kavitha was inspired by both her grandparents who found new ways of engaging in social services as and when possible. “My maternal grandfather belonged to the Communist party. He was a farmer who strongly felt for the emancipation of women and empowerment of the downtrodden. Although no other family member joined this party after his demise, his ideals of equality and respect for labour are still being practiced. These principles began to influence my choices in life and were the bases on which I questioned the state of affairs in our society. Why people still lived on platforms? Why were so many sleeping hungry despite welfare programmes and other initiatives? What could wipe out poverty and the divide between the haves and the have nots?,” asks Kavitha.

Kavitha got an opportunity to engage in social service events during her college days, through the NSS. However, she could not continue taking part in such activities as her father disapproved of them. One of her experiences from NSS days encouraged her to pursue B.Ed. in Special Education (Mental Retardation). As her interest in working for the intellectually challenged children grew, she went on to pursue a Master Degree in Psychology. While she was gaining experience by working with different organisations in Chennai and Cuddalore, the Government of India’s District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) that was introduced in 1998 helped her grow as a Resource Teacher.

“It was my responsibility to train teachers in identifying learning disabilities in children, teaching new methods that can enable learning process for the differently abled and also enrol



those who were out of school or school dropouts. Every time I trained a teacher, I felt like drawing the learning curves of new groups of children and I felt proud about my efforts,” says Kavitha.

Kavitha became more passionate about working with children and decided to prepare herself completely. She completed her Post Graduate Diploma in Therapeutic Education from YMCA in Chennai and soon became the Head Mistress of the Special School at YMCA. All her endeavours were appreciated and she was conferred the Best Teacher Award in 2008. Kavitha felt a great sense of responsibility in every step forward. She also studied a one year course on Learning Disability to be able to train parents of special children effectively. “Learning is a lifelong process which is not restricted to school, nor are parents devoid of this responsibility once their children get enrolled in special schools. Unless we see teachers and parents complementing each other’s work, children’s learning curves can never progress positively. This is very critical in the case of children with learning disabilities,” asserts Kavitha.

With her heart for children, her family circumstances forced her to practice Acupuncture. Professionally trained and



well connected with colleagues in the field, she got an opportunity to work with the Sri Santhana Krishna Healthcare and Research Foundation. Kavitha took on every challenge in her own stride. She practiced Acupuncture and simultaneously managed time to train parents, teachers in teaching children with learning disabilities. “All my knowledge, skills and the resultant abilities helped me sail through the toughest time in my life. I survived and also managed to help improve the quality of lives of the few others, I could. It was two distinct fields and a wide range of stakeholders to be dealt with. I saw my abilities dictate my decisions and was determined to practice the principles that inspired me,” she says.

Kavitha enrolled in CSIM’s Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Programme to learn how to establish her own work centre, but there was more in store for her.

“Being amidst people who have always thought about the disadvantaged who are inevitably left out of the social welfare system, I couldn’t help but relate to the intellectually challenged children who lead a life of dependency. I was forced to reason out why training programmes prepared them to face the outer world while mainstreaming was the need. This called for efforts from both sides,” she says.

Kavitha founded SPOT in September 2017 with a two-fold focus. One was to provide medical support and free health care services to the marginalised, and the other was to train parents of special children to help mainstream their children to lead independent lives.

Emphasising that mainstreaming special children is a long term and a holistic process Kavitha believes to have made the right start with SPOT’s activities. Her past pupil’s visit on the inauguration day reaffirms her belief. “My old student, an autistic child from the Special School at YMCA is now studying in a regular school and has scored 86 percent in his class ten exams. He presented a memento and wished me success when SPOT was inaugurated. He is now in class 12 and his development reassures my belief in mainstreaming special children,” shares Kavitha, determined to change the lives of many such special children through SPOT.

—Shanmuga Priya.T

Down The SILKY Lane, MEETING SELF

Ring...ring...ring...the phone kept ringing as Padma rummaged her purse to retrieve the cell phone frantically as she was getting into the car..."hello, Raghav! What is it? You have called me 3 times already". "Where are you? Come near the school entrance fast"... Padma's heart raced in anxiety. Padma got out of the car and ran towards the entrance gate of the school. Raghav stood in the middle of the road and his car was parked in the side. "Come, see in the car" excitedly he moved to the car. Padma peeped through the window and lo! A cute little dog was wagging its tail, trying to get out of the half raised window, totally confused. "Whose dog is this? Looks sooo cute." Padma was now very excited. "I don't know whose this is. I was driving past the gate and this dog came running and was almost going to get under the wheel. I stopped and opened the door and he just jumped into the car. He looks like lost from home. This is a small breed variety. Seems very friendly though". She carefully opened the door of the car and he jumped onto her like a baby coming to a long lost mother. She held him and he began licking her face and hands as though saying 'I found you, I found you'..."Oh! What shall we do now? You are going for a meeting and you should rush. But I need to go to office. I will enquire in the apartments around and see if I can find his house. I will message you. Anyway we will meet at 4 in the office". Next hour went in enquiring with the security of every apartment on that long winding road to see heads shaking in denial and puzzlement. Padma was hungry and tired with the heat of the summer beating down and the dog was refusing to leave the car. "Raghav, this seems to be an abandoned dog. Let's plan and see if we can trace the owner" messaged Padma and decided to drive straight to office. Raghav smiled reading the message. He knew Padma's ever-receiving loving heart can never be satiated in life. Every opportunity to love, it only expands and includes.

"Hey, what shall we call him"? Padma cuddling the dog, stopped Raghav right near the staircase as soon as he entered the office. Grinning widely he added, "Softy, so soft as silk... feel his hair... wow... SILK!". "Yes, SILK, my SILKY baby, SILK" whispered Padma in its ears. SILK lifted his eyes to meet hers and at that moment both a mother and a child were born.

The biggest fear was not answered yet for Padma as they drove back home. She



knew Raghav could not keep him in his house, but will she be allowed? Will Srinivas, Padma's husband agree? Just then, she closed her eyes and thought of her state in the house... the previous weeks' regular episodes ran past her like in a movie screen...

Srinivas pushed the main door open and walked in "Padma, Padma, are you there? Why no lights are on and what are you doing?" "I'm here", came out Padma from the kitchen looking listless. Srinivas switched the hallway and living room lights saying "it's already dark and 6.45. Why are you working in the dark?" "Didn't feel like and I forgot to put the lights on. Anyway I am all alone..." padma's voice trailed away becoming

heavy. It was almost one and half years since Padma's mom's passing away. Her Dad had passed away nearly 3 years back. Their daughter has been studying in USA and son left six months back. That night after dinner, as they sat down drinking their green tea, Srinivas tried to make a conversation with Padma, "I know you feel a lot empty and alone. But, Amma had to go. If you keep thinking of her and crying do you think she will be happy wherever she is? The children are following their dreams and how can we feel sad about it? You are so busy, doing so many good things in office and outside. Be happy". Srinivas voice sounded strained, tired and helpless. He himself was clueless trying to manage

himself. It had been months since their faces had seen laughter.

"Jo jo laali na haduve.. china ninna muddaduve..." A lullaby came loud from Padma's singing filled with love and affection. Silk sat cuddled on her lap with a contented snooze seemingly well set into the familiar arms. It had been almost two weeks now and SILK had found its home. Padma had many battles to fight internal and external and had grown to know new sides of herself in this time. "Why do you need a dog now"? "better check if he is fine. You don't want a dick dog home"; "god knows why people buy dogs and abandon them like this"; "aren't you just out of all these home responsibilities and enjoying life? Why do you take on more?"; "just put it for adoption and someone will take him; don't invite headache"; "what will you do if you have to go to USA to visit your children? Who will take care of it?"; "hey, it may carry some infections and diseases, be careful"; "if you have more money and don't know how to spend give it to me, why waste on this dog?" ... all questions, annoyed statements, friendly jibes, sarcastic comments, concerned advice had all been a part of life. But, Padma had only a smile as an answer for all this. Who else than her could know better what it means to be welcomed home every evening with a thousand watt smile, happiness and hundred licks from a being that had waited patiently for her nearly 10 hours and didn't have a single complaint or expectation. Life had dramatically become full and busy and thoughts were all about SILK. What if his original parents came and claimed him? In spite of all efforts, no one had neither recognised nor claimed him.

Padma while riding to office with Raghav mentioned, "What is so surprising is that Srinivas is so friendly and loving to him. Silk has totally brought love into the house. I have never seen this side of Srinivas so far. I always thought he couldn't express softness and affection so easily". It was a big surprise that Srinivas had not only allowed SILK to stay in the house, jump on his bed, but they had now formed a buddy relationship of watching the matches and news together. "Silk, where are you? Come let's watch TV" was a usual sound in the house as soon as Srinivas came home. SILK would dart near the bean bag and settle comfortably next to him. "It's magical that SILK understands our language. Raghav, it's just like how a child gets adopted and settles down in a few weeks into the new

house, isn't it?" added Padma in a thoughtful tone. Raghav only silently looked at his friend with a subtle smile that said, "I guess I know what's happening to them".

"Oh, Srini look, my sugar level has dropped by 25 counts. It's just 115 now"!! Screamed Padma from her room. "Haha, good. Its SILK being here that is doing this. You know Padma, I am seeing you so happy and relaxed after a long time" Srini lovingly remarked. SILK, sat watching them, knowing something happy was happening but unaware of its own doing. Strangely, in the last two weeks the sounds in the house had changed. Padma's ever excited voice was back again. Many evenings Srini had walked into home to squeals of laughter from Padma running around chasing SILK who was jumping in excitement like a little Rabbit. Padma routines had changed. Srinivas and Padma took long walks in the evenings so SILK would be happy going out. There was a new space bonding that was happening.

"Sir, after the arrival of this dog my work has only increased. This dog is not toilet trained properly. He does his potty in various places. You may want to seriously rethink and give him away", an upset housekeeper Rina complained to Srinivas. SILK, while had learnt to love and play was still struggling to find his bearings. He marked his territory with his frequent urinations. Even a dog-psychologist had been called over for consultation to check if SILK was depressed. "Don't be so upset Rina. It's only for the time being. Slowly he will settle down. Please adjust a little bit. See, how much I have accepted. All this for your madam's sake. She is getting back to life again. Every joy comes with a little sacrifice." Padma's eyes were filled with tears and love for Srinivas. She was in the kitchen and had heard it all. She always knew there is a softer side to him that he guarded vehemently and



deep moments could only bring them out. Some of us never show our softer side to the person we love most. Deep love resides in deep vulnerability.

A year had gone by. Padma looked five years younger. SILK had grown healthier, happier and energetic. "Look there goes aunty, SILK's mom. Aunty, where is SILK?" children in the layout had called out to Padma on the lazy Sunday morning. They were known as SILK's parents now. Donno if the parents had adopted SILK or SILK had adopted them. But things had changed.

"Padma, I am so amazed how you look now. You have changed and look so happy", Lalli remarked. Lalli was the most famous person in the layout working for rescuing and fostering dogs in the layout. She was evergreen looking 25 at 50. She was known as the dog – aunty. "The empty space in you which had unspent love has found its recipient. And the recipient in need of love has found its source. All of us have that in us. An empty nest is empty not because children or adults went away. It's because we don't know where to deposit all the love that we have in our hearts. If we can become more inclusive and expand our hearts, so many animals needn't have to be on roads and I don't have to beg people to adopt or foster". True. Emptiness and loneliness are always seen as not having something. Rarely do we see it as not being inclusive enough to share the love we have and accept the love we get.

"While SILK has found a home, I have found myself", remarked Padma as she bid good-bye to Lalli and walked with SILK pulling her back home.

True Story dedicated to all people who strive to find good homes for the rescued animals.

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath

Present Movement



Once the clock master while fixing a clock heard the pendulum plead, "Please sir, leave me alone. Think of the number of times I will have to tick day and night, 60 times each minute, 60 minutes an hour, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for year upon year .. I could never do it."

But the master replied wisely, "Don't think of the future. Just do one tick at a time and you will enjoy every tick for the rest of your life." And the pendulum decided to follow the master's words and is still ticking merrily away.



Explicit Learning

- The present moment is never unbearable if you live in it fully.
- What is unbearable is to have your body here at 10 a.m. and your mind at 6 p.m.
- Quite often we swing between the past and the future and hardly find time to remain in the present.



Introspective Learning

- What is the nature of the 'Present Moment'?
- What holds me from being in the present totally?
- How do I see the 'here and now'?

LOST AND FOUND

Since its inception in August 2012, till October this year, SOCH has recorded the rescue of 3759 children from vulnerable situations and has boasted of successfully reuniting 2,666 of these children with their families.



Manoj Kumar Swain grew up at a small village in Odisha. On graduating college, Manoj went to the Tata Institute of Social Sciences where he pursued a course in Child Rights and Social Entrepreneurship. Soon after, Manoj joined SATHI, a national-level NGO working towards rehabilitating street children. A few years later, in 2012, Manoj would go on to start the Society for Children (SOCH) with the help of like-minded people. “We began in July 2012, and are operational in three locations of Odisha — Bhubaneswar, Berhampur and Puri —

difficult backgrounds (Project Pankh).”

Since its inception in August 2012, till October this year, SOCH has recorded the rescue of 3759 children from vulnerable situations and has boasted of successfully reuniting 2,666 of these children with their families. Working in coordination with CWC, GRP, RPF, Railway Authorities and other government bodies, SOCH is currently engaged in the rescue and resettlement of about 80 to 100 children from various difficult situations. “When we began, we had just one room for an office,” Manoj recalls.

In the last half-a-decade, SOCH has managed to cause quite the impact among NGOs in the same space. Such has been its success in a relatively short span of time that the organisation has been acknowledged as Best Children’s NGO for 2015 at the Giving Back Awards held in Mumbai. SOCH also bagged top honours at the CSR Implementing Agency Challenge at the India CSR Summit 2016, in addition to being recognized as a “Punya Utkal” organization for its role in social contribution.

As on date, statistics suggest that SOCH re-settles 70% of the children it rescues. “The key words to the work we do are ‘outreach’ and ‘networking’,” explains Manoj, “Outreach is all about policing railway platforms, observing every child, taking note of their activities, behaviour and their company.” This process is usually followed by an informal interaction to confirm the authenticity of the suspected runaway, missing, abandoned, abducted or

Railway Protection Force (RPF). Vendors, autorickshaw drivers, cleaning staff and watering staff are potential stakeholders too. “All these individuals are vital in tracing and identifying such children owing to their regular presence at stations and platforms,” he adds, “They are instrumental in referring missing cases.”

In Manoj’s experiences with resettling children, he says that 80% of the reasons that these children come up with for leaving home, are trivial. “Among the more serious reasons for running away from home are Peer Influence, attraction of the city, child labour, education, child abuse and child trafficking,” he says. “Running away from homes in search of work tops the list of reasons while ‘city attraction’ and ‘escape from scolding by parents’ follow in at a close second and third,” Manoj adds. The table below lists out these reasons, with their frequencies.

What happens when a child is “discovered” at a railway platform? Surely, once SOCH and its stakeholders zero in on an abandoned child, there must be an SOP that is followed? “Yes,” confirms Manoj, “Many a time, the child himself or herself volunteers to part with information, and comes up with the parental address. This usually happens when the child in question shows a basic will to return home, after counselling sessions.” But by Manoj’s own admission, the challenge almost always arises when the child is adamant and ends up not parting with any contact details. “There might also be a situation where parents are abusive or unfit to take care of the child due to poor financial conditions,” he says, “Then there are the cases where either the child is an orphan or is too young to remember their address, or even situations where parents are not fit enough to receive the child.”

When reunions do occur though, it usually happens under the jurisdiction of the Child Welfare Committee (CWC), which in turn refers these children to Government-sponsored shelter homes like Home Shelter (usually done on a temporary basis) or Child Care Institution (done until the child attains the age of 18) on a case-by-case basis. At present, SOCH finds itself in three locations around Odisha, but Manoj admits that there is scope for expansion. “Based on our surveys, there are plenty of prominent railway stations like Khordha Road, Cuttack, Rourkela and Angul to name a few, where there is scope of expansion.”

Donations are often the bedrock of any NGO, and so is the case with SOCH. “Our Rescue to Resettlement process for each child accounts to Rs 4,000, and on an average we rescue 80 to 100 children per month,” says Manoj, “This accounts to a budget of Rs 4,00,000 per month.” For a while now, SOCH has been working through support of individual sponsors and also the fact that Behrampur is supported by the Tata Trust. Both cases underline the importance that donation plays in the day-to-day functioning of the NGO, and the work it does.



up until date,” says Manoj, “The main focus of SOCH is child rights, our core activity being rescue and resettlement of runaway, missing, abandoned and abducted children (Project Rakshyak). We at SOCH also work towards behaviour modification of street children (Project Punarjivan) and mainstreaming of youths from

trafficked child as the case may be. “Network-building then ensures that through awareness meetings and sensitization drives with key stakeholders present at rail way stations, the process of resettlement occurs smoothly and efficiently,” says Manoj. In this case, stakeholders may range from porters at the station to the

SOCIAL IMPACT REPORTING AND MARKETING: A HAZY DIVIDE?

“Marketing is manipulation and deceit. It tries to turn people into something they aren’t – individuals focused solely on themselves, maximising their consumption of goods that they don’t need.” Noam Chomsky



It is a powerful quote from Chomsky and not one that I entirely agree with as I feel that businesses have to promote and sell their products in the competitive environment which is part of our prevailing economic system.

The whole idea of marketing reminds me of a time I was wisely told by a colleague that there is often a difference between what people say they are doing and what they are actually doing. This brings me to the main thread running through this blog which is the relationship between ‘marketing’ and ‘social impact reporting’.

In some ways it comes back to why should social and community enterprises regularly report on their performance and their impact on people, the environment and on the society in which they exist. They do not have to. So why do they?

Often social enterprises will say they are doing it in order to market what they do and to be able to promote and ‘sell’ what they can provide – ‘selling’ it to investors or funders and other stakeholders. This is quite legitimate and to be applauded but I would argue should not be the sole reason to report on social impact.

The last few decades have shown a huge and pervading expansion and emphasis on ‘marketing’. Entrepreneurs starting out or wanting to expand will come up with a ‘product’ and then spend an inordinate amount of time, resources and energy to try

and sell that product in the market. Arguably, organisations with a central social objective should by definition not need to spend as much on this, as they should be responding to a social need and through their activities provide for that need to those that benefit from their work.

The area where social impact reporting and marketing meets manifests itself in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reporting. It is admirable and to be encouraged that businesses report more holistically and include the positive impact that they are having on the environment, on people and on the wider culture. But this is basically philanthropy. Their core business, if you like, is to maximise profit for their owners or founders. They also have wider impacts but they remain secondary to their core purpose.

Social enterprises, on the other hand should be reporting regularly on their core business with its positive social change. Social enterprises should be assessed and judged on how well they are achieving their central purpose and the impact they are having.

Social impact reporting should not only be used for marketing but also to contribute to planning, to the management of the whole organisations, to review what has worked and what has not, to understanding priorities, to involve processes that listen to stakeholders, to understand costs and

outcomes of differing strategies, and so on. It is about reporting and accounting and not just a way of providing marketing information.

Social Accounting and Audit takes organisations through a process that asks for a regular review of the mission, values and objectives alongside an analysis of stakeholders (all those individuals and organisations that can affect an organisation and are affected by it). It requires an ‘impact map’ identifying outputs and outcomes to emerge from the activities of an organisation. This is followed by collection of quantitative and qualitative data that is brought together in an annual set of draft social accounts. The social accounts should seek to accurately reflect the performance and impact of the organisation during the past year. This ‘account’ then is subject to an independent audit and the revised draft becomes the social report. The process runs parallel to the financial accounting and audit process.

A social report for social and community enterprises is about proving what your organisation has achieved – backing up the claims with evidence; improving as an organisation as inevitably decisions on the future will be based around hard facts; and finally, and this is of increasing importance, about being accountable to all stakeholders.

It is important to recognise that the audit checks the thoroughness and veracity of

reporting and does not pass judgement. The judgement about performance and impact is left to stakeholders and the report should be openly disclosed to them. They then make a judgement about the organisation.

Some organisations going through regular social accounting and audit consider the final report as of huge importance. I would argue that going through the process is equally important.

It would be a mistake to think of social impact reporting only in terms of how it can be used to market the organisation.

The quote from Chomsky at the start of this blog reflects the cynicism around marketing – claiming that it is only about businesses trying to persuading people to spend their money. Social and community enterprises are more about responsibly and regularly reporting on how they have effected change that contributes to benefits for people and the wider society. In social reporting what an organisation says it does should be as close as possible to what it actually does.

Telling people about what an organisation does is one thing; but doing this in order to sell more and more products and services is another...

...and never the twain should meet.

—Alan Kay, Co-Founder,
Social Audit Network, UK

Sanitation and Dignity

Sanitation is a complicated issue both in rural and urban areas. Management of human waste is a huge concern, that has always suffered neglect due to different reasons. Our social structure has designated a section of the population to manually handle human waste and this community continues to remain the most disadvantaged.

“The root cause of all these problems is the disrespect we are habituated to associate with toilet behaviour. As a result, it is not even normal to discuss the characteristics of the waste we produce on a daily basis. We are too embarrassed to talk about an existential problem”, says Mr Kishan, a volunteer at the Environmental Sanitation Institute (ESI) in Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

The story began from the time of India's struggle for independence when Mahatma Gandhiji expressed his concerns over the sanitation situation in the country. Gandhiji's claim that sanitation is as important as independence motivated Shri Ishwarbhai Patel, popularly known as the ‘toilet man of India’, to dedicate his life to study and implement low cost, sustainable solutions for human waste management.

Shri Ishwarbhai Patel had travelled extensively to understand all details – physical, social and cultural – pertaining to toilet behaviour and developed multiple designs of toilets that suited Indian context and needs. Every such design explored details like nature of soil to learn its percolation capacity, local materials that could be used for construction, locally available water resources, other local resources that could be used for human waste management and promoted the knowledge to ensure people's participation. This approach eventually led to the initiative being owned by the people themselves. Besides the new designs he developed, he also came up with design modifications in the models then used to make them efficient and sustainable. He also won the Padma Shri Award for a design that uses only 1.5 litres to flush. “He was a visionary who thought of ergonomics for toilets. Studying the composition of human waste, he advocated that each one of us were producing rich fertilisers, every day. He then found a way to harness this utility from our waste and our campus demonstrates just that, effectively, on a routine”, says Kishan.

Ishwarbhai founded Safai Vidyalaya (Sanitation Institute) in 1958 to carry his mission forward and work for the removal of manual scavenging. He often mentioned that construction of toilets was the ‘hardware’ component of this mission,



which held no value until people's attitude towards sanitation, which he called the ‘software’ component, was aligned in the right path. In commemoration with Gandhiji's centenary birthday celebration, Government of Gujarat enacted laws on liberation of manual scavengers. Thus, came a shift from use of dry latrines to wet/flush latrines, preventing the need for removal of night soil from the latrines. Ishwarbhai was appointed as the Advisor to Government of Gujarat and Government of India to supervise the implementation of programmes that followed the enactment. Thus, Safai Vidyalaya became a key resource centre to the state and central governments, that trained officials from sanitary inspectors to cleaners with the municipalities. Ishwarbhai's conviction to the cause and his leadership led to the construction of more than 500,000 toilets by Safai Vidyalaya and also enabled more than 100 organisations that work tirelessly to improve the situation of sanitation in our country.

In 1985 Ishwarbhai established ESI to disseminate the learnings from research and practical experience at Safai Vidyalaya. Based on the Gandhian principles of environmentalism and up-liftment of poor, ESI was dedicated to the task of changing people's attitude towards health and hygiene. “When we

say attitude, we are not only talking about people who defecate in the open. We are also talking about bureaucrats who neglect the work, policy experts who fail to realise the social practices, taboos associated with toilet behaviour in different contexts. There are women who feel shy to use a toilet when men are present in the house. The humiliation they feel is a big social burden we must write off to change their attitude towards hygienic toilet behaviour.

Therefore, the need of the hour was a decentralised model that could strike a chord with common people, officials, safai karamcharis, village leaders and others who influenced practices and attitudes at an individual and community level. Such an approach allowed us to study social behaviour when people moved out to defecate. Women disliked toilets as it restricted their personal space with friends, so the design for women's toilets had a small window and also a small community space in the front that allowed them to indulge in their private conversations. Every detail about a toilet was worked out diligently in every construction we took up”, he elaborates.

Whenever a toilet is constructed, a grand inauguration with a traditional ceremony is organised to reiterate the importance of the ignored corner of the house. Beginning with one resident, the cycle of change resonates throughout the village. An interesting approach used by ESI is the introduction of Nandini Van. An exemplar for space management, this van moves to villages with an equipped cleaning team and a pre-set exhibition on health, hygiene and sanitation to create awareness among the children. The cleaning team, comprising of volunteers, goes on with the work while also engaging in play with children in the village. Customised games help the team to open discussion on hygiene and then the exhibition completes the process of

education. In the evening, a gram sabha is called and pictures of the village before and after the cleaning exercise is shown.

“We also show pictures of the children playing with us. The team talks only about that day's experience and the village's plight. The discussion always moves around the context of the concerned village. Hence, building a bond with the villagers becomes possible and we get to see a few get convinced about the cause. We then encourage them to talk to others in the village and influence their attitude towards toilets. It is such an overt focus on attitudes over construction that has led to 90 percent of the toilets constructed being in use”, he explains, adding that ESI began to devote more time on changing people's attitudes towards sanitation since the launch of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, as many entities came in to focus on construction of toilets.

ESI's campus is an example of sustainable architecture and zero waste structures. Waste from all the toilets in the campus, along with food waste enters a pit where microbes work to produce methane gas that powers the two bio gas plants. Remaining sludge is used as manure for the garden. A notable feature of the campus is the toilet garden developed in 1967. Showcasing different models designed by Ishwarbhai, the garden is a wealth of information about that corner in a house that hardly goes through meticulous planning. Taking the sensitisation further, is the toilet café in the campus, built by Jayeshbhai Patel (Ishwarbhai's son and Director, ESI) in 2010, where everything from chairs to tables is modelled on toilet designs to create awareness on sanitation. “Basically, a positive outlook on those who clean the toilets is what the café tries to create. They are an equal part of the society”, adds Kishan.

Besides the training and sensitisation programmes, ESI also assists in the implementation of programmes for the welfare of children from this community of cleaners. With the help of the residential hostel facility instituted by the Sabarmati Harijan Ashram Trust in Gandhi Ashram, more than 6000 girls have completed Diploma in Education and are now teachers in schools across Gujarat. The journey of this eminent training institute continues beyond our borders, reaching out to more than 20 countries, including South Africa, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Germany, Japan and Netherlands. “There is still a long way to go. Unless we see the poorest of poor living in hygienic conditions, fully acknowledging good sanitation practices and until we see people, rich and poor, respect sanitation and the pertinent work, ESI will continue its march, unhindered”, asserts Kishan.

—Shanmuga Priya.T

Connecting local social programs to the Global SDGs



The global sustainable development goals (SDGs), spearheaded by the United Nations, are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure peace and justice for all. For achieving these inspiring goals by the year 2030, NGOs and inspired change agents have a big role to play. Also, NGOs should sensitize youth in communities for their productive engagement with SDGs.

Keeping these points in view, Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM), Hyderabad; Vishwa Yuvak Kendra (VYK), New Delhi; and Surge Impact Foundation (SIF), Hyderabad jointly organized a training workshop in Hyderabad on 10th and 11th November 2017 for preparing NGOs and other change agents from Telangana for their engagement with SDGs. Over 50 participants attended this workshop.

Inaugurating the workshop, Jayesh Ranjan, Principal Secretary, Govt. of Telangana emphasized the crucial role of NGOs in mobilization of people and inclusive development of communities. He lauded the efforts of CSIM, VYK and SIF for organizing this workshop.

In the beginning, participants discussed all 17 SDGs and learnt about alignment of their program goals with specific SDGs. Subsequently, the discussions focused on Goal 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions).

Change makers like Bhagirath (Tata Trusts), Mayur (Nirmaan), Neha (Rubaroo) and Rubina (SAFA) inspired and guided the participants by sharing their work on SDGs and explaining the role of youth participation in these programs. This was followed by a lively panel discussion involving 5 panelists who discussed methods for ensuring peace, justice and strong institutions in society (Goal Number 16). The panelists were: Mazher Hussain, Mamatha, Shyamala, Shobha and Sanjay.

The workshop included video session, group exercises and team presentations dealing with SDGs and youth mobilization.

The workshop concluded with a resolve of participants to adapt these global goals for local contexts and work for empowering and assisting the poorest of the poor in communities for a better tomorrow.

—K.L.Srivastava

Recognition for CSIM's Work



On 17th November 2017, the World CSR Day recognized the contribution of CSIM as a strategic change maker and impactful organization in NGO sector.

Mr. K.L. Srivastava received the NGO Leadership Award 2017 in Hyderabad on behalf of CSIM.



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.

For more information, please visit our website 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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Celebrating Social Entrepreneurs



Celebration is a kind of food we all need in our lives, and each individual brings a special recipe or offering, so that together we will make a great feast. Celebration is a human need that we must not, and cannot, deny. It is richer and fuller when many work and then celebrate together.

This was the underlying theme during the Sadguru Gnanananda Awards 2017 instituted by Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani.

Held on 25th November at the Swami Vivekananda Rural Community college near Puducherry, the Chief Guest, Dr.Kiran Bedi, Governor of Puducherry paid a fitting tribute to Mr.PN Devarajan, founder-MSDS, by lauding his idea of celebrating social change and transformation.

It was an unforgettable day for the three aspiring Social Entrepreneurs – Ridhi Aggarwal, Karthikeyan and Medha Shah-who received their first fellowship amount from Dr.Kiran Bedi, a social entrepreneur herself. Mr. P N Subramaniam, Managing Trustee, MSDS and Mr.G V Subramaniam, Founder, SVRCC were also present.

Dr. Kiran Bedia also launched the CSIM centre at SVRCC and issued certificates for the first batch of participants.

—Latha Suresh



“Social silence will no more be acceptable.”

Lakshmy Ramakrishnan shares with Marie Banu her passion for social issues.

Lakshmy Ramakrishnan is a unique filmmaker, talented actor, reality show presenter and a social activist. A Graduate in Commerce, the entrepreneurship bug bit her when she pursued a course in Fashion Designing at Kothari Institute in Chennai.

She made her debut in the Malayalam film *Chakkara Muthu* (2006), and has appeared in over 40 films in South Indian languages and one in Hindi. She also hosts a Tamil reality show in Zee Tamil titled *Solvathellam Unmai* which has crossed over 1500 episodes.

She has won the Asianet Film Awards in 2007 for Best Character Actress; Edison Award for Riveting Performance in 2012; and Filmfare Award for Best Supporting Actress – Malayalam in 2017, besides several others. She has been recognised for her contribution for the Welfare of Omani women by Ministry of Heritage & Culture, iGovt of Oman & Omani Women's Association.

In an exclusive interview, Lakshmy Ramakrishnan shares with Marie Banu her passion for social issues.

About your journey as an entrepreneur?

I started with fashion designing and moved to event management. All my ventures have been entrepreneurial and co-producing the film *Aarohanam* has made me a social entrepreneur. When I left India and joined my husband at Muscat, I ran a vocational camp called 'Kids Camp' as there was very little scope for fashion designing here. I found a lot of children sitting in their homes either watching television or playing computer games as they did not have much scope to play in the open as the summer months were very hot. I joined six other women who were qualified, but did not have a work permit, and started a small activity for our own children. We started with 15 children, and by the time I left Muscat, we had 5,000 children every year from different parts of the world enrolling for the camp.

Whenever we conducted an activity, we ensured that it focused on a social issue. We had the support from Toyota, Genteco, Pizza Hut and National Bank of Oman who sponsored our events for children. We also hosted fashion shows for children where the theme was either world peace, or water conservation, or tree planting. In 2001, at Coimbatore, I organised a road show against plastic menace where we distributed more than 5000 jute bags with the help of women.

Till now, nothing has been planned in my life. At the same time, I have not missed out on any opportunity that has come my way. Having come from a conservative family, I am thankful for the support of my husband and my three daughters who have been with me all through my journey.

The role of women in Indian cinema?

In Tamil cinema, about 20 years ago, we had very meaty roles and women oriented films. Of late, say 10 years, Tamil films are not portraying their female lead as good as before. Apparently, Bollywood films have more women involved in production work and there is a lot of progressive thinking content wise. Today, issues like stalking and wrong portrayal of women, have been taken up by the media very seriously and they are raising their voices. This is a good sign!

When you talk about an inclusive society, we should also talk about women. It is sad to see some movies portraying issues related to women or disability in a melancholic tone. Why cannot they show them as contributors to our society? The future will see more women in Indian cinema and social silence will no more become acceptable.

Why do you choose socially relevant issues as your movie themes?

I do not make movies for the sake of it. Whether it is *Arohanam* or *Nerungi Vaa* or *Ammani* – I only choose socially relevant issues. I do not wish to sacrifice a year of my personal life in making a movie which is not socially inclined, even if you would give me crores of rupees for that.

I wish to be socially responsible and do not want to compromise on the bigger cause for the sake of becoming popular. I am not saying that I am a social worker, as I do have financial goals and personal ambitions. I balance and find a way where my work gives me the scope of giving back to the society in some way. This is what social entrepreneurship is all about, isn't it?

Arohanam addressed an issue like bipolar disorder, which most of us would already know. But, there is another section of the society who think that any mental disturbance is mental illness. I found cinema to be a beautiful medium to address this issue.

What motivated you to be part of the reality show *Solvathellam Unmai*?

Solvathellam Unmai is not my brain child. The show was already popular when I came in. In fact, when I was approached first, I could not accept the offer as I was busy shooting for the movie *Arohanam*. When I was approached again, I thought that there must be some reason for me to keep receiving offers for this programme, hence agreed. Till now, I have hosted over 1200 episodes.

At *Solvathellam Unmai*, we are discussing on a

larger screen either a personal problem or an accusation which is totally private. Whether these issues should be discussed by counsellors or psychiatrists or lawyers and not with the media is a debatable question.

Domestic violence is not a private affair, but rather an offence against the state. Many times, people do not intervene to resolve family disputes or street fights as they feel that they do not have a role here. Through the reality show, we are trying to address this issue by directing the affected person to a counsellor or a police station or a lawyer with the help of the media.

Media has the power to influence people over a period of time. We were certain that there will be a change in the mindset of people, and we are witnessing it now.

Were you able to resolve many cases through this reality show?

The term 'resolve' is very relative. In one instance, a 19-year-old girl was abandoned by her family and a passer-by on noticing her sitting at Koyembudu market for over four days brought her to our studio.

She was found to be pregnant and suffering from fits. Her husband had deserted her and she had no place to go. While discussing her story at *Solvathellam Unmai*, she said that people should learn from her life and should not commit the mistake of early marriage, which she did. We traced her husband and

reunited her with her family. She delivered a healthy baby and my team visited her at the hospital. The doctors disclosed that she had a brain tumour which needs to be operated. On hearing this, one of our leading movie star came forward to support her medical expenses.

Like this, there are many more people who have been benefited from *Solvathellam Unmai*. Rotary Clubs and Lions Clubs approaches the affected people and supports them directly. Out of 1500 episodes, I can say that not all have been successful. Although, much change cannot happen within two to four hours of interaction with the affected persons, it has given us the platform to create a dialogue.

Most media are used to shutting up women, not allowing them to talk about their grievances, disparity or the violence against them as we always attach a stigma to it. On the contrary, *Solvathellam Unmai* is braving people to talk about their problems. We lend a hand, a timely help, but it is up to the affected persons to make the best use of it. This show has created a lot of awareness amongst people which in itself is a great achievement.

Who do you think plays a larger role in the issues faced by women? Women themselves or men and why?

In most of the cases, I find that although a man would have inflicted the pain on a woman, there is a woman who has been the cause for it. There are only certain sections of the society who are more empowered and have liberal thinking. In others, it has been set deep down in their DNA that women are conditioned in a certain manner, are insecure, have inferiority complex and low self-esteem which makes her react in a certain way with other women. This should change!

