

# Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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## FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

*"Life is without meaning. You bring the meaning to it." Joseph Campbell, American mythologist.*

Parents often say that they want their children to be "happy". It is unusual to hear them say that they want their children's lives to be "meaningful". Well, this is what most of us seem to want for ourselves. We fear meaninglessness; we fret about the rejection of all religious and moral principles or that aspect of our culture. When we lose a sense of meaning in our lives, we get depressed.

Happiness and meaningfulness often overlap. The more often people feel good, the happier they are. Satisfaction of desires is a source of happiness, but it does not have a sense of meaning. Those who are happy say they have enough money to buy the things they want. Such people are happier to the extent that they find their lives easy rather than difficult. Good health is also a factor that contributes to happiness but not to meaningfulness.

Meaningfulness and happiness are apparently experienced quite differently in time. Happiness is about the present; meaning is about the future. The more time people spend thinking about the here and now, the happier they are. Simply put, meaningfulness comes from contributing to other people's needs.

I believe that every person is a creator of his or her life. All of us are capable of making our life meaningful by fixing priorities and making efforts to achieve them. We need to know what's important to us, pursue our passion, discover our life's purpose, spend more on people than things.

Living life to the fullest has different meanings to every person. We all live our lives differently, but we can choose our outcomes.

The stories of changemakers in Conversations reveal the efforts made by them to bring meaning in the lives of several people across the globe. Read, be inspired!

*Wish you and your family a Very Happy and Prosperous New year!*

Marie Banu

## EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh  
Marie Banu

# Learned Optimism

*"We would accomplish many more things if we did not think of them as impossible." - Vince Lombardi*

**O**ptimism is life force energy. When we face uncertainty, the uplifting force is the capacity to invoke optimism. While many aspects are not in our control, optimism is—but are we exercising it?

### Where does optimism come from?

- Trustful anticipation that the future will be favorable
- Gratefulness
- Inclination to view situations as temporary

- Consider that there may be another way of looking at things

### Early steps to practice optimism

- Start connecting to people who are optimistic and grounded in life
- Cultivate gratitude by journaling for few minutes each day
- Accept what you can and cannot control in the situation

By employing a habit of optimism, we can take ownership to generate new options, explore solutions to "unsolvable" problems—and become healthier, have stronger relationships, do better at work, and be more resilient.

Explore your relationship with optimism. We almost always have more options than we perceive!



### 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](mailto:bhuvaneshwari@teamthink.co.in) for arranging Positive Energy training and Coaching sessions.



# BELONGINGNESS



To feel connected is a basic human desire and the foundation of social intelligence. It is the starting point of empathy and respect for fellow beings. “It helped me see human potential, beyond the façade of class differences and see myself where I belonged,” discloses Dr. J. Sundarasekar, Founder of Vanavil Charitable Trust in Dindivanam, Tamil Nadu.

Sundar’s childhood in Madurai was profuse with his parents, both doctors, and their interaction with friends who were also doctors. “The way in which people came forward to connect with my doctor parents and the respect they had for them filled me with gratitude and care. After their demise, it was this sense of gratitude and care that assuaged my loneliness and kept me going,” recalls Sundar, who was supported by his family friends to complete his school education.

*Vanavil Charitable Trust is a well-equipped rehabilitation centre for senior citizens, destitute children, disabled persons, and abandoned women*

As the School Pupil Leader, Sundar was part of many community engagement programs, which exposed him to the layers and details of class differences and their impact on society. “How can class differences divide people so easily when survival needs are essentially, the same for everyone?” he often wondered. Following his parents’ footsteps, he also became a doctor and worked in many Nursing Homes as a registered practitioner.



“My life completely changed when I experienced miraculous recovery of my son who couldn’t walk for three years,” exclaims Sundar, who then resolved to help as many needy people as possible. In 2012, at the age of 52, he volunteered with a non-government organization that worked for the welfare of tribal communities in Kodaikanal. “We lived the simplest and most fulfilling life here. I treated the local people and they paid back by way of cash, vegetables, grains, etc. But, the tribal people were illiterate and unaware of their basic rights,” he shares. After working for three years with this organization, Sundar began to work independently and educated the local communities about health, hygiene, and protection from basic infections. With every activity/program, Sundar realised that a lot more could be done to empower them. He began to organically work out plans to help the destitute survive. “To believe that you can survive is in itself a sense of empowerment which every destitute, abandoned women, children, old people should realise,” he adds.

After spending about seven years in Kodaikanal, Sundar moved to Dindigul with his family and established Vanavil Charitable Trust in 2021 in Tindivanam. After his wife’s demise, he spent most of his time with the Trust activities. “It was at the time when I hardly knew anything about managing a non-

profit organization that I learnt about CSIM. It was a blessing! Although I was not successful in registering a Trust in 2016, CSIM told me that consistency in efforts is the key and that I can always learn and work at my own pace. CSIM also taught me that there are many ways in designing a social welfare program. I realised that I didn’t have to do it alone,” says Sundar, appreciating the participatory teaching-learning methods used at CSIM.

Today, Vanavil Charitable Trust is a well-equipped rehabilitation centre for senior citizens, destitute children, disabled persons, and abandoned women. Regular tuitions and music classes for children have been successful thereby making inroads for the inmates’ integration with communities. Awareness programs for women on domestic violence, property rights and empowerment have not only given a new perspective for the inmates, but has allowed the neighboring communities to revisit their attitude towards women.

“It was amusing to see how things transpired from simple programs to changes in one’s attitudes. Friends from community who once never cared to even look at the abandoned people on streets, now call and notify us to enroll them at our rehabilitation centre,” shares Sundar, who also organizes plantation drives regularly.

Vanavil Trust is managed by Sundar, his sons, few volunteers and employees who are Social Work graduates. He ensures that all of them are represented in planning and administration activities because, participatory program management, he believes, is the most effective way to visualize impact at multiple levels. He admires its ability to simplify grand thoughts into simple, workable, impactful programs and finds them extremely helpful in blending all insights.

When asked about his future plans, Sundar reveals that he hasn’t thought of any. “At 62, I just want to keep going. I am not into experiments; I just want to be there for those in need. I see my success in building the next generation leaders who will soon be ready to take over. And when they do, this Trust will also experience a new phase, with a fresh dose of skills and instincts, from people who feel they belong here,” he says perceptively.

*Shanmuga Priya.T*



# YOUTH TO THE RESCUE

**Y**outh-leadership, community mobilization and collective action—these are the pillars upon which Synergy Sansthan stands. Situated in Harda district, a semi-rural, semi-tribal district in the heart of Madhya Pradesh, Synergy Sansthan has been helping communities realize their potential, build capacities, and become aware citizens through its programmes.

Ajay Pandit, co-founder of Synergy Sansthan and its current Director- Youth At Risk Programme, speaks about how the organization came to be. “In 2004, a team of eight young people pursuing their Master’s in Social Work, conducted programmes on education and mental health awareness in the slums of Indore city. While engaging with the community, they realized that along with furthering their own dreams and aspirations, the youth can also play a major role in leading social change from within their own communities. Thus my friends and I created Synergy Sansthan in 2006”, says Ajay. Since the friends themselves were from rural communities, they were no strangers to adversities at every stage of their own lives. “Owing to a lack of support systems, we all struggled very hard to compete with our peers from more affluent backgrounds”, explains Ajay, adding that, “Our motivation hence was strongly geared towards supporting children and youth from marginalized communities. Initially there were two of us who went into establishing and running the organization fulltime, while a third friend supported us financially.” Over the course of these 16 years, Synergy Sansthan has gone from strength to strength, accumulating valuable knowledge and building its own capacity to withstand the challenges thrown at it each passing year.

Currently Synergy Sansthan runs six major programmes in partnership with other not-for-profit entities. Yuvaalaya, a youth resource centre served over 10,000 youth over the course of five years. The centre developed and delivered trainings on self awareness, inclusion, leadership, gender and relationships for the youth.

Udaan- a one year fellowship that supported over 90 girls over a period of five years. The fellowship immersed girl children in sports, martial arts, art education and music. It helped girls dream big and lead the way to change in gender related issues that directly affected them.

For the past three years, the We Are Citizen programme has been providing civic education for children of classes 6-10. Developed in partnership with teachers and education experts, this programme helps children gain an understanding of the constitution and what it means to be an active citizen.

A programme that focusses on eliminating malnutrition among tribal populations, and another project for mitigating sickle-cell anemia, run in Harda and Khargaon districts respectively. Synergy Sansthan runs a mobile medical unit to test for sickle-cell anemia.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the Synergy Gram initiative for Livelihood



and Enterprise Development helped collectivise and organize migrant labourers who were forced to return to their native villages from other parts of the country. Through capacity building programmes, sharing of knowledge and financial support, this initiative supports over 200 small businesses in and around Harda, as also over 400 artisanal bamboo artisans.

Synergy Sansthan has received several awards and honours for their work. In 2017-2018, it became the only organization in Madhya Pradesh to receive the National Youth Award by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India. The Civic education module developed by Synergy Sansthan was accepted into the curriculum by the Ministry of Education, Government of Madhya Pradesh.

Several youth change makers trained and supported by Synergy Sansthan have gone on to do prized fellowships such as the coveted Asoka Fellowship, Pravah Changelooms, Dignity Fellowship, etc.

In 80 government schools, the Right to Education is currently being implemented as a counteraction to existing bonded-labour and child-labour issues in the region. Working in partnership with the police, the Juvenile Justice Board and other relevant authorities, Synergy Sansthan is currently influencing key policies impacting youth and adolescents in Madhya Pradesh.

While the work keeps getting more impactful, challenges abound in trying to keep the organization going. Synergy Sansthan lost a key leader during the COVID-19 pandemic. Says Ajay, “This



had a major impact on the mental health of the whole team. It mirrored to us the lack of social security for our own team members at this crucial time. We saw some more team members leave and realized we didn’t have enough to sustain our team. His piled up on top of how we had to redefine our community’s issues altogether due to the pandemic. For instance, all our operations used to be in-person before the pandemic, and when it came time to go online or find alternative methods to reaching out to the community, our efficiency was severely impacted. Also, funding has been difficult to gain due to changing priorities of funding organizations. While inflation has led to prices skyrocketing, the wages of staff remain the same.”

While Ajay has been candid about the challenges of running Synergy Sansthan, he also has clear-cut plans to overcome these challenges. From here on out, the top leadership plans to invest time and energy

in planning, strategizing and improving the sustainability of the organization. “We want to create a welfare fund for our staff that they might use in case of emergencies. We wish to create more knowledge through accumulation of data about our target population. We’re looking to improve our online presence and be more active on social media. Basically we’re reviewing all of our organizational policies and are strengthening them to suit our emerging needs,” says he.

What is your vision for Synergy Sansthan? We ask. “Our aim is to build Synergy Sansthan as a sustainable and resourceful organization for youth centric development for the youth belonging to all marginalized communities in Madhya Pradesh—be they tribal, rural or semi-urban,” says Ajay as he signs off.



# SPOILT? DON'T THROW... REPAIR!

*In Singapore, a community works to reduce waste by helping people to repair their broken items.*



Every last Sunday of the month, people from all walks of life in Singapore come together at a Repair Kopitiam event, bringing with them their malfunctioning toasters, broken fans and other faulty home appliances, hoping to give these household items a new lease of life. But this event is more than just a simple fix-it session. It is a mission to create a sustainable world. Repair Kopitiam, wants to get Singaporeans to reset their behaviour by fixing what's broken instead of just throwing it away, so that they can do their part to protect the environment.

Singapore's population of 5.82 million people generate approximately 60,000 tonnes of e-waste a year. That's equivalent to each person in the country throwing away 70 mobile phones annually.

When electronic waste is disposed of, it usually ends up in a landfill. As the components break down, they release toxic heavy metals like lead, cadmium and arsenic into the soil and contaminate the groundwater.

## REPAIRING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Repair Kopitiam is an initiative by Sustainable Living Lab that began in 2014. It was founded by Veerappan

Swaminathan, a Singapore International Foundation 2019 ASEAN Youth Fellow. They wanted to fight the growing waste problem in Singapore by getting Singaporeans to fix their broken items such as torn garments, rickety furniture, and electrical items, instead of just throwing them away. Shifting from a linear economy, a buy-use-throw approach, to that of a circular economy, where a faulty product is repaired instead of being thrown away.

For some participants, coming to Repair Kopitiam's event is a one-off outing to get their stuff fixed. Others get bitten by the repair bug and sign up for a 3-month workshop where they learn to tinker with a variety of things. "We get those who know how to repair to teach those who need the repair, so that this knowledge is being passed down," says Danny Lim, the Community Innovation Lead at Repair Kopitiam.

For a lot of the volunteers and coaches at Repair Kopitiam, it is simply the joy of being able to revive a broken appliance that keeps them coming back.

"When I was a kid, I used to open up

my uncle's cassette recorder, dismantle it and fix it back," recalls Edmund Ho, a Repair Kopitiam coach. "I have very itchy hands. From young until now, every day, I've been learning how to repair things."

Not only does Edmund feel a sense of accomplishment when he has successfully repaired something, he also can't help but feel touched by the sentiments that people have towards the things that he has fixed.

"A lot of the seniors will bring down

their own items. And they like the item so much that they say, 'Edmund, can you please help me to repair that?' And once I'm able to repair the old appliance, they are so happy. That's the kind of feeling money cannot buy."

## EXPANDING THE KAMPUNG

For their future endeavours, Repair Kopitiam hopes to build a 'kampung' (Malay word for 'village') within every public housing estate, where residents can help each other fix things in the spirit of neighbourliness.

"There could be a wheelchair bound person who cannot change his own lightbulb, or someone who cannot afford the cost of a repair," explains Danny. "This neighbour-help-neighbour kind of assistance is actually needed."

By getting more people engaged in the fix-it movement, Repair Kopitiam hopes to not only serve the community but also help to reduce our carbon footprint and impact on the environment.

*A story by Our Better World (the digital storytelling initiative of the Singapore International Foundation)*

[www.ourbetterworld.org](http://www.ourbetterworld.org)





# SMALL STEPS LEAD TO GIANT LEAPS



Since its founding, the Nishchaya Foundation has risen above and beyond to work towards a few goals that it considers crucial to its vision and mission. These include poverty eradication, education, women empowerment and environment protection. There's a good reason why the organization has chosen to make these the fulcrum of its very existence.

"Poverty is one of the main problems in India and many other parts of the world, and there are endless things connected to it namely access to health services, education, job opportunities and so on," says Sujeet Singh, President, Nischaya Foundation, "By working to eradicate poverty we can deal with all these problems as well."

Sujeet notes how those living in extreme poverty don't have access to basic education, which has inadvertently meant that poverty and education share a common link. "Education leads to jobs, resources, skills and knowledge, which in turn help people survive and thrive, and that in turn helps in the eradication of poverty," he says

However, the goal behind ensuring education, at Nishchaya at least, is to help individuals understand their basic rights and thereby undo generational wrongs that have over time resulted in what Sujeet calls the "transmission" of poverty between these generations.

"Women empowerment is very essential for the health and social development of families and communities," he adds, "Women can and must have the equal right to participate in education, society, and politics. Women who are safe and living productive and fulfilled lives can contribute their skills and knowledge to the workforce, and also raise healthier children. We view empowerment as an important tool in the pursuit of reducing crime and discrimination against women."

Through its work, Nishchaya has touched the lives of at least 10,000 individuals in the last 10 years of its existence. As per data on the NGO's website, the organization has provided livelihoods for over 2,340 individuals and helped admit 6,235 children to school. It has helped 1,632 women

turn self-reliant and has also planted upwards of 5,000 trees. "The 10,000 people whose lives we have impacted have mainly benefited from our various programmes," says Sujeet.

One of the organization's most successful programmes include its free health check-ups and its tree-planting campaign. In its attempt to support the environment, the organization has devised a method to monitor and support saplings as they grow into trees.

"The most successful programs are health awareness programs with free health check-ups — we organize over 100 such camps in a year, most of which have been really successful," says Sujeet, "We also partner with several hospitals and clinics in case people need advanced levels of medical assistance."

He adds: "Planting trees is also one of the most successful programmes that we have managed to launch; we have planted more than 5,000 trees so far, and not only do we plant saplings but also monitor and support them in

their journey to becoming trees."

In its original focus on using education as an effective poverty-eradication tool, one must acknowledge the overwhelming success that Nishchaya has encountered in its attempts. Targeted at rehabilitating the poorest of the poor, the organization's education programme have gone a long way in changing the lives of thousands of children in the decade-long existence of the organization.

"Our education programmes are very successful," says Sujeet, "We have run a number of quality education programmes for child labourers, street children and runaway children, and that includes reaching out to children from the poorest families around us."

Over the last decade, the organization has encountered and crossed several milestones that has placed it in good stead to launch itself into the future, even it goes about changing lives. "We have planted more than 5,000 trees not only in rural areas but also in urban areas," says Sujeet, "We have prevented more than 500 trees from being cut

with the help of locals, farmers and the forest department; we have helped provide livelihood to more than 2,000 people and have helped more than 500 women dealing with cases of domestic violence.

However, there's no stopping this NGO from charting out more ambitious plans and goals for itself even as the New Year approaches. "In 2023 alone, we aim to reach out to more than 2,000 of the poorest families that live on streets and footpaths in order to help their children benefit from our education programmes," says Sujeet, "We also want to plant 2,000 more saplings and support them in their journey to become trees."

He isn't done yet: "We want to conduct 200 health camps in villages and tribal areas, install 500 hand pumps in places where individuals do not have access to clean water, and run 200 skill-building programmes in slum areas."

However, the journey won't be easy. After all, the organization runs on the basis of donations, and has to keep striking a balance between donations and contributions

received and the scale of its own ambition. However, in its attempt to expand and touch more lives, there is an expansion roadmap that Sujeet has charted out. "We have to establish a balance of sorts between the donations and contributions we get and the programmes we intend to keep running," he says. "However some of our expansion plans involve opening a new centre in West Bengal."

There's no denying that NGOs like the Nishchaya Foundation help affirm the belief and fact that small steps can eventually result in giant leaps — all thanks to the compounding of focus areas like education, poverty-eradication and environment. With its sights firmly set on the horizon, the organization could make significant contributions to uplifting the most marginalized sections of society.

Rahul Philip



# HELPING OUR CHILDREN DEVELOP LIFE-SKILLS

Through busy schedules of homework, office, day to day tasks in the home and other aspects of life, parents come up with different strategies for teaching children life-skills. A first step is taken by having a toddler take charge of favourite possessions, such as a toy or bed-time teddy-bear.

As they grow, children are asked to help with easy tasks such as to lay plates on the table or put away their clothes, demonstrating how to manage their own lives as well as work together for the benefit of all.

## The need to start early

What is the best time to start teaching these skills? As a working mother, I had limited time available at home when my children were toddlers. I wanted to use what was there (after the dreaded homework was done!) as 'quality time'. I translated this as taking them to the park or asking about school and friends in the brief hour or two we had together.

Teaching them ironing and other tasks around the house was not on the agenda at all. As with many other working parents, the adults did all the chores and hurried on to the next bit, thinking vaguely that we must do these together with the children some time. But as children grow older, the complexities of school, teenage years and other responsibilities take over and opportunities to share become increasingly scarce.

Reading about different approaches being practiced by parents was enlightening in some respects, reassuring in others. It felt as if many faced the same dilemma and made similar choices. However, on reflection it seemed clear that the earlier they begin to learn, the easier it is to adopt an easy, flexible and positive attitude towards responsibility as grown-ups.

Having established this, my thoughts turned to tactics. Within the time constraints of employment and the day-to-day, how does one reinforce these lessons in a way that is helpful for the children?

## Financial responsibility

One question that I struggled with for years was talking about money and financial responsibility. As a child, resources had been limited, so I learned to earn through whatever means were feasible and make choices between different aspirations. As a parent, there was the classic dilemma of not being sure how to deliver the message of balancing wants with needs and making difficult decisions. While I did my best, not having a clear strategy meant I was sometimes over-indulgent and sometimes too strict.

Notwithstanding the negative connotations or discomfort of discussing money, the way the world and the job market are going now makes it essential that financial resources are managed consistently and with the ability to provide a cushion in time of need. This has various implications for the idea of financial responsibility: first, children need to learn that they need to work to get what they want. Second, they need to learn about saving and investing.

Demystifying the link between earning and getting what one wants is a useful thing to start with at a younger age, such as when children are asked to do certain errands for which they are rewarded. Demonstrating how to budget, prioritize and work towards goals is a good start, as kids who are used to managing their pocket money will continue to do so when it is a paycheck for a job.

The concept of investment is another area to think about. There is no doubt that with all economies witnessing inflation, it is essential that one's savings

bring in some returns. One simple and useful way to demonstrate this idea is to open a bank account for the child and discuss the balance with them every month or so. This should show them how interest works. It can also be an opportunity to discuss saving and investment, such as how they would benefit by putting half their pocket money into the bank every month.

## The importance of giving

There is a significant nuance here. It is important to understand the value of money and the responsibility it entails, but we should also communicate that it is only part of what is important in life. A basic example might be learning the value of sharing toys in kindergarten. There is no "reward" other than the joy of sharing the experience of playing. Similarly, giving to others from a young age teaches them about the feeling of fulfillment that comes from helping others.

## Life skills



Unfortunately, the grim reality for children who have grown in the wake of the financial crisis is the unpalatable fact that even if money is invested safely it might not be available at a point when needed. The same goes for a job. However diligently and well one works, lay-offs can and do happen. Such circumstances are not always our fault, but they are our responsibility to deal with.

Emotional resilience is essential, and building it starts in childhood, with the love and care a child gets in the family. Apart from this, there are specific areas to focus on. For example, giving a child independence where comfortable, such as deciding what to wear, can help them build self-confidence.

When my children were young, I often picked clothes for them to make the morning rush easier. Years later, I have reconsidered. Everyone, regardless of age, wants to exercise some control over their lives. I should have allowed that freedom of choice to be exercised where I could, like letting them wear mismatched socks with the school uniform. At the time, it seemed more important to get it done and laying down the rules was the fastest way. Now, I feel respecting their choice as individuals would have been so much more beneficial.



Parents who consider embedding such behaviours when kids are young adopt different strategies for different circumstances. They resist the urge to intervene in an argument with another child, recognizing that learning to resolve these helps understand consequences, boundaries and social skills. Allowing enough unscheduled time lets children use their own judgement and develop their creativity. Letting them order their food in a restaurant and discussing options with them is an opportunity to discuss food and healthy choices.

As kids grow into teenagers, the stress on time and work can be difficult to deal with, affecting self-confidence and health. The mindset is the focus, where issues are relatively effortless to manage rather than these becoming an uphill struggle.

## The reward for parents

This is where resilience comes in. Part of life-skills is teaching our toddlers and teenagers how to cope with the loss of a favourite toy, a fall when learning to ride a bike, a bruised heart and other such misfortunes. These are all hard lessons for our children as they are growing up, and equally hard for parents to stand by and watch their child in tears.

However, once our children leave the home to start their lives, they will have to deal with the ups and downs of life. Teaching them to maintain a balance and be responsible for their choices will be an immense help to them.

Deciding how to act for the best with our children is like walking on a tightrope. But as with all trapeze artistes, the huge reward is getting to the other end, seeing our young ones grow into adults who are responsible, resilient and self-confident.

*Karuna Luthar*



# Needs and Eligibility

Aspirations and socio-economic conditions may not complement each other for everyone. When they don't, there is a look out for resources and opportunities. But, how do we know that our resources are reaching the ones who most need it? This question and the quest to be able to support those in real need is the story behind Smt. Chanda Bai Jain Society in Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh. "It all started from a simple thought. I wanted to do something for the underprivileged and chose to support the education expenses of talented, interested students who hailed from under privileged families," says Mr Siddharth Jain, Founder of Smt. Chanda Bai Jain Society. With his father and wife (Co-Founders) also passionate about the cause, they began to look for needy students from their inner circles – orphans, semi orphans, children of maids/ construction workers, and ensured that they completed their schooling and pursued college education.

Siddharth found this approach regressive, as the reach was not determined by resources in hand, but by the ability to identify needy students. "Can we not go further and how?", he kept looking out for strategies to effectively utilize resources at hand for the needy students.

The first seven years from 2010 to 2017 went on without proper systems in place. This not only made the initiative flexible but proved to be inefficient in the long run as information about the programme was spread only by word of mouth. "Communication was not organised, it was amateurish and we didn't know where we were headed. We were not reaching out to as many as we could. What we saw was not even the tip of the iceberg," says Siddharth. Given the performance of education indicators in Madhya Pradesh, he felt that there was a bigger scope to influence education among underprivileged students. And so, he worked with his team to design an eligibility matrix to identify students who were talented and interested in studies but could not afford to continue education due to financial reasons.

Siddharth and team tried other models too, before zeroing in on the matrix. They visited government schools in the remote and tribal areas of Khandwa district and asked teachers and Principals to refer names of deserving students. However, this did not work out as not all those whose education was supported, completed

*From  
50 scholars  
in 10 schools, we  
now reach to 70  
students in 25  
schools*

education. The reason for drop-outs, was majorly because the parents wanted their children to work and contribute towards family income.

The state government scheme that allowed private entities to adopt a government school and improve the quality of education in government schools was also tried out. "We provided computers, established a lab facility, electrified schools and also invested in school infrastructure to improve the quality of education the students received. But, to the team's disappointment, we found that the facilities were not adequately used by the students," he complains.

The Trust initiated the scholarship model that appealed the students directly. The team visited fifteen schools in Khandwa district and distributed pamphlets about the Saksham Scholarship. From the 300 applications that were received in 2019, 100 were shortlisted. The brief telephonic interview revealed students' ambitions and their socio-economic conditions. Thereafter, home visits were undertaken to ascertain their living conditions and verify their credibility. The type of house (kuchcha/pakka), parents' occupation, whether orphaned/semi orphaned, etc were all examined and 50 of the most deserving students were selected for scholarship. Some of these students are now pursuing Nursing or B.Ed or Post-graduate courses.

The entire scholarship programme is



managed by volunteers, local teachers, and the Trustees. The model is now adopted as a standard practice and our reach has broadened year after year. From 50 scholars in 10 schools, we now reach to 70 students in 25 schools. "This is a big achievement for us as we were able to support only 5-6 students in 2017. Scholarship is also offered for students who excel in studies and are motivated to study further. We respect students' decisions," he says.

From humble beginnings, Saksham Scholarship is now a renowned name among school and college students in Khandwa district, building the hopes of underprivileged students.

*Shanmuga Priya.T*



# 85 YEAR OLD KAMALATHAL PAATI WAITS FOR IDLI DATE WITH MODI



Eighty five year old M Kamalathal who sells Idli for one rupee in Coimbatore wants to meet Prime Minister Modi and serve him her fluffy idlis. The fragile but active lady who's been selling idlis over the last eighteen years wants to thank Shri. Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India for the complimentary LPG cylinders she has received.

Three years ago the story of the grand ma serving idlis to hundreds of daily wagers every day had gone viral on social media.

Anand Mahindra, Chairman, Mahindra Group had tweeted about her wanting to help her with an LPG stove and build her a home. However HP installed two Bharat Gas LPG cylinders for her and has not been charging her acknowledging her service.

Presuming the cylinders to be a personal help by the Prime Minister, Kamalathal told tellmystory.in 'Only Modi has been giving two gas cylinders over the last two or three years. I am proud. I want to meet him and thank him'. When asked how would she do it she added "I want to go to his place or he could come here, eat my Idlis and go."

Over the last two years the grand old woman's gesture was a boon for so many who lost their jobs amid the pandemic. "For five rupees one could have a hearty breakfast. She is not after money" a worker said.

Kamalathai would soon get a new home as well. Anand Mahindra who's building for her tweeted "Only rarely does one get to play a small part in someone's inspiring story and I would like to thank Kamalathal better known as *Idli Amma* for letting us play a small part in hers. She will soon have her own house cum workspace from where she will cook and sell idlis." The Paati cheerfully serves even to those who don't have any money to pay.

"Its nobility to the core. What is money when a stomach is hungry" says Ms Vanitha Mohan, Chairperson of Pricol Ltd who visited Kamalathal, inspired by her gesture.



Courtesy: TellMyStory  
[www.tellmystory.in](http://www.tellmystory.in)

Ms Vanitha Mohan, Chairperson of Pricol Ltd visiting Idli Paati at her home. She calls Kamalathal's gesture "Nobility to the core"



# PND ENDOWMENT LECTURE

The Indian Institute of Chemical Engineering conducted the Third Endowment lecture of Shri P.N.Devarajan on 14th November 2022. Shri. T.S. Krishnamurthy, former Chief Election Commissioner of India was the Chief Guest for the event.

Dr. K.V. Radha Head of Department of Chemical Engineering of Alagappa College of Technology (ACTECH), Anna University, Chennai delivered the welcome address.

Prof. R. Parthiban, Professor and head of Department of Chemical Engineering, S.S.N College of Engineering and Chairman of Indian Institute of Chemical Engineers – Chennai Regional Centre felicitated the Chief Guest and addressed the audience.

A citation on Shri P N Devarajan was read by Shri. Narasimhan, Director of Protech Consultants and presented to T.S. Krishnamurthy.

Dr. N. Balasubramanian, Director of Centre for Energy Storage and Technology, Anna University introduced the Chief Guest and Dr. Saravanathamizhan delivered the vote of thanks.

Mr. Shankar, Asoka Fellow and Founder of Narikuravar Tribal Society shared his experiences with Shri. P.N.Devarajan. He mentioned that PND had sponsored education expenses of Narikuravar children and was instrumental in empowering them. In fact, few of these children had lobbied with the Government, along with Mr. Shankar and his team, for the Narikuravar community to gain Schedule Tribe status. It was on the day of the event, 14th November 2022, that the Lok Sabha bill was passed giving Scheduled Tribe status for Narikuravars.



## Centre for Social Initiative and Management

**C**entre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) is a unit of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani (MSDS). 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. [www.csim.in](http://www.csim.in)

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

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# "PND was a true patriot and his sincerity, dedication, and commitment to our country is commendable."

## Mr. T.S Krishnamurthy shares his memories with Shri P.N. Devarajan



**M**r. T.S Krishnamurthy, former Chief Election Commissioner of India, started his career as an Indian Revenue Service officer. Krishnamurthy started his career as a probationary officer at the Bank of India at the age of 19. He joined the Indian Revenue Service in the batch of 1963, subsequent to which he was posted as Income Tax Officer in Madras. Having served number of ministries in New Delhi including Shipping and Finance, he was deputed as a Deputy General Manager with the Hindustan Shipyard Limited in Visakhapatnam.

He shares his memories with Shri PN Devarajan (PND) at the endowment lecture held at Institute of Chemical Engineers, Chennai on 14th November, 2022.

### My first encounter with Shri PN Devarajan

I came to know PND during the early 80s when he was the Chairman of Hindustan Organic Chemicals. Once, at a Management Meeting of Public Sector Undertakings held at Chennai, I met him along with another friend Mr. J. Jayaraman, Chairman of Cochin Refineries.

During this meeting, one of the Speakers made a critical statement about how PSUs were managed in our country. He specifically mentioned about the Chairman Position of a PSU being held by an IPS Officer. Apparently, at that point in time, I was deputed as a Deputy General Manager to Hindustan Shipyard of Visakhapatnam Mr. S. Anandaram IPS was the Chairman.

I was itching to give a rebuttal. I sought permission to speak from Mr. Sen Gupta, Secretary for Department of Public Enterprises. I strongly defended my Chairman and said "It does not matter if you are a Government servant or not, what matters is your ability to lead the organisation". I also explained some of the features the management had brought about into Hindustan Shipyard.

After my talk, PND complemented me for giving a fitting response to the Speaker. Within a few hours we became very close and since then we have been spending a lot of time together.

He wanted me to leave the government service and said that I was not meant for the Public Sector. When I was serving as Commissioner of Income Tax in Chennai, PND spoke to the

Chairman of one of the leading Private Limited companies, which he was associated with, and recommended me for a position. He even booked my travel ticket to Mumbai for the interview. I had to decline the offer as my wife was against me leaving the government service.

In fact, I was selected for the position of Finance director for Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilizers Limited and later for Mangalore Chemicals & Fertilizers. I was mentally prepared to leave the government service, but the effective blockade came from my wife. She spoke to my bosses in the Department who advised me not to leave the Government service.

### PND's unique traits

One of the things that impressed me the most was PND's informality. He was very friendly with anyone he met. He makes one feel at ease invites you to join his discussions. He was fond of dreaming big Government projects that would provide employment opportunities for youngsters leading to improvement in country's economy.

PND always thought about bringing about change in organisations, and was remarkably sharp at that. This is one quality which every youth should imbibe.

He always said that there were a lot opportunities which has not been exploited by our economy, particularly the entrepreneurs. It is a pity that PND left early, but his foot print is always felt in many areas even today. I feel that if he had lived for a few years more, Mr. Narendra Modi, our Hon'ble Prime Minister would have certainly taken him into confidence to bring about many economic changes. I am sure many top industrialists in Mumbai, who had disagreed to his ideas earlier would realise in some time that it holds a lot of opportunities for expanding progress in industrial economy.

PND also encouraged youngsters to venture into the field of Entrepreneurship. After my retirement, we met quite often and he used to explain the various social activities that he was engaged in.

The fact is that PND is a multi-faceted personality; he did not confine himself only to his field of chemical engineering. He could talk on any subject and was keen on social activities, corporate social responsibility, and so on. It is amazing that he was able to do all of these with ease. I never found him lost to think about a project or to find time for social work. He kept influencing us to work towards bringing about change in our society. He also had a little bit of a philosophical adventure where he wanted to build a Kodi Linga Temple.

I remember PND mentioning about his pet project where he earmarked funds for poor students' education which

would be revolved so that more needy children could be reached.

### PND's tryst with youth

PND's contribution to the growth of the youth is phenomenal. Whenever we visited an organisation, he would speak with the young officials and motivated them.

I cannot think of any other person, who would take interest to improve the company, whether serving the company or not. I remember PND meeting many entrepreneurs individually and giving them ideas. It was baffling to note how he found time for this.

With the kind of economic opportunities our country has had in the last few years and the incentives available for entrepreneurs, PND's ideas could enable self-employment for many. Youth should think of launching enterprises instead of working for a 10 to 5 job. In substance, I would say that PND's life would inspire the modern youngsters. By the time youth completed graduation, they would have gained clarity and should therefore be able to think differently. They should have the courage to launch an enterprise. In fact, when I was about to leave the government service, I too thought of starting an industry.

Our government has been promoting entrepreneurship through Aatman Nirbhar Bharat scheme and we have a remarkable market that would sustain the economic growth of our country.

Considering the humble beginnings of PND, where his father was a school teacher in Vellore, and the way he overcame the various challenges, in his career as well as his real life, is notable. He was clear that Social entrepreneurship was not meant only for the intellectually bright students.

### PND & CSR

He had the vision for corporates to have social responsibility, so that the profit is not meant only for the shareholders. His thoughts were ahead of time as the CSR Act was enacted only in 2013. PND spoke about making profit people-oriented. He also had the concept of making profit in social service activities, and reinvesting that profit for furthering the organisations' work. This was indeed social entrepreneurship!

In his last years he was associated with a few social service organisations that worked for the welfare of the mentally challenged. He went out of the way to source donations to help these NGOS. All along, he was a great man driven by passion to do something for our country.

I am sure if he was still alive, he would have contributed much more to drive the economy faster and farther. He is no small person and there is no doubt on that. He was a true patriot and his sincerity, dedication, and commitment to our country is commendable.