

Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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About Akshaya Patra and its activities



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without which India cannot
survive."**
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From the Editor

Dear Friend,

A leader must be capable of envisioning the future reality of his or her society and be able to effectively and convincingly communicate it to the people. He or she should be totally committed to the cause and should be prepared to go to all extents of self-sacrifice for the betterment of the society and the realisation of his or her ideals.

Leaders know how to achieve goals and inspire people along the way. They require farsightedness and the ability to see ahead and lead the team on the correct path. This skill comes with experience. It is the intuition and his or her ability to learn from past mistakes that sets the leader apart from the rest.

A leader not only leads the team from the front, but also stands along with it. Only when a leader is a good team player can he become a successful leader. Understanding the team, bonding with them and sharing the work are some of the significant qualities of a leader that not only make him successful but an idol to his team.

Leadership is not mathematics and does not have a set formula to ensure making of great leaders. It is the science of progressive learning and does not have fixed rules. Steve Jobs and Bill Gates followed different styles, and both remain classic examples of great leaders. At times, the leadership position might also demand expertise in specific areas depending upon the needs of a particular group or society.

Leadership is becoming an evolving field that relies not only on inherent qualities, but also on vast and specialised knowledge. It is therefore essential for chosen persons to be trained and educated so that they emerge as successful leaders.

Over the years, the definition of leadership has changed. From being a ceremonious position, leadership has come down to the grass-root level. Today, the image of a leader is one who can be a common man.

The changemakers featured in Conversations Today are all leaders in their own way. Each of them are unique and many have interesting stories to tell.

Happy reading!

Marie Banu

Levels of Listening



“At the source of leadership failure is lack of listening, lack of connecting with what’s going on in reality right now. Listening as a leadership capacity is the most underrated. Listening is at the source of all great leadership.”- Otto Scharmer

At its core, leadership is about shaping and shifting how individuals and groups attend to and subsequently respond to a situation. As a leader, one intends to “hold” a space that invites others in. The key to holding a space is listening generously: to oneself, to others and to that which emerges from the collective.

Listening is at the core of leadership. When leaders listen generously they begin to ‘declutter’ their inner world and become ready to operate from the emerging future!

In many ways our ability to listen generously commences with our

inner condition. The first step is to focus inwards, to learn about our own filters and biases. The most common types of ‘internal chatter’ come from our auto-pilot response-listening through our ‘filters’:

- Judging the person who is speaking
- Being preoccupied with the other person’s opinion of us
- Getting angry or preparing a response as a result of being defensive

As we become aware of internal chatter, we learn to deal with three resistances. The first is the voice of judgment—it blocks our capacity to access our open mind & collective creativity; voice of cynicism—blocks our capacity to be vulnerable and to access our open heart; voice of fear—blocks our capacity to access our open will, to let go the old self and let come the deeper authentic self.

For leaders, empathic and generative listening are two additional sources of listening that offer ways of addressing the voices of judgment, cynicism and fear, thus taking them to the threshold of transformation.

In empathic listening we suspend evaluation and criticism when we listen to others. It’s listening with an open heart. Generative listening requires us to access not only our open heart, but also our open will—our capacity to connect to the highest future possibility that can emerge. When we operate from generative listening we realize that by the end of the conversation we are no longer the same person we were when it began. We have gone through a subtle but profound change that has connected us to a deeper source of knowing, including the knowledge of our best future possibility.

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.

Editorial

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu

Empowering Self and Community



Achievement is a difficult term. “Every step in life is an achievement, because you move forward. Your decision is your power. It commands respect,” explains Mr P.Muthu, Founder of Sky Foundation in Kolambakkam, Kanchipuram. Highly motivated and grounded, Muthu has always endeavoured to support his community. “I am differently abled. I know it takes time, but I have also figured out how to progress, with the community,” he smiles.

Muthu hails from Kolambakkam in Kanchipuram district. He confronted numerous challenges in accessing education, yet got trained in Plastic Injection Moulding at the local ITI centre, run by WORTH trust for the differently abled, in 1989. He interned and also worked with many companies, but was unhappy to see other differently abled youngsters from his village deprived of opportunities. “For the differently abled in rural areas, choice and access to opportunities hardly come together. By now we all know the level of support a community can render to the differently abled. It varies from one place to another and every community adapts gradually. At times, each community might take the lifetime of many individuals like me. Lack of support and discrimination is not new. What is disturbing is that the benefits planned for the differently abled never reaches us or rather the implementing authorities don’t find us,” laments Muthu.

Muthu’s work experience reiterated that the differently abled who live in rural areas prefer to not move from their villages. Their urge to succeed diminishes by the time they encounter all the barriers. Fortunately, Muthu found his way and continued to move forward. He worked with Rejuvenant India Movement (RIM) for three years as Samudaya Sirpi, meaning Community Architect. He also

coordinated the tsunami rehabilitation and tribal development projects on behalf of Asscord, for about eight years. Engaging with different communities helped him learn about the reality of lives led by differently abled in rural areas. While he felt a strong push to do something for the differently abled, he was also sure that they can come together to help the rest of the community. “Seeking help throughout our lives is both a responsibility and a burden. We must go beyond this and consider helping each other in the community. It is easily said than done,” he warns.

Muthu established Sky Foundation in 2012 to help differently abled from rural areas and tribal children in his district. He envisaged building their capacities to ensure personal and societal progress, simultaneously. Beginning with life skills for small groups of students, Sky Foundation has geared up to run free tuition centres for tribal children. The local teams have stopped many child marriages besides educating and sensitising the communities in the process. 24x7 presence in the community helped Muthu and his team to understand the local concerns better, and plan strategies for change. Sky Foundation has collaborated with organisations like Concerned for Child Rights Network to widen their reach and impact.

Sky foundation also anchors the activities of Federation for Differently Abled Association, Tamil Nadu, in Kanchipuram district. Moving beyond pocketed interventions, Muthu decided to form simple structures within communities that took the responsibility of protecting child rights. The foundation thus formed Child Rights Protection Committees that comprised of volunteers from the villages, women, panchayat leaders and other representatives to monitor the situation of child rights in



Palayanur and Bukkathurai panchayats. A very successful and penetrating concept in the realm of child rights, in built community structures promise to help communities comprehend their challenges and resolve them. With youngsters trained at Sky Foundation taking up key roles here, Muthu is hopeful of seeing a better tomorrow for both the target groups.

Muthu’s journey has not been easy though. Coming from a technical background, Muthu built his vision from past experiences. A friend’s reference led him to CSIM and according to him, completing the one year programme was in itself a big achievement. Although Sky Foundation was established and registered in 2012, 12A and 80G were alien concepts then. “None of the leaders from the organisations where I had worked earlier were inclined to know my personal aspirations. They probably could not visualise a role model in me. CSIM welcomed me as a leader, which was very encouraging. If I

can switch on a computer and work on it, it is only because of the training I received as part of the PG Diploma in Social Initiative and Management,” shares an overwhelmed Muthu.

“I could see Sky Foundation as a full-fledged organisation now. I learnt the significance of book keeping, and preparing annual audit reports. I am confident of presenting my organisation’s work to any audience,” asserts Muthu, quickly adding that Sky Foundation’s 80G and 12A certificates have been big achievements for him.

Muthu feels capacitated to administer the work of Sky Foundation on a bigger scale. Muthu’s vision is to establish a training centre in the village that can create employment opportunities for the differently abled. As always, he moves ahead with his community.

“I have encouraged seven students and friends also to take up the course at CSIM,” he signs off.

—Shanmuga Priya.T

A Boomerang for Good

Our loan to a head lice-crushing killer just came back.



Picture courtesy: Milaap

Imagine having a special boomerang in your hands.

And as you send it out, it sets various dreams into motion. It could be enabling a little girl to finally know what a classroom looks like, or empowering a man with skills, so he can better provide for his family.

As these dreams begin to turn into reality, your boomerang returns to you – either for you to keep, or to send out again.

It may seem like a fantasy, but it's a reality.

That "special boomerang" is a Milaap loan.

Working Poor

Set up in 2010 to give India's working poor a leg up, Milaap is a Singapore-based online crowd-funding platform

For as little as \$25, anyone can offer a borrower a loan that could be life-changing.



No donations of sympathy here, only loans of empowerment.

In our case, we just got repaid our loan by a lice-killer.

In February 2012, our colleague Ashima bought the Our Better World team a Milaap gift voucher, which allowed us to make a loan to Pandiammal, a 40-something mother of two from Trichy, in India's Tamil Nadu state.

Pandiammal and her neighbours had set up a business selling medicinal powder for head lice.

The five women said they would repay their crowd-funded loan of US\$910 within 18 months, through instalments.

And true enough, 18 months later, we've gotten back our part of the loan in full, allowing us to choose whether to reinvest in other people working their way to a better life, or to recover our loan.

Pandiammal had taken up the loan to buy in bulk raw materials for her business selling lice-treatment medication.

On a visit in June 2014, Milaap staff visited Pandiammal at her home, from where she sells the medication, and found her to be "very happy with her family", and her business "running smoothly".

Ripple Effect

Pandiammal's example is not unusual. Over and over, Milaap has seen the

positive effects of small loans rippling out from individuals to their families and communities, like in the case of AD Nagendra, a tailor in Bangalore who used his loan to expand his business. It's resulted in more stability for his family and more jobs for people in his community.

With more than a 96% repayment rate and 100% of your loan going direct to the borrower, it's a really good bet as far as investments go.

And let's not forget about the interest on your investment: knowing that someone's closer to their dream because of you.

The boomerang is in your hand. You can choose to send it out.

—A story by Our Better World – the digital storytelling initiative of the Singapore International Foundation
[www. https://www.ourbetterworld.org/en/story/boomerang-good](https://www.ourbetterworld.org/en/story/boomerang-good)

Milaap provides a platform for anyone to offer loans to India's working poor. The next time you're looking to buy a present, consider a voucher from them. You can trust us when we say it makes a wonderful gift that keeps on giving.

SOCIAL IMPACT: THE USE OF LANGUAGE AND WHY IT MATTERS...



In this world of a Trump election in the USA and Brexit in the UK – where facts and ‘truth’ are being stretched to a frightening degree, I am reminded of George Orwell and his concept of doublethink. He writes...

War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength. The very concept of objective truth is fading out of the world. Lies will pass into history. (George Orwell, 1984)

This idea of words and language being used to manipulate thinking is at the heart of Orwell’s work. He recognised that language and words are crucially important.

As we enter a world of post-truth and increasingly instantaneous information and communication, we are going to have to be more scrupulous in filtering out fact from a tidal flood of fiction which has been designed to influence the way we think.

Of course, language can be used to explain and clarify things. The late James Cameron in an article in the Guardian in the 1980s wrote about how he did not really know or understand his opinion on things until he had tried to express it in words. He relates how he became surprised at the opinions – often strong opinions – that he held which only really come to light when he put his thoughts into words.

This resonated with me at that time – and it still does – as it reveals the strong link between our culture – the way we think about things in the world, and the

language we use to explain it to ourselves and to others.

But language can also be used to confuse and obfuscate the truth intended in the meaning.

Often there is a difference between what people say they are doing and what they are actually doing. This lack of a clear link with reality may just be the absence of clear thinking, but it may be deliberate to manipulate how others think about things and what they do about it.

In the world of social enterprise, words are used in ways that intend to influence. Indeed, the term ‘social enterprise’ originated from the French, ‘*économie sociale*’, and its early use was not to explain the impact of economic activity in ‘social’ ways or in benefitting people. Rather the term was used to explain that the economic activity was owned by people. For me this is an interesting distinction, and one that is often forgotten. But, of course, the term has evolved from its roots into what we understand ‘social enterprise’ to mean today, that is, the impact on people.

Another example from the history of social enterprise...

A precursor to social enterprise in the UK was the Scottish community business movement that started in the 1970s with rural community co-operatives supported by the then Highlands and Islands Development Board (now Highland and Islands Enterprise).

The idea of community ownership of

economic activity spread to urban areas with community-owned businesses supported by local authorities using Urban Programme funding. This movement flourished, became established and mainstream. In the early 1990s it came in for a lot of criticism (some of it quite valid) but this led to people changing the terminology – if not the concept. They started to refer to these types of organisations as ‘community enterprises’. Not the old guard, ‘community business’, but the fresh and new, ‘community enterprise’.

Similarly, in the early 1990s a range of versions of community-owned businesses emerged. In my view, they were more-or-less the same thing but with a new twist: ‘development trusts’, ‘social firms’ – to name but two. Old wine in new bottles. The newly formed terms implied a new concept.

Turning to the world of ‘social impact’ there are similar things happening.

I have been actively involved in ‘social accounting and audit’ for many years. We started to use this term in the early 2000s replacing ‘social audit’ as we felt the longer term more accurately described the two parts of ‘social accounting’ and ‘social audit’. As you can imagine it is not a particularly popular term and we thought of changing it into something more immediately appealing like, ‘SEE Visioning’ or similar.

It was thought that a change of name might attract those that associated

‘accounting’ and ‘audit’ with arduous and stressful connotations. For better or for worse we stuck with the accuracy of ‘social accounting and audit’. You get what is says on the tin...

More recently I have become aware of a subtle change of word usage in the social impact field.

A few years ago, the term ‘impact measurement’ was on everyone’s lips. We were being encouraged to ‘measure’ the change that happens on people, the environment and on the local economies. If we could not, the argument was that the impact could not be managed – or so we were told.

The Social Audit Network has always disputed this and said that just because one cannot measure something, one can still put a value on it. In fact, many of the things that most people personally would value in their lives, cannot be measured – like love, close friendship, the warmth of company, the delight in a beautiful view, the exhilaration of achievement, and so on. Others in this area of social impact insisted that ‘measurement’ was key.

Inevitably, those that insisted on measuring things and often reducing the good things in life to a financial value are now recognising that they may have been wrong. But instead of accepting that – yes, you are right – they change the words. ‘Impact management’ has been introduced. Recognising the absurdities of trying to measuring everything, which one cannot sensibly do, let’s change it to managing and understanding our impact.

Perhaps what is not so strange is that those advocating ‘impact management’ now are not a million miles away from what ‘social accounting and audit’ has been suggesting for decades.

So the use of language may just be a minor skirmish within the social impact. But it is arguably a reflection of something much more important – that is, the way we use language and what we really mean.

I can see that in a future more nationalist, more fearful, more defensive and exclusive world, the connection between language and ‘truth’ will become more divergent.

The writing of Orwell will no doubt come back to haunt (or is it taunt us?). In his work, ‘Politics and the English Language’, he writes...

The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one’s real and one’s declared aims, one turns, as it were, instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish squirting out ink.

I am not sure what a cuttlefish is, but there seems to be a lot of them about.

—Alan Kay

Co-Founder, Social Audit Network, UK

Food For Thought

It was in the year 2000, that Bengaluru-based Akshaya Patra decided to begin a journey to feed 1,500 children from five government schools in the city. The initiative's objective was simple: no child ought to be deprived of education because of hunger. Soon enough, well-known citizens of Bengaluru — the likes of Mohandas Pai and Abhay Jain — joined these efforts, and the programme never looked back. "What helped us grow was the Supreme Court's mandate in 2001, which directed State Governments to provide mid-day meals to children in their schools," Dhanashree BM, Deputy Manager, Akshaya Patra. "It also helped that the food wouldn't just bring children to schools, but also helping them focus on what they were being taught."

In 2003, Akshaya Patra became the first organisation to forge a public-private partnership with the Government to implement the mid-day meal scheme. A similar approach would soon be followed by other States. Today, 27 locations across 11 States serve up mid-day meals thanks to the organization. "The Mid-Day Meal programme is an apt example of public-private partnership in the non-profit sector," says Dhanashree.

While Akshaya Patra goes to great lengths in implementing the Mid-Day Meal schemes for several governments, the governments themselves allot land on long lease, at nominal costs. "Grants and subsidies are provided by the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and the Food and Civil Supplies Corporations, who also help with timely procurement of grains. The permission to seek donations from within the country is granted by the Finance Ministry, while the Ministry of Home Affairs grants the permission to seek overseas donations under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), 1976," explains Dhanashree, "Each meal costs us Rs. 10.23, of which Rs. 06.05 comes from the Government, while the remaining Rs. 04.18 is borne by us." Funding for the organisation comes from both, individual and corporate donors.

Only four years ago, the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Policy framed under the New Companies Act of 2013 aided the efforts of Akshaya Patra on the funds and sustainability front. The organisation says it now observes more companies coming forward, to socio-economic development programmes.

As far as the Mid-Day Meal scheme is concerned, the organisation seems to have all elements in place. Akshaya Patra's meals meet nutritional requirements of children, complying with the Governmental norms. "It's also worth noting that the menu is designed after taking into consideration the local palate," says Dhanashree, "We strive to meet the Government norms in terms of consumption of dal, vegetables, and oil. Curd is also served from South Indian kitchens." The scheme also makes the most of technology. "We feed over 1.6 lakh children from 13,529 schools in 11 states. For this, we rely on our state-of-the-art kitchens," explains Dhanashree, "Of the 27 locations in which we operate, 25 have centralised kitchens — Bengaluru has two

centralized kitchens. These units can prepare food in huge quantities in just four hours. Everything is prepared on a huge scale without compromising quality." In fact, the rice cauldrons in these kitchens can churn out 500 litres of rice, while roti-making machines can dish out thousands of rotis at a time. An estimated 100,000 children can be fed through each of these machines at any given time. In two locations (Baran in Rajasthan and Nayagarh in Odisha), the organization found it unfeasible to set up centralized kitchens owing to their remoteness. "In these locations, we have adopted the decentralized model.



As a part of this, Women Self Help Groups are assigned the task of operating small kitchens, which typically cater to one or two schools in the vicinity." In Nayagarh alone, the system feeds 23,976 children, and in Baran, the number stands at 11,020.

With no commercial model in place, raising donations from corporates, philanthropic trusts, and individual donors is the primary approach towards fund-raising. "We are a charitable organization, and donations help us meet the deficit of the programme cost," says Dhanashree. Despite being a not-for-profit organisation, Akshaya Patra has a board of

trustees helming of the organisation's affairs. A Chairman and Vice-chairman occupy positions, overseeing departments like operations, projects and infrastructure, resource mobilization, donor care management, communications, finance and accounts, people function, and administrative services. This enables smooth operations on a daily basis.

Food safety and hygiene are crucial factors in the NGO's operations. "Total Quality Management (TQM) tools are used to comply with food safety and management system standards," says Dhanashree, "Our kitchens are 5S (sort, simplify, scrub, standardise, and sustain) and GMP (good manufacturing processes) compliant, and checked with regular audits." Samples from kitchens are periodically drawn and analysed in a NABL-accredited laboratory. A First-In-First-Out (FIFO) method is implemented to make sure all perishable items are used efficiently, while all kitchen locations use a toolkit to ensure that FSMS norms are complied with. "Once the food is cooked, it is packed into steam-sterilized vessels. All the food contact surfaces are of either 304-grade stainless steel or food-grade plastic," explains Dhanashree, "Cauldrons, trolleys, rice chutes, sambar or dal tanks, cutting boards, and knives are sanitized with steam just before use."

While cooking the food prides itself on high standards, equal importance of standard is given in the delivery process too. "The cleanliness of the vehicle is checked before loading the food. The body of the vehicles is insulated with thermocol to retain heat. Stainless steel racks meant for vessels of small, medium, and big sizes are laid inside to secure the vessels and prevent spillage," says Dhanashree, "When the vehicles return after delivering food, they are washed with a pressure jet. A daily feedback mechanism is established and responded within 24 hours, stakeholder complaints are managed within 24 hours and beneficiary satisfaction surveys are conducted to improve the products and services."

At these kitchens, operations begin as early as 2am. By 6am, delivery vehicles start leaving for schools. "Around 9am, after vehicles leave, the cleaning process begins," says Dhanashree, "This is followed by preparation for the next day. Vegetables are cut in pre-processing area and stored in the cold storage room. By the time this is done, vehicles are back from schools with empty vessels. These are cleaned thoroughly. There are guidelines for each of these processes, which are strictly followed at all times."

Today, the organization helps feed 1.6 million children from 11 states. "While there are nine new kitchens in the pipeline, which are expected to add close to 40 lakh children to our beneficiaries list, we are also in talks with other State Governments for possible partnerships," says Dhanashree.

"Our mission is to reach 5 million children by 2020 and the rate at which we are expanding our footprint in the mid-day meal space, we are confident that we will be able to realize it," she signs off.



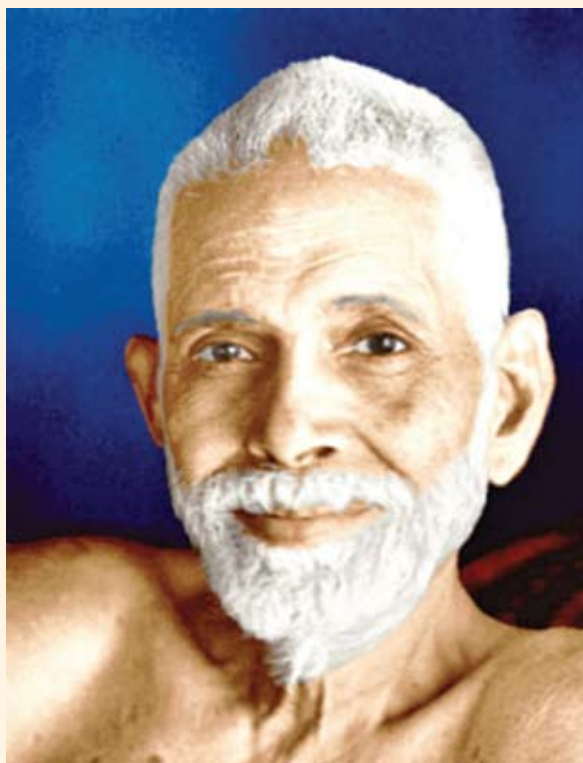
Conversations with Shri Ramana Maharishi

Mr. Cohen desired an explanation of the term “blazing light” used by Paul Brunton in the last chapter of *A Search in Secret India*.

Maharshi: Since the experience is through the mind only it appears first as a blaze of light. The mental predispositions are not yet destroyed. The mind is however functioning in its infinite capacity in this experience. As for nirvikalpa samadhi i.e., samadhi, of non-differentiation (undifferentiated, supreme, beatific repose), it consists of pure consciousness, which is capable of illumining knowledge or ignorance; it is also beyond light or darkness. That it is not darkness is certain; can it be however said to be not light? At present objects are perceived only in light. Is it wrong to say that realisation of one's Self requires a light? Here light would mean the consciousness which reveals as the Self only.

The yogis are said to see photisms of colours and lights preliminary to Self-Realisation by the practice of yoga.

Once before Goddess Parvati practised



austerities for realising the Supreme. She saw some kinds of light. She rejected them because they emanated from the Self, leaving the Self as it was ever before. She determined that they were not supreme. She continued Her austerities and experienced a limitless light. She determined that this also was only a phenomenon and not the Supreme Reality. Still she continued Her austerities until she gained transcendental peace. She realised that it was Supreme, that the Self was the sole Reality.

The Taittiriya Upanishad says, “Seek Brahman through penance”. Later on, “Penance is Brahman”. Another Upanishad says, “Itself is penance which is again made up of wisdom alone”. “There the sun shines not, nor the moon, nor the stars, nor fire; all these shine forth by Its light”.

Source: Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi

Fear



According to an ancient Indian fable, a mouse was in constant distress because of its fear of the cat. A magician took pity on it and turned it into a cat. But then it became afraid of the dog. So the magician turned it into a panther whereupon it was full of fear of the hunter. At this point the magician gave up. He turned it into a mouse again saying, “Nothing I do for you is going to be of any help because you have the heart of a mouse.”



Explicit Learning

- A. Fear is more a matter of how one feels at heart than what one really is.
- B. You can't get rid of your fear until you really want to.
- C. Whatever one may do, it's ultimately you who will have to gain the courage to overcome your fears.



Introspective Learning

- A. What is the basis of my fears?
- B. What is the nature of 'Fear'?
- C. How do I overcome my fears?

Joy in Volunteering



Volunteering is an enriching experience that unravels the scope for growth in an individual, a community and an organisation. This growth, resulting from collective learning, exchange of knowledge and skills has created a new identity for social service. Sustaining the impact of such engagements is necessary to promote the inherent value of every individual/group, the understanding of which forms the basis of social capital in a society – the more diverse, the richer. Chennai Volunteers is a social initiative that endeavours to build this foundation in a very systematic manner by providing the supportive infrastructure through an interactive, dynamic web portal.

The underlying concern is that many non-profits do not have the requisite resources to hire professional help, and, there are professionals who wish to contribute through their skills or just time to specific causes/domains. With limited platforms to bring them together, sustaining this potential engagement and the consequent impact is a challenge. All they need is support to figure out where, how and whom to engage with. By engaging citizens from different walks and socio economic status, Chennai Volunteers intends to open channels of learning & development for 'all'.

Established in August 2011, Chennai Volunteers has built an 'exhaustive volunteering knowledge network' that makes it easy for anyone to choose partners in resonance with their interests. Chennai Volunteers was started as a social initiative of Mecheri Foundation. It was the vision of Rajeev Mecheri with Rinku Mecheri and Sanyukta Gupta as mentors. The Trust had already been working with a handful of NGOs in the areas of education, care for elderly and differently abled children. It was born out of personal experiences in volunteering and the idea was to leverage the benefits of the digital medium in the field of civic engagement.

"Volunteers only have to communicate their interests, location and time. All ground work and research to ascertain credentials of both individuals and organisations has already been done, thereby removing

all apprehensions pertaining to association with a new partner. Accordingly, Chennai Volunteers' portal enables open ended scheduling to ensure a very productive experience for all stakeholders," says Rinku Mecheri.

Chennai Volunteers has organised many events over the last six years and has on its board local, and national partners. Supporting such a huge network, the organisation makes sure that every volunteer is adequately oriented and guided in their work area. Volunteers are also paired with senior volunteers for a brief period, where they are accompanied to ensure that volunteers' skills and field requirements match. "Volunteering is slowly becoming a part of people's lives and there is a growing need in them to give back to society. The youth are fantastic in their efforts and it is heartening to see middle-aged as well as retired people reaching out to volunteer with their time and skills. With the CSR Act coming into play, volunteer engagement is seen as an integral part of corporate responsibility", adds Rinku Mecheri.

Be it recreation at 'Homes for the Aged' or disaster relief or teaching differently abled or art conservation, Chennai Volunteers has grown to promote values and principles of volunteering, given its diverse network of



organisations and volunteers.

"It's been a smooth sail with lots of positivity and inspiring people who we have met along the way. The only challenges that we faced were to bring structure into a largely unstructured ecosystem; and to educate the NGOs on the benefits of volunteering and not let them approach volunteers with their sponsorship needs," adds Rinku Mecheri.

What started as a small attempt to foster volunteering and heighten the role of individuals in civic society, has now developed into an entity of its own. "While we consciously stay away from the number game, some milestones in our work so far has been encouraging. In our second year, we accomplished more than 50,000 hours of volunteering during Daan Utsav. During the Chennai floods, we facilitated more than 12,00,000 hours of volunteering for the cause during a period of 2 months. We have partnered with 100+ NGOs/institutions till date and try and deepen the volunteering impact with them," says Rinku, adding that the structured platform provided by Chennai Volunteers has made it easier for volunteers to reach out, despite their busy lives.

With NGO partners also realizing the real time impact of volunteers, their belief in it is increasing. Given the dynamics of development at all levels in a country like India, volunteering ushers in new hope in bridging the gap between haves and have-nots. "The benefits are many and today, it is heartening to see the new crop of social entrepreneurs around us", smiles Rinku Mecheri.

The limitations to volunteering aren't many – it's a practice that has been part of our culture for centuries. You can call it seva, service or volunteering. We have grown up seeing it happen around us. Volunteering is the new avatar! However, it is important that every volunteering effort has a resultant impact either in the short term or long term. "Without that, there is no fulfillment for the volunteer or the NGO", she warns.

—Shanmuga Priya. T

Nruthya Bodhini – Musings of an Artiste

06 – Team jiggle & mingle

*Coming together is a beginning.
Staying together is progress.
Working together is success.”-
Henry Ford*

It is easy to do things by yourself than getting things done. The ability to work in a team and collaborate is integral to social entrepreneurship.

“That’s not fair!! Aunty, I want to be in the introduction dance too!”

“Aunty, I don’t want to do the thillana. I will do the padam instead!”

“Hey, you can’t have only what you want”!

“Oh, I can’t do if I don’t like it. I will ask Aunty to change”.

“Aunty, who is playing the role of Krishna? We don’t have enough male dancers in class!!”

From the time the teacher announced the Annual day program she was planning and the parts the students would play, there were a whirlpool of questions, ensuing commotion in class that evening. Excitement, doubt, anxiety, urgency, frustration mixed up feelings were largely expressed by the girls. The teacher just sat silently, waiting for all the talk to die down naturally so she could make them all see the value of team work.

The teacher raised her voice to address the girls, “May I have silence please? Listen to me and I will tell you who can do what item in the program. Then, we can discuss this further. I want you all to know we need to work as a team if this has to be a great show. You will have the option to choose for a few of the performances, but there will also be some that you won’t. We have to be fair to all!”

The class suddenly quietened and the girls sat down next to the teacher, ready to plan. Radhu could not stop murmuring to Mala. Sadhana loved being first and participating in everything and was visibly anxious about missing out anything. The only person giggling was Bindiya. Seeta as usual was regularly irregular, and absent in class. To their dismay, they all had to compromise on their choices of the pieces they wanted to perform. However, to Sadhana’s delight, she was chosen to play the role of Krishna. No one could deny her eyes sparkling mischievously that perfectly fit the flirtatious role of Krishna. Bindya with her grace was the naturally chosen to play Radha. Sadhana wanted a female



role, but was also thrilled to play Krishna. She knew secretly that given a chance, she would have played all roles happily. Sadhana’s burning need to be a part of it all and give every ounce of energy she had to this show was a reflection of the way she lived her life too.

Team work is synonymous to sacrifice, acceptance, and the ability to see the bigger picture and share the vision to go beyond oneself to move towards the goal is equally important. The success and sustainability of social organizations

depend largely on the extent to which each member of the organization is a team player. While the social entrepreneur may be capable of many things, it is important for them to realise what they need to do and what others can do.

“Aunty, I want to be a part of the program too. How can you leave me out? I am a senior student too” argued Seeta suddenly appearing in class after hearing about the Annual day program planning. “You have missed a lot of classes Seeta and rehearsals have been going on with the rest for two weeks now,” justified the teacher. “No Aunty, I will certainly be regular henceforth and will surely practice. You know I learn fast and I am talented. Please, please, let me join in now.” There were disgruntled sounds from the other girls who thought it was unfair for Seeta to be a part of the program halfway through. The teacher, being kind hearted and non-assertive was soon bulldozed into accepting Seeta to participate in the program. This caused the group to have to share their roles and parts with Seeta. Their

dissatisfaction caused them to turn a cold shoulder towards Seeta, not making it hard for her to learn her parts in a short period of time.

There are different kinds of people in every team. Some are sincere hardworking; some want to do the least but are great crowd pullers; some are passive onlookers; some are over enthusiastic and willing to do all work; some are excellent idea generators and some are connectors. They are all essential to make the team work. The power of team work is experienced the most at the time of action than during planning.

“Why do you want to be ready so early? It’s only 3pm and the program is at 6.30pm!” said Seeta when Sadhana wanted to begin her make-up and dressing. “Someone has to begin so that all can complete their makeup before 5pm... also, if my makeup is done, I have enough time to get my hair done and put on my costume...not to forget my quiet time”. “It’s too early and I want to do it much later...also I don’t understand why

you have to plan everything all the time! Going to go down to the store and get myself a snack now”.

“Priorities, Seeta! Priorities! How many times do I have to tell you to just focus on what needs to be done now? Everyone in class will arrive soon and there will be a lot of commotion and confusion. My mom always told me that it’s important to be ready an hour before and sit quite conserving all energy before the stage opens.” “You do it if you want!!!” shouted Seeta and sprinted out of the auditorium.

Sadhana had a way of planning everything she had to do, prioritising them as she worked. This discipline helped her avoid any possible situations in her daily life. Seeta was the opposite; everyday presented a new crisis and she worked to get things done in the last minute. Both thrived on different notes.

Sadhana began her make-up and being the first one to get it done, the makeup artiste had all the time in the world to do a good job. Slowly girls trickled one by one and began dressing while waiting for their turn in front of the mirror. Fights on who will be next, space in front of the mirror, mothers of the girls comparing notes on life, girls borrowing hair pins and jewellery from each other filled the small green room. Seeta was seen distributing biscuits, chips and chocolates to other girls, oblivious of the time.

By the time it was 5 o’clock, the green room resembled the mess of a marketplace on a busy day. There was just an hour to go. Seeta had just begun to get dressed, realising everyone was almost ready. Her waist belt was not found, the girls had used all of the safety pins, no one wants to help her out and the makeup artist was tired after doing the faces of all the girls in the room over



the last 3 hours... “Oh, Seeta, look at your nose. Why is it red? Oh no! You must’ve accidentally touched your nose with your hand when the red paint was still wet! Hahaha, she looks like a red nose Raindeer... Hey, you can do monkey part in Ramayana song!” jeered the girls, completely ignorant to the tears in Seeta’s eyes. “Don’t pull my hair! Oh, God! You’ve ruined it!” They were actually settling old scores with her. The teacher had to step in and give them a good scolding to get them to sit quietly and not mess up their costumes. “Don’t

keep fighting, just make sure you’re all ready. The program can begin only if everyone is ready and calm. Just sit and meditate for next 15 minutes”.

“Where’s Sadhana? She is nowhere to be seen!” Bindhya commented anxiously. Sadhana sat in the corner behind the stage quietly, meditating for the last 30 minutes. She felt absolutely fresh, ready and in sync with her body, mind and soul. She was completely prepared to go on that stage.

The connect between action and meditation is underrated. They are seen

as opposites, but actually, the deepest and maximum action comes when the body, mind and soul are aligned. One of the best methods of getting the team aligned is to enable them to synergise through meditation. A shared vision, respect for each other’s competency, convergence and acceptance of everyone’s contribution makes the best team.

To be continued....stay connected...

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath

CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INITIATIVE AND MANAGEMENT



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

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

It also offers training and hand holding support to prospective social entrepreneurs and enable them to launch their social initiatives. CSIM operates in Chennai, Coimbatore, Hyderabad and Bangalore.
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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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“Secularism is the oxygen, without which India cannot survive.”

Nawab Mohammed Abdul Ali, Prince of Arcot, studied at Churchpark Presentation Convent and Madras Christian College School. He also received coaching in Arabic from private tutors. He also served as Sheriff of Madras for two separate terms and was interested in public life from the time he was in his teens.

The Hon'ble Prime Minister of India had nominated Nawab Mohammed Abdul Ali as a Jury Member of the National Foundation for Communal Harmony, an organisation established by the Central Government, Ministry of Home Affairs, along with His Excellency the Vice-President of India, the Hon'ble Chief Justice of India, the Chairman of the University Grant Commission (UGC), and the Union Home Secretary.

The Prince is Founder-Secretary General of “Harmony India” a registered association formed in 1990 to promote communal amity and national integration. Mr. N. Ram, Former Editor-in-Chief of The Hindu, is the President while the other 32 members are drawn from different communities. The aim of the organisation is to educate people to live in peace, to hold seminars, processions and meetings towards this end and to extend help and advice during riots.

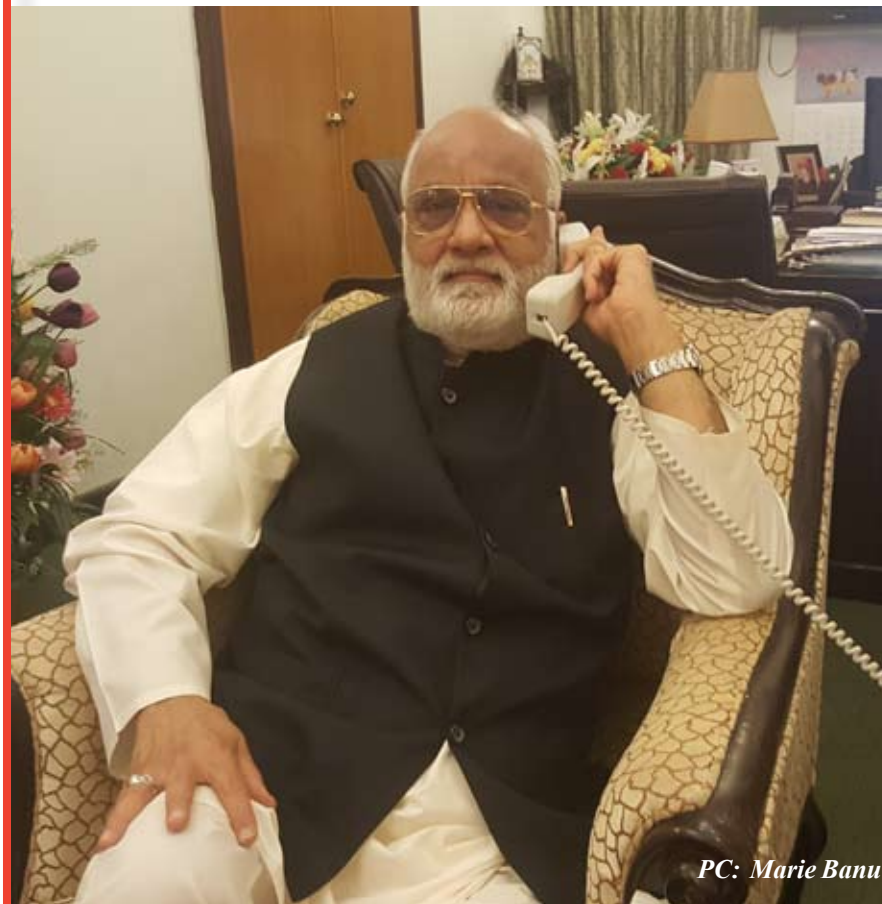
Nawab Mohammed Abdul Ali heads a religious endowment. He also manages the wakf in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. He was the President of All India Muslim Educational Society (AIMES). The Prince is also an accomplished singer and pianist. The Prince has been the recipient of many awards for this social service, including the National Unity Award from His Excellency the Governor of Tamil Nadu on many occasions. He was the recipient of “For the Sake of Honour” award from the Rotary Club.

Nawab Mohammed Abdul Ali, Prince of Arcot, is a patron of music, art and literature and his hobbies are photography, gardening and reading books. He is married to Sayeeda Begum and blessed with two sons, Nawabzada Mohammed Asif Ali and Nawabzada Mohammed Naser Ali and daughters-in-law, Nawabzadi Seema Ahmed and Nawabzadi Aasia Zainab along with several grandchildren.

Your childhood, education and hobbies?

My family's history is perhaps older than the city of Madras. My great ancestors ruled much of South India and were known as the Nawabs of the Carnatic/Arcot. As a testimony to this, there are many landmarks here, the most important being the PWD offices at Marina Beach which was constructed by my great ancestor Nawab Muhammad Ali Wallajah who was the sovereign and independent ruler of this part of the country. Later on, the senate house came there and these grounds were

Nawab Mohammed Abdul Ali shares with Marie Banu the need for Secularism in our country.



PC: Marie Banu

used for firing gun canons to welcome the dignitaries in those days. The University of Madras, MA Chidambaram Stadium, and the State Guest House were all constructed on the land belonging to the Chempauk Palace.

I am proud to say about my great ancestor Nawab Muhammad Ali Wallajah (1749 to 1795) who distinguished himself in the South Indian History. His contribution to religious places besides the Muslim is notable. He gave several lands for Hindu Temples as well as to Christian Missionaries. The garden from which the flowers are grown for the deity in Sri Ranganathan Temple is even today known as Nawab Thottam (Nawab Garden).

The land for the Mylapore Kapaleeswar temple tank was also donated by Nawab Muhammad Ali Wallajah. Likewise, land for Bishop Heber College and St Joseph's College at Trichy were also donated by the Nawab. I am also proud to say that all leading religious heads have visited Amir Mahal. The Chief Imam from the Holy Kaaba Mecca, Saudi Arabia; Arch Bishop of Canterbury; Chief Jethadar from Golden Temple at Amritsar; and His Holiness Jayendra Saraswati of Kanchipuram Mutt have visited our ancestral home Amir

Mahal in Chennai. Swamiji told us that that it was in the first time in the history of Kanchipuram Mutt for over 2000 years that a Swamiji has visited a Muslim house. He said that the reason was because of my ancestors' association and their contribution to the Hindu religion and he wanted to pay a visit as a mark of respect. Even Shri Sunil Acharya from the Jain Community had visited Amir Mahal during my ancestor's time. I keep Amir Mahal open to public on such occasions.

I want to say that India is a secular state with multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-linguistic people. That is its great strength, and it must be preserved at all times. It would therefore not be possible to introduce Uniform Civil Code (UCC). Not only Muslims, but even other communities will be affected. When there are many important things like housing, education, and employment that needs intervention, why create disharmony through UCC? Even the RSS Chief Shri M.S. Golwalkar had clearly stated earlier that UCC will not work in India.

Secularism is the oxygen, without which India cannot survive. Secularism should be preserved whoever comes to power at the Centre or in the States. India is a great country, no doubt, and especially the

Muslims in India are well secured and happier here like any other community. Even during independence, many Muslims have sacrificed their lives. Those Muslims who wanted to go to Pakistan have left, but those who are staying here like to live in India. So, why should anyone ask them to leave the country?

Can you share your thoughts on Communal Harmony in India?

My forefathers have always promoted harmony in our country with their heart, soul, and blood. For instance, the Milad-un-Nabi procession that used to take place in Triplicane, Chennai was stopped by my continuous persuasion and finally there is no Milad-un-Nabi procession taking place anymore.

There is more peace in India when compared to other countries. People from different faiths are living together for centuries. You cannot find this kind of country anywhere else in the world. Even the politicians, whichever party they belong to, must understand the Constitution and what it says about secularism.

About Muslim Women and their status in India?

The status of women in our country, not only Muslim women, is much better comparatively. In Chennai, we have good Colleges for women, especially for Muslim women like SIET and Mohammed Sathak College. When compared to developed countries, India is much behind in education. The whole world is paying full attention towards education. Without education, no country can develop or progress.

Certain obligations, fundamental rights like Hijab for Muslim women, and fasting have been ordained by our Almighty God. It is not necessary for women to cover their full face. They need to cover their head and wear loose dress, not necessarily black burkha. This has been adopted for the good of the people. Even fasting has been prescribed in all religious scriptures. The Holy Quran says: “Your religion is with you; my religion is with me.” So, let us not interfere in each other's religion.

What is the Philanthropy trend in India?

There are several associations and organisations engaged in social service to help the poor and the needy at times. In Church Park convent, the Alumni have recently formed a committee called ‘Maryada’ (meaning respect) under the Presidentship of Mrs Nikhat Suhail, to help the retired teachers of the school. Late Dr. J Jayalalitha, former CM of Tamilnadu was my senior by 4 years and we played sports together. Maryada will also provide medical aid and support for the old teachers in whatever way they can.