

Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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EDITOR: MARIE BANU.J

6

COVER STORY

RISE ABOVE

About Sudha Panchapakesan - the phoenix
who battled Aphasia

Alumni Talk



3

Farmer stands up for Child Rights

Mr. C. Ramu and his interest in farming as well as children development work

Profile



9

Readying Communities for Rights

About Ainthavithan Trust in Kancheepuram that aims to protect women and children from social evils like domestic violence and abuse.

Chit Chat



12

"If you don't try to see a God in a human being; you will not find God anywhere."

An exclusive interview with
Mr. Abraham Moses,
Head, Mindtree Foundation

FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

Love and responsibility - these words are often mistaken. While there can be no responsibility within an outside relationship, it is essential for family and friends. Responsibility is something you can always withdraw yourself from or hand it over to others.

To love or care is not a responsibility, it is to be felt within. Love is undefinable or immeasurable care shared by one person to another- whether parent to child or child to parent or within couples or friends. Responsibility is what you "owe" towards something without expecting a result!

We often hear these phrases: "It is my responsibility to educate my children", "It is my responsibility to take care of my parents, etc. While these were the set of moral values that one has imbibed, of late, the trend seems to change. Children say to their parents and vice-versa: "It is your duty to educate me; it is your duty to take care of me..." Can you see the difference? For some, even having a child or giving birth to a child seems to be a mere responsibility. Is that right? Definitely not!

Educating a child is to be done from the heart and with full interest. Each one of us have a responsibility to bring up our children with ethical values so that he can be a good citizen and a perfect mankind to society. While it is our duty to do so, we also have the responsibility to have someone better like a teacher or a mentor to take care of that responsibility.

Taking care of parents in their old age should be out of love and not a mere responsibility. It is only when we treat our parents well in front of our children, will they realise the responsibility of taking care of us when we grow old. Although this should not be an expectation, it is our duty to take care of our parents as much as it is we take care of our children.

Feeding a child is love and not responsibility. It is only when we love our children, can we be cautious of what food we provide, whether they are nutritious; if it is adequate and leads to a healthy lifestyle. In this, the responsibility comes in when we let our children realise the importance of food, its benefits and eating habits.

When a child is born, parents shower love and care which is not reciprocated when they grow old. In recent time, we learn more about retirement homes, old-age homes or orphanages which has become a convenience factor to send the elders away from their home. How many of these elders would have sent their children away to a hostel? A point to ponder!

Taking ownership and responsibility for your actions is important to maintain a healthy relationship. This reminds us that we have control over what role we play in a relationship. One can always choose to do things with love or responsibility. When there is 'love for the sake of responsibility', then it becomes fake. Instead, if we love responsibly or do our responsibilities with full of love, then it leads to happiness everywhere.

Hope the stories of the changemakers featured in Conversations inspire you to love unconditionally and contribute to society responsibly.

Marie Banu

EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu

SELF-INTIMACY- START THE RELATIONSHIP WITH YOURSELF

Only intimacy with the self
will bring about true healing.

Deepak Chopra

quote fancy

We celebrate Valentine's day this month. The talk is about love and romance and in the process we may be narrowing our view of its relevance in our lives. In today's times, many of us experience being unsafe being ourselves, scared to shine our light, unworthy, hidden, and have a hard time loving ourselves because of the way we feel. Can we choose to look at Intimacy – as a process of connecting and developing close relationship with oneself?

Begin with self

Self-intimacy requires that we see ourselves as we truly know ourselves to be. It is about stepping out of any shadows that keep our true self hidden from the world. One of the barriers to generating intimacy is judgment. Step away for a moment, pause and reflect upon things you are telling yourself.

How can you start experiencing self-intimacy?

1. Identify behavioral patterns that trouble you and leave you powerless. While doing this have allowance- accept yourself the way you are- letting go of right and wrong.
2. Choose what empowers you and stay tuned to it.
3. Embrace solitude- enjoy your own company- do things on your own
4. Practice gratitude- relish parts of you and your life that you are grateful for
5. Honor your feelings and needs
6. Be generous and practice forgiveness

Feel connected

Self-intimacy is the experience of feeling connected to all parts of yourself—the parts you naturally embrace as well as the parts you wish didn't exist. This connection allows you to feel grounded—giving you a center that anchors your experiences.

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.

FARMER STANDS UP FOR CHILD RIGHTS

The most interesting aspect about the social development sector is the participation of individuals from all walks of life. Irrespective of their professional or personal background, there are many individuals who take a stand for vulnerable sections of the society. They have categorically articulated the rights and needs of the needy and have gone greater lengths to ensure that their rights are not compromised. This is not just interesting but indicates a riveting phase in a society's transformation where people act for others, aware of the significance of simple gestures of care.

Mr. C. Ramu's life is not just an example here but an inspiration for youth to prepare themselves for them to be heard. Ramu hails from Oodamalai village in Salem district. Farming is very close to his heart as his parents are farmers and he personally loved farming as it connected him with both nature and market. "The interface is dynamic and transforming. Time will tell us why this needs attention," he adds. A graduate in History, Ramu took to farming out of personal interest and simultaneously engaged with friends in village development activities.

Enrolling in the Nehru Youth Groups that brought all village youth together to participate in rural development exposed him to a wide range of social service activities. "It was overwhelming to see how simple activities redefined the lives of vulnerable populations. This was the period when I also learnt about funding organisations, NGOs and the concept of child rights. It is beguiling to see how the vulnerability of one section of the population lends power to another," shares Ramu.

While working for the Village Reconstruction and Development Project (VRDP) in Salem, he saw the lives of child laborers and their rescue missions. The complete cycle of rescuing child labourers, enrolling them in evening schools or bridge school programs and mainstreaming them made Ramu realise the hard work and determination that was needed to ensure children lived their childhood. "For the poor, children are an extra hand at work who can contribute to family's earnings. They do it out of desperation. What if children effectively utilised alternative opportunities?" he wondered. He began to think beyond the support for groceries and essential household items that parents received through the project.

Having developed a keen interest in children's development, he joined UNICEF as a volunteer and took up different responsibilities in surveying the lives of tribal children in Kalvarayan Hills. High incidence of dropouts, child marriages and child labour drew his attention and Ramu began to observe every factor that determined the current state of affairs. "We now call it cause analysis. While proposing new projects, we also do log frames. Back then, I was a young volunteer with only basic training. My observation skills were my strength and my concern for these children knew no bounds," he continues.

While surveying 25 government residential schools for tribal children, he was appalled by the lack of basic amenities, inadequate toilets and irregular attendance of teachers. "Teachers would not travel this far. They would pay a senior student from the village to manage classes here. Food was also not given properly. The timetable suggested by the Government was not followed at all. Hence, children did not have nutritious food, did not study and did not play. I sent a detailed



report to UNICEF and NCPCR (National Commission for Protection of Child Rights)," says Ramu who was then dumbstruck by the level of apathy. "Why were these children in school at all? I had to pull myself together to plan the next steps," he adds.

With pressure mounting from the District Collector, things began to change for the better. Right to Education (RTE) compliance became a norm and children started having nutritious meals every day. Still, there were gaps and Ramu knew that he needed more volunteers who were genuinely interested in children's welfare.

Sustainable impact and a long term change also calls for periodic monitoring. In order to ensure this, Ramu oriented a group of young volunteers and convinced them about why it was important to stay vigil about development programs. He planned visits to chat and play with the children and learn about the status in the residential schools. "Often times children may not open up due to fear of being reprimanded, hence games and casual conversations helped. I would seek help in reading a news item to understand their reading skills. I recorded all this to gather evidence and where inadequacies were apparent, I would go straight to the



Head Master," says Ramu. Using petitions and press conferences consistently, he witnessed the circumstances to improve.

Ramu's association with the people, both as a farmer and as a child rights activist, drew him to organise different programs and prepare communities to oversee programs that were implemented for them. He wanted to see people taking ownership on activities that were planned for their welfare. Soon, Ramu founded his Power Trust in Salem in 2015 to better strategise his programs. Referred by a close friend, he enrolled in CSIM's Social Entrepreneurship training programme. "I went to CSIM to learn new skills. I realized that I had not utilised my resources to the full potential. Mobilising local resources became my priority and I also learnt the art of mapping my community's strengths," he says.

With increased awareness, Ramu also worked out strategies to ensure a sustained funding for the Trust. He is now working to mobilise tribal farmers' collectives to sell their produce directly without intermediaries. "This idea came to me during an interaction with CSIM team. The very nature of classes allows you to think in different ways. I could sense the openness in my thoughts," he recalls. After completing his course at CSIM, Ramu also began to focus on women farmers and formed farmer groups in 12 villages. The Trust trained them in collecting forest produce and will soon be engaging women in processing it.

Amidst all these developments, Ramu continues to visit the residential schools and undertakes surveys without fail. "It is an uphill task for me, but the words from a child several years ago keep echoing in my head. He said that he got three meals because of my survey and that teachers taught well and showed care. He also requested me not to stop my surveys. This responsibility will always be my first priority," he says.

—Shanmuga Priya.T



GoCoop: A Marketplace for India's Magnificent Weaves & Crafts

The treasures of traditional Indian textile crafts thrive in tiny villages and small towns across the length and breadth of the country. Using skills handed down generations, men and women in the hundreds of artisanal clusters that dot the rural landscape, weave magnificent varieties of cloth in silk, cotton and blended yarns, bringing to life patterns and motifs unique to their region. These include some of the most sought-after weaves of handloom lovers and craft connoisseurs – the Sambalpuri Ikat with intricate traditional shankha, chakra, phula motifs of Orissa, the fine Jamdani cottons with inlaid patterns from Samudragarh and Phulia in West Bengal, the fascinating but complex double Ikat Telia Rumal from the Nalgonda district of Telangana, the light and elegant Maheshwari silk cottons of Royal heritage from the

banks of the Narmada, the rich tapestry of silk and gold from Kanchipuram and Benaras and many more.

Conventionally, the beautiful creations leave the weavers' deft hands in looms far away to pass through the hands of traders and middle-men, before reaching the shelves of retail stores in urban markets and into the hands of buyers. The long supply chains and the bargaining muscle of large retailers have, for years, resulted in poor revenues for textile weaver cooperatives and very low incomes for artisans and ancillary workers, even when the end-consumer paid a high price for the products in local and international markets. While handloom weaving and handicrafts are the second-largest livelihood occupations in rural India (after farming) connecting to the market, selling at a fair price and generating sustainable earnings have remained a

huge challenge for the artisanal community.

Technology to address value-chain distortions

It is this distortion in the value chain that GoCoop's Founder, CEO and Managing Director, Siva Devireddy (former Director of Accenture's India Innovation Centre) set out to address by setting up GoCoop Solutions and Services Private Ltd. - a social enterprise headquartered in Bangalore. "In 2011, when we founded GoCoop, our vision was simple – we believed that technology can drive social change" says Devireddy. GoCoop's mission is to enhance artisanal livelihoods through an online marketplace created for promoting the sale of handmade, sustainable and natural products to consumers in India and overseas.

The marketplace - GoCoop.com - went live in August, 2014 and has since grown from strength-to-strength, onboarding weaver cooperatives, master craftsmen and NGOs from craft clusters across India, and drawing craft-loving customers to its wide range of traditional textiles and other merchandise. The technology-driven initiative has eliminated middle-men and is helping lower the cost and improve efficiency of market access for artisans. Not surprisingly, GoCoop was the recipient of the First National Award for Textiles Marketing (eCommerce), given by the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India in the year 2016.

The scalable model has attracted seed funding support from the likes of Unitus – a leading venture fund in India and Indian Angel Network, and Series A Funding from Infosys Co-Founder Kris Gopalakrishnan, among others.



Onboarding and training artisans

GoCoop works to bring artisanal cooperatives, master craftsmen and craft enterprises online and merchandizes their products on its platform. Initial onboarding efforts are focused on meeting artisans and cooperatives in clusters and creating awareness related to online business and its pre-requisites like having a bank account, ability to keep stock for a period of time, maintaining product quality, processing orders efficiently etc.

GoCoop has designed cluster development programs to digitally enable rural producers and artisan cooperatives. Artisans are trained in financial tools, digital communication and in conducting business digitally via e-commerce platforms. Hands-on training is provided on downloading apps & tools and explaining their uses, e-mail communication, using smartphones for product photography and uploading files and images.

The story of tech-driven change

Artisans from over 70 clusters, 350 weaver cooperatives and master weavers, including National and State Government award winners, from across 22 states now sell indigenous crafts on GoCoop to consumers in India and in 20 other countries. GoCoop initially relied on State Handloom and Handicraft departments and other social organisations to identify well-run cooperatives to onboard onto the platform. Some of the leading sellers on its platform include Boyanika Odisha state Handloom weavers Cooperative Society representing all the primary weaver cooperatives of the Odisha state, SERIFED Odisha



Cooperative Tussar Silk Federation which represents over 160 Orissa Silk Weavers Societies; Loom World that sells products produced by weaver societies from places like Paramakudi and Kancheepuram in Tamil Nadu (under the Department of Handlooms and Textiles, Government of Tamil Nadu); Hansa Handlooms that represents 80 weavers and 15 ancillary workers who create exquisite Maheshwari sarees from Madhya Pradesh.

Apart from cooperatives, not-for-

profit organizations working to enhance craft-based livelihoods also sell on the GoCoop Platform. For example, RangSutra, a company owned by over 2,000 artisans in villages and small towns across India — predominantly Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Kashmir & Manipur, sells products like handmade cushion covers and woollen jackets on the platform.

“By selling on the GoCoop platform, the artisan gets visibility and recognition as the maker of the product” says Devireddy.

Offline Initiatives

Recognizing that a large number of buyers of textiles and crafts still prefer the offline buying experience, GoCoop also conducts handloom exhibitions across major cities under the ‘Go Swadeshi’ brand. These events bring together weaver artisans from all over India under one roof, giving customers an opportunity to interact and buy directly from them.

Additionally, GoCoop also launched an artisanal fashion brand called ‘the good loom’, as another initiative to build a premium market for artisanal products. A sustainable line of menswear and sarees was showcased at the Lakme Fashion Week in the year 2018, including ilkal Sarees, woven by traditional weavers from the Bagalkot District of Karnataka.

The pandemic – challenges and opportunities

During the pandemic, cooperatives, master craftsmen and small weavers suffered severely as sales dropped even during the usually busy festival seasons, inventory piled up, working capital was choked and production came to a standstill. GoCoop took many initiatives to ease the pain for artisans, including enabling wholesale buying online to help them offload unsold inventory. This helped retailers, designers, boutiques and home entrepreneurs source handwoven sarees, fabrics and more directly from the producers after registering with GoCoop.

During this period, GoCoop conducted webinars to train artisans in e-commerce and also organized online events to promote crafts. The efforts paid off well – the period saw an increased interest in online sales resulting in new master weavers, micro craft entrepreneurs and even leading craft organizations joining the platform. Craft Entrepreneurs Rajib and Ranjana from Phulia, West Bengal, and Kaluram Jaipal from Rajasthan engaged in the Shibori craft, for example, were onboarded during the lockdown and were able to generate sizeable sales month-on-month on the platform.

Going forward, Devireddy feels that making strategic long-term investment in developing craft clusters & making artisans resilient by empowering them with the right training and exposure are of utmost importance. Weavers & artisans will then learn to craft their own futures, as entrepreneurs.

GoCoop has demonstrated the power and potential of technology in uplifting lives and livelihoods, preserving tradition and driving conscious consumption – and the Indian rural artisan stands tall and empowered, at the centre of all its efforts!

Click here to know more:

<https://gocoop.com/>

<http://unituscapital.com/>

Usha Ravi

RISE ABOVE

"It is only in the face of adversity that great men and women rise up to their highest standards and ability."

When Sudha Panchapakesan had a stroke in 2014, her vitals were surprisingly normal. "As soon as we got into the ambulance, the medical staff told me her vitals were all normal and so I was a little relieved," her husband Jayendra said in an interview to a news website.

It was only after the hospital began running tests, a 100 percent clot was detected in her carotid artery (blood vessel that supplies blood to the brain). Soon after doctors decided it was dangerous to dissolve the clot, they planned on performing a surgery to relieve excess pressure on the brain.

The tragedy was that the stroke ended up affecting Sudha's speech centre in the left brain creating a condition called Aphasia that affects speech, reading and writing.

For months, Sudha did not know she had the illness. "I didn't know I had aphasia," she indicates in an interview with us, "I was lying in bed and couldn't follow what people around me were saying." She adds: "I couldn't speak either. I wasn't scared but I kept thinking what would happen next."

Four months later, in April 2015, Sudha found herself being wheeled into a rehab centre in Chicago for treatment. "It was not my decision," she says, "I did not understand why I was going there. Jayendra made the decision and took me there."

For years, Sudha was Head of Human Resources at Qube Cinema Technology, which was incidentally co-founded by Jayendra. Overnight, she found herself unable to speak. While her consulting neurologists gave her medication to ensure the stroke would not reoccur, and physiotherapists helped her motor functions recover to some extent, getting her speech back on track was proving to be a difficult task. This was largely because awareness about aphasia was lacking in India.

However, her stay at Chicago helped. Sudha realized there that she still had the words in her brain, but struggled to communicate them verbally. "In Shirley Ryan Ability Lab, I understood all the words were still in my brain and my memory," she recalls, "I only lost the neural networks to access those words. However, they (Shirley Ryan Ability Lab) had innovative and interesting ways to help my brain adapt and slowly get my language back bit by bit."

While all of this was taking place, back in India, a large majority of the population continued to be in the dark about aphasia or what it was all about. Some data indicates that between 334 and 424 people in a sample size of 1 lakh suffer strokes, with 25 percent of this group developing aphasia. While methods like physiotherapy and speech therapy are often adhered to, India still lags behind in terms of information and awareness.

A little extra effort was required if Sudha was going to get back to becoming close to normal. "My physiotherapist Sangeetha worked hard and intensively with me to make me walk quickly," she

recalls, "I learnt to brush my teeth, eat and write with my left hand." However, getting her right hand to work was proving to be tough for Sudha. "After many years, I could eat with my right hand but it is very tough," she adds, "The fine movements of my fingers are still not possible and I continue to undergo therapy for my hands and legs, every day."

Jayendra and his friends spent a lot of time in researching the best resources across the globe that can help in Sudha's rehabilitation. On seeing her progress, Jayendra felt that every aphasia patient in India should benefit from such treatments that are available. This led him to organise a workshop on Aphasia Therapy for 47 speech pathologists across India. The speakers were: Ms. Ann K. Oehring, a consultant with the Centre for Aphasia Research and Treatment at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago and the Director of Chicago Speech and Language services, Chicago; and Dr. Leora R. Cherney, a senior research scientist at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, Illinois and Professor of both Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation and Communication Sciences & Disorders at Northwestern University.

The programme was hosted by Indian Council of Medical Research, Sri Ramachandra University and Bhoomika Trust in Chennai with an objective of not to just share the knowledge but inspire more practitioners to take up adult speech therapy. Ligi Santosh, one of the therapists trained in the workshop continues to work with Sudha on her speech therapy for the English language. Ramya Dilip works with Sudha for speech therapy in Tamil language.

The workshop covered the traditional as well as new approaches to the management of aphasia. A wide range of treatments were described in depth, including their theoretical underpinnings, the current evidence supporting their efficacy, and detailed administration procedures. Further, video samples illustrating their application were also provided to the participants.

It was only inevitable that things didn't quite pan out for Sudha at work. "I couldn't do the job after the stroke and aphasia," she says, "Even though I went to the office every day and my colleagues supported me a great deal, I couldn't fulfil my role. My head was brimming with ideas but I didn't have the words to communicate them."

It is only in the face of adversity that great men and women rise up to their highest standards and ability. When COVID-19 struck in 2020, Sudha chanced upon marketing a game-changing idea - a technology that could synthesize pure drinking-water from air.

"I realized I had to do something useful during COVID," she says, "When I chanced upon this idea I was excited; I thought Chennai needed it and it will help people." In a nutshell, that's how Sudha's initiative to market 'Nature Source' along with her



friend and partner Narmada came to be. "We market systems that make pure drinking water from air," she explains, "From 40 litres to 1,000 litres per day, the technology comes in six different models."

Sudha and Jayendra have also been actively advocating for better awareness about Aphasia, even going so far as to conduct seminars that help explain what the illness is all about. This has proven to be the need of the hour in a country that hasn't quite grasped the gravity of the problem. In taking a challenge and turning it into an opportunity and an avenue for overhaul, both Jayendra and Sudha have really proven to be change-makers and agents of revolution.

Sudha herself has stood out, over the years, as a beacon of strength, power and resilience simply in the manner she has taken her illness and made something out of it in the attempt to spread awareness and prove that there is a way around everything, irrespective of how dire the situation may be. She and Jayendra continue to be an example of doing the right thing and rising above challenges to be the best version of themselves.

THE ESG WAY - INVESTMENT DECISION

Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) is new term for many of us in social development or any kind of development space, mostly we talked about sustainability of finance and operations to make first level assessment of any business. Responsible finance was the term coined by large international development organization in context of financing various financial and non-financial institutions working with/for the poor segment of population.

Companies boast about their financial sustainability and NGOs boasted about their social or development sustainability, issues came up when financial institutions working with poor tried to tell about their impact and sustainability. As, the strategic decision involved here is to clearly define the kind of impact any organisation want to create through its financial services, this was the start of Social Performance Management (SPM), Social Return on Investment (SROI) and Social Accounting Standards. Civil society organizations, completely dependent upon donations need to showcase their social impact and associated value to get more and more for their donors, while profit making companies working for social cause need to show their financial and operational sustainability reports to their investors and stakeholders as a part of compliance or to attract more funds.

Governments and large corporates have accepted that corporate social responsibility is one way to address these issues. We got a platform where profit making and commercial companies can show case their social development work to all their stakeholders including investors. Idea behind doing such work and reporting to public and board solved two purposes, one is to keep intact the overall value of the organization and also to remain socially acceptable organization. Policy makers and environment advocates saw growth of these companies under the critical lens of cost of doing their business or running their enterprises (especially the ones involved in manufacturing and value addition of goods), which directly or indirectly de-stabilises the overall environment and changes the local demography.

ESG was introduced just in time when large enterprises were looking into their social development projects and tried to leverage their impactful work for large scale funding. This was the time when lot of social enterprises were introduced and global efforts were made to transit from Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Sustainability became the focal point of all development ideas; with social, economical and environmental sustainability were selected as core of strategies. Few more round of deliberate efforts brought in Governance into this core group, that all crystallised today's ESG definition. Still it is work-in-progress.

ESG Investing has grown rapidly over the past decade, as per some industry standards it exceeded USD 17.5 trillion. These projects were part of professionally managed ESG focused portfolios around the globe. Similar growth was seen in ESG-related traded investment products that exceeded USD 1 trillion across various financial markets around the globe. The growth in sector shows growing interest of investors in ESG factors; which includes assessment of risks and opportunities effecting long-term performance of companies and policy makers. Due to various reasons related to demography, political, financial and legal regulations. Globally ESG have definition level difference, while definitions differ regarding ESG risks, indicators, sub-indicators, weightage and probability; but most of the developed countries, institutions and think tanks have realized its importance and future scope. In general terms, ESG investing refers to an approach that seeks to integrate environmental, social and governance factors into asset allocation and risk decisions. All this is done to achieve sustainability and access long-term financial gains. It is always important to see the extent to which the ESG



approach incorporates long terms financial, environmental and social risks and returns and risks.

Recent academic and non-academic researches suggest number of benefits and long-term sustainability strategies of using ESG at the core of development (financial and social) agenda. Some of the factors, why ESG is getting considerable attention are:

- Under few conditions, ESG investing can help in improving risk management of the whole entity. It is also seen that the financial returns are comparable to traditional way of doing businesses, so why not comply with globally accepted standards for doing business in good spirit.
- People on the planet are now better aware about the risks associated with climate change, responsible business conduct, diversity at workplace and bringing in social values to influence investors, consumers and other stakeholders.
- Corporates and economies are now choosing a long term strategy over quick fix solution for sustainable development, where equitable importance is given to internal and external factors including environment, social and governance perspectives.
- There are investors and philanthropist who seek to increase sustainability in long-term, they give preference to investments where societal values and benefits have better perspective to prosper and engage the local community.

Other than these reasons other evidences prove that

the sustainability of finance should incorporate external factors to maximize social, environmental and financial returns. ESG is now point of discussion for number of public sector, including the central banks, where institutions are supporting transition of traditional financial systems toward "greener", low-carbon and equitable economies. Central banks in developed and developing economies have shown their commitment to incorporate ESG assessments and investment qualification into their management and operational systems.

Moving forward and become future ready finance industry is developing new products and services related to ESG ratings, indices, and funds. New companies are growing fast to capture the market looking for ESG assessments, indexes, equity and fixed income funds and ETFs. Investors are allowed to engage with ESG investment through low-risk products and models like money market funds, passive smart beta ETFs, they are also allowed to take suitable positions through hedge funds. There are number of products available to suit different kind of investors, like one looking for a low-carbon economy can put their funds in green transition and renewables funds. Financial markets are now agile, transparent and customer-oriented to capture upcoming clients for their new innovative products.

Dr. Agyeya Trippathi

READYING COMMUNITIES FOR RIGHTS



Every organisation has its own unique style of comprehending a situation and enabling responses from its stakeholders. Often times focus is either on a target group or a community, but the story of Ainthavithan Trust's is that of smooth transition from its key stakeholders (women and children) to that of the community itself. "It took time for us to play out that transition, but it also helped revive focus on our target groups from a contemporary-community perspective. We began to break down every issue within the factors that defined community's welfare. Although it may sound subjective, it ensures that the idea of rights becomes much closer than earlier," explains Mr Mahendran, Co-Founder of Ainthavithan Trust, based in Kancheepuram.

Established in 2016, Ainthavithan Trust is led by Ms Thavamary, wife of Mr. Mahendran, whose vision was to protect women and children from social evils like domestic violence and abuse. Counselling was the first step to help women see through what was happening to them. As women began relating themselves to larger thoughts on rights, respect and the impact their situations had on children, they opened up. "Large number of calls during the pandemic (500 cases registered so far) was alarming and our extended

networks helped to reach out to women in need. These calls also indicated women's readiness to act for themselves and this further motivated our Trust to strategically raise our voices against child abuse within the community," he adds.

Coming to talk about education and employment of transgender people, Mahendran laments that they give in easily to their traditional way of lives and find it difficult and unrewarding to choose education, employment and other ideas that may redefine their identities and potential. More than the concept of rights, he feels that, they do not relate to community integration. "This is due to the many decades of ostracisation and humiliation they have faced and they cannot accept the change easily. It is best to go slow. So far, we have trained 10 transgenders in using computers and placed them in jobs. They have adapted really well," he says.

Mahendran is also a resource person at the Tamil Nadu State Institute of Rural Development and Village Poverty Reduction Committee. Having trained many government officials from all tiers on their roles and challenges in reaching out to rural population, he finds that a lot of learning is required before they engage in teaching them anything new. "The word rural and agriculture are closely related. Yet, there is so much

more than agriculture that must be thought of. My attempt is to help them explore their work communities from a wider perspective," he says. As members of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Atrocities Committee, Mahendran and Thavamary have been a part of many cases where their first task has been to remove the thought of relating people's responses to their social identities. "Not only officials, even people pre-judge about officials' reactions. So the unlearning is a two-fold process and the Trust's activities are a sincere attempt in bringing community and officials on the same page," he explains.

A new project to revive a local lake and make way for inland hybernation was very promising in many ways but the Trust's team had to shelve it as new regulations called for foreign funds to be routed through the Central Government. This did not deter Mahendran's efforts as his Trust is consistently engaged in improving the lives of the community. They next focussed on the model village project covering Ayakulathur, Kilai and KN Kandigai in Sri Perumbudur taluk that built a new cycle of waste management systems. 30 garbage vans were acquired and a shed was also built to segregate and manage the waste. Recycling and compost making are managed by

women thereby ensuring them a steady income.

Be it livelihood or empowerment, whatever the focus is, enabling rural women to earn a steady income is always welcome in the community. In collaboration with another organisation, Ainthavithan Trust is embarking on a new project to train women in making different products using palm leaves to cash in the high demand for such products in European Countries.

Alongside, new partnerships have also created room for providing world class, professional coaching in different sports to underprivileged children. "Our children are capable and just because they live in villages their talents must not go unnoticed. We are only trying to advocate talent search without any spatial biases," insists Mahendran. With these two projects lined up to start soon, the team continues to engage with the communities in different ways. From simple interactions to structured discussions, such engagements have helped the Trust to work on right priorities. It is this participatory approach and an integrated practice that has helped the Trust build a perspective of rights within the communities. As it has risen from their understanding, the idea of rights is even more closer to them and relatable.

Shanmuga Priya.T

WOES TO WOWS THE DISCOVERY OF THE PEARL

“How could you reach the pearl by only looking at the sea? If you seek the pearl, be a diver.” – Rumi

Myna was sitting by the window gazing at the open lands next to her house. A beautiful summer afternoon, silence filled the room and everything was at standstill. She felt that she had stopped breathing for a moment. “Oh, this pandemic and why am I to go through this situation? What is going to happen? Will we all die from this corona?” The young 15-year-old mind felt the fear chill down her spine. Quickly, from boredom to frustration to anger, a typical teen emotional turmoil happened confusing her to choose which emotion to stay with.

Paradoxically, she heard the mild sound of snoring come from the room opposite to hers. The fast-paced sound of the fan running filled the silence of her room. “Oh, Thatha (meaning Grandfather)! How can he sleep in the afternoon so peacefully while the entire world is in tension? He snores so loud which is annoying,” she mumbled. Thatha had occupied her play cum study room with his medical bed and diaper packets which angered her even more. Her forehead creased when she wondered why he had to come to stay with her family.

Thatha was her paternal uncle who resided in a Care Centre. His wife had died early and he lived all by himself. Myna was 13 years old when she first stepped into an Indian school. Her father Srini had been working in the US for over 15 years before he had decided to return to India and start his own business. She used to visit Thatha once in 6 months. When he posed a few questions about her school and studies, she would run to the garden that surrounded the elder’s home.

As Thatha had no children of his own, he considered Myna’s father Srini ‘as a son’. The staff at the Care Centre became sparse during COVID lockdown and inmates who needed extra care were asked to return to their families and return when the situation improved. As Srini was the youngest of four siblings who lived in the same city, he decided to take care of him in his home for a few months, much to the displeasure of his wife Vasu.

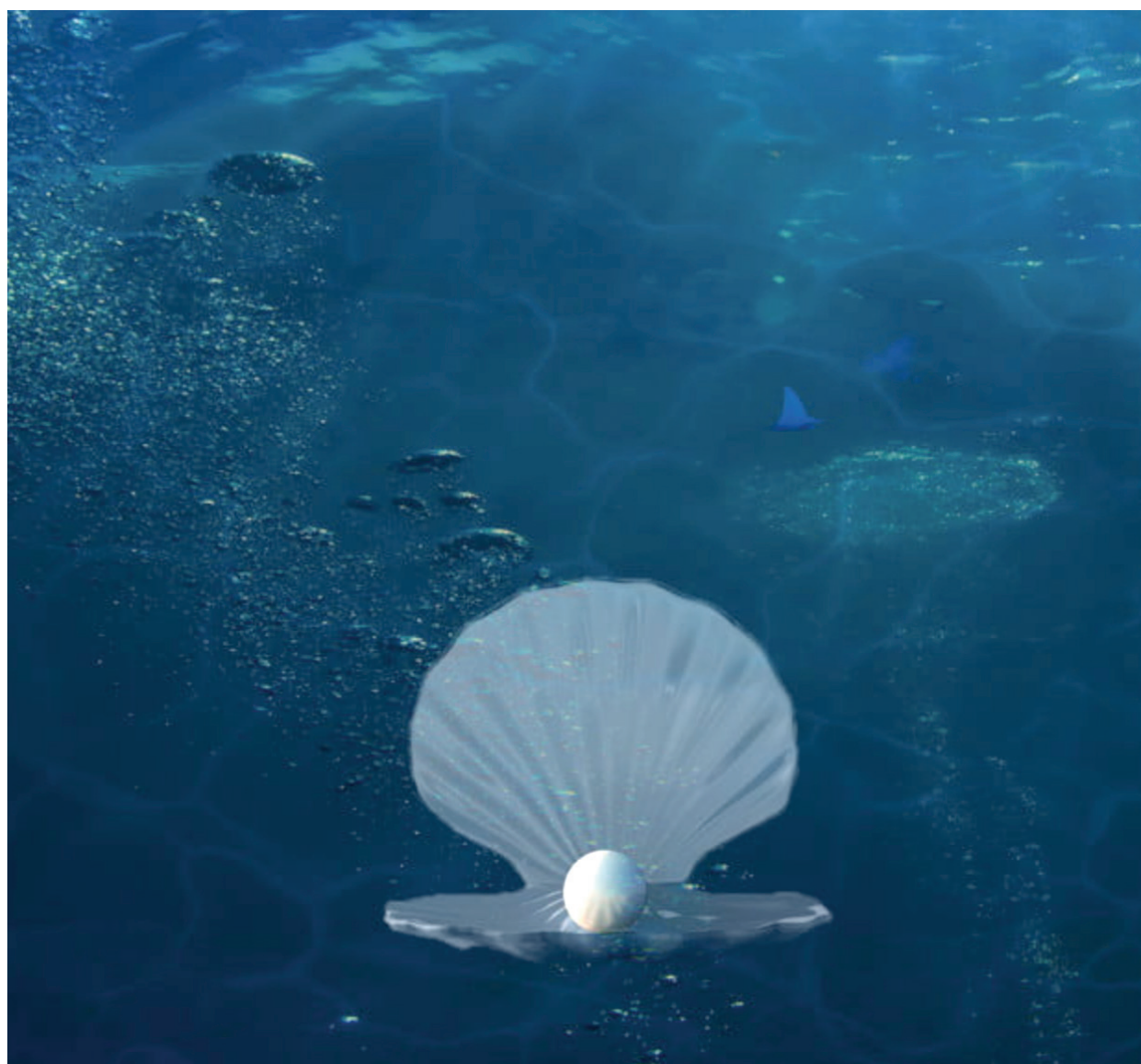
Myna went back to her science book that was in front of her. A few minutes later Myna could hear Thatha’s feeble voice saying “Sriniiii... Vasuuuu”. Both Srini and Vasu, her parents, were working from home and were attending conference calls sitting in different rooms with ears plugged and doors closed. She pretended not to have heard Thatha and went back to her science project that lay on her table. In the next three minutes or so, she heard Thatha saying, “Can you come here Srini, I have slipped from my bed! I need help!”

This irked Myna and did not react. “Why do old people do something or the other in the afternoon that bother others instead of just lying down and sleeping?” she wondered. Vasu had shared with her woes of having to take care of Thatha as other family members did not offer to take any responsibility on the pretext of the pandemic. She had blamed Srini’s soft nature and inability to say ‘No’ to his siblings and could she understand his love and respect for Thatha.

Myna heard Thatha calling Sriniiii, Vasuuu... and with irritation went and pushed the half-open door of Thatha’s room. Thatha was in an awkward helpless state having slipped down from his pillow while trying to get up.

“What happened Thatha?”

“Ah! Myna dear, please can you help me sit? I am unable to.” Reluctantly Myna went near him, with some effort put her hand beneath his shoulder and lifted him



up so he can take the grip of her hand and sit.

After he had settled on the chair opposite his bed Myna asked, “Why were you getting up Thatha? What do you need?”

Thatha gave a toothless smile and said, “I remembered an anecdote from my work days and I wanted to make a note of it for the book I am writing.”

Myna’s eyebrows narrowed into a question mark while she asked, “A book? You are writing a book? What is it about?”

There was a fleeting glint of happiness in Thatha’s eyes. He smiled and hesitantly said, “You know I worked as a Chief Engineer and then as a CEO of most critical Government projects. I have toured across India and have lived in deep forests and valleys of India along with a large team who worked with me. Those 40 years of my life were filled with lessons useful for leadership and life. I have been writing them down for the past two years. My memory is gradually failing and before I begin to forget, I want to preserve those golden experiences.” With a distant look, he added, “It will be useful for someone someday.”

Looking at the frail shrinking body and stubble face, somehow the image of a CEO in Thatha did not occur to

her. With a hint of doubt, she asked, “So, you were in a top position and you are writing your experiences.” Grabbing the opportunity to talk in an otherwise silent life, Thatha settled himself comfortably on the bed stretching his legs, and said, “Oh, I did my IIT- IIM degree and also a master in English literature much after that. I was initially alone and would love to read books. My ways of expression were poems and little notes, a few of which were also published. I met your Grandma in the Central Library which I often visited, and our romance started with book discussions,” he added with a chuckle. “Can you open the suitcase which has my books? Bring them here.” Struck dumb with astonishment and surprise, Myna got up and took the books from the suitcase. As a matter of fact, Thatha said, “You can read them and give them back.”

Still awed by this new information Myna walked back to her room with his books. Boom! A new person suddenly appeared in front of Myna’s eyes. Gradually the old man with the smell of medicine got replaced with this fascinating accomplished man in her mind. In an hour she just peeped in and asked, “I am making coffee for myself. Can I get you some, Thatha?” The small smile that touched his face and a quick nod began

weaving their hearts together.

The next 15 days, Myna dived deep into her Thatha's books. She loved his diction, expression, depth, and perspectives. She was amazed at the value he had given to women and their contributions in his articles. Each writing of his was crisp and she loved the leader learnings' he had captured with rich anecdotes that explained all dimensions of the decisions he had taken. She knew she held one of the rare treasures in her hand when she read each of the chapters.

She researched at Google and got all that she needed to know about Thatha's illustrious career. As she did not want her parents to give her a lecture on tenth-grade exams and studies, she did not talk about her discovery. Every afternoon she would spend an hour talking to Thatha about his life experiences, stories of the tribes he had met, and his college life. He gave her the transcripts he was writing. Myna took it upon herself to clean his room, dispose the diapers and help him to the bathroom for his bath while smuggling a few bits of snacks in the afternoon for him to munch.

A strong friendship, mutual respect, love, and affection blossomed. The boredom, thoughts about dying, frustration and anger was replaced with purpose, learning, joy of discovering and exploring. There were times Vasu noticed the special smile on Myna's face when she spoke about Thatha. Myna used that opportunity to gradually infuse the reality of Thatha's life and achievements into her mind.

A year passed by and none had the thought of sending Thatha back to the Care Centre. Vasu had noticed the change in Myna's moods and reduced cribs. The Pandemic was in its second wave and lockdowns continued with people accepting the new way of life.

One morning, Thatha was woken up with fragrance in his room and loud singing of "Happy birthday to you, Happy birthday Thatha".

Myna, Srini, and Vasu had brought a cake and a lovely bouquet of rose flowers very similar to that of what Thatha's wife would gift him every year.

With teary eyes and a choked voice, Thatha managed to mumble, "Oh, what a surprise! Thank you!". Myna held his hand, cut the cake, and fed him a piece planting a kiss on his

cheek. Srini held out his hand that held a gift wrapped in gold coloured paper. Thatha gratefully accepted the gift and pulled the ribbon open. Lo! It was a book of his dreams! His anecdotes accompanied with carefully drawn pencil drawings! He was shaking with surprise, shock, and an inner joy bursting from inside. He turned the book to see one of the loveliest selfies Myna had captured while they were drinking coffee sitting beside the window. Thatha hugged Myna.

Myna had spent several nights typing, editing, and structuring the writings to give it a shape, pushing her father to meet with printers and get the book published before his birthday. There stood one large family with deep feelings of satisfaction, happiness, and fulfilment in their hearts!



Dr. Kalpana Sampath



Centre for Social Initiative and Management

Contact Persons:

Centre 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

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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 is an overseas chapter of Social Audit Network, UK covering India and Middle East.)

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“If you don’t try to see a God in a human being; you will not find God anywhere.”

Abraham Moses shares with Marie Banu about Mindtree Foundation

Abraham Moses is the Head of Mindtree Foundation and drives CSR activities across the organization. He was awarded the Forbes “Good Samaritan” Philanthropy award in the year 2012, for his combined efforts in looking after administration and the personal welfare of Mindtree Minds.

Moses was born in a middle class Christian family. He comes with an experience of over 35 years in the IT industry, started off with Wipro, and then Mindtree since its inception.

In an exclusive interview, Abraham Moses shares with Marie Banu about Mindtree and its CSR Programmes.

Tell us about your family and childhood?

My father was in the army fought for the Second World War. I grew up with 7 siblings, me being the fourth. As part of army life, we were allotted a 12-bedroom bungalow in Bengaluru, we led a luxurious life. There was a setback in the family when my father met with an accident. We had to relocate to a smaller home with just one room and a kitchen. We were all packed like a matchbox literally eating just one good meal a day.

It was at this point in time we realised who true friends and relatives were. I had to discontinue my education engage in daily wage labour to support the family. I started with earning three rupees a day.

What was your inspiration to engage in charitable activities?

There are millions of angels or good Samaritans who helped me become who I am today.

When I have received so much of goodwill, it is my responsibility to give back. That is what life is all about! There is always something ‘extra’ in our life. What we need is basic food to eat and a place to stay. Everything else is an additional blessing which we should not keep it for ourselves; instead share it with others.

My mother used to ask us during dinner time to share one good deed we had done during the day. Only then, we would be served food. Many times, I used to say that I have not done anything wrong, which is in itself a good deed. She would say that it is important for us to make a difference in a person’s life and we should learn to identify small ways of making this possible.

I am a very spiritual oriented person and all religions teach giving, loving and sharing. If you don’t try to see a God

in a human being; you will not find God anywhere. If you want to truly worship God, you should first respect a human being. The Bible says that we should love and respect others the way we would like to be loved and respected. This is what I follow!

During my early days in Wipro, I worked with great leaders like Mr. Subroto Bagchi. One day, during coffee time, we had a casual conversation about what we can do for our society. We formed a Technology for Social Action (TSA) group and volunteered in orphanages/ children’s Home on every second Saturday’s. We also took our friends and families and spent time with the inmates.

About your early days in Mindtree Foundation?

Initially, I engaged in charity work without anyone knowing about it. In 2010, when the Chairman of Mindtree Mr. Ashok Soota asked me to head Mindtree Foundation, I put my foot down and refused the offer as I never wanted to want to earn my livelihood by doing social work. However, the management convinced me to accept the position as my role would be more in identifying the right projects for intervention and addressing the gaps in the social sector.

I was designated as General Manager, Good Samaritan – the first corporate employee to have such a designation though.

In 2012, I received a call from Forbes mentioning about the Good Samaritan award and that I was selected to receive the first award among ten others. Mr. Ratan Tata, Mr. Azim Premji, Ms. Kiran Mazumdar were some of the other distinguished recipients.

Can you tell us about Mindtree’s rural education programme?

The world is full of needs and we can’t cater to all of them. There are a lot of gaps; CSR is all about filling this gap. Mindtree focuses primarily on rural education. We identify government schools and provide support to match it to the quality of education provided in a primary school. We create an atmosphere for a child to love to attend school. In certain schools, there was a need for toilets which was also provided.

We designed a rewards and award system where children were provided a badge of metal stars (like that of Army officers) for their academic performance, regularity, discipline, etc. We worked in one Taluk for ten years and ensured that there were zero drop-outs. At first, we started with a primary school, and later reached to thousands of children studying in 176 schools.

We worked with SPASTIC society of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka to identify children with Autism and tied up with organisations like Agastya International to provide simplified science experiments for children.

About Mindtree’s project to support medical education?

Dr. Devi Prasad Shetty, Chairman of Narayana Health approached Mindtree and expressed that there was a shortage of doctors in our country. We proposed to allocate a fund for medical education and identified about 50 children who were interested to pursue medicine while they were in class eight. Their entire education expense was sponsored by Mindtree.

Thangam, a daughter of a daily wage learner who lives in a hut in Dharmapuri district has cracked NEET examination and is now pursuing her degree in medicine. The others are studying physiotherapy or nursing or para medical courses.

How does Mindtree Foundation coordinate the programmes on ground?

Mindtree started in 1999 and much before they worked on a business plan, they focused on making a difference in the society.

This was the thought process and it is in our DNA. CSRACT was not new for us as we were already spending 2 percent of our profits for social activities. In fact, we were also part of the deliberations for CSRACT formulation in 2013.

Our team spends 80% of their time in the field. Our partners say that we are different from other donor organisations as we don’t just give funds, but also guide them in the implementation process. Good things happen with an emotional connect. We can also make wrong decisions at times. At times, it was getting difficult for us to identify genuine beneficiaries.

Your thoughts about the youth of today?

It is important to cultivate the art of giving among youth. I was pushed to work with young software professionals who come from different states to work in the IT sector. Most of them have never faced difficulty in their lives even though their parents would have. It is not their mistake!

While at WIPRO, I took it as my personal mission to sensitise the youth to be good employees; only then they can make a good organisation. We created a lot of volunteering opportunities for Mindtree employees so that they can spend their weekend meaningfully. We leveraged their talents for a good cause.

If you lack personal discipline, you will not be a disciplined worker. If you don’t understand your own problems, you cannot understand the customer’s problem. It is our responsibility to shape our youth!

