

Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Friend,

Republic day is celebrated on 26th January every year as this day is of great importance for every Indian. This is because India was declared as a republic country on this day, and the constitution of India came into force after long years of independence struggle.

Republic day is the national holiday in India when people celebrates this great day of honour in their own way by seeing news, speech at schools or get participated in quiz competitions related to freedom of India. At this day a big event gets organized by the Government of India at the Rajpath, New Delhi where a parade takes place by the India army in front of the India Gate in the presence of President of India after unfolding the India Flag and singing National Anthem.

It is also a day of national pledge when we decided to make our country, sovereign, democratic, and republic.

As we celebrate our Republic Day, it is time for some soul searching. How much progress have we made in the past six decades and how vibrant is our democracy?

When we talk of our 74 years as a democracy what immediately flashes before our eyes is a country that is stretched across all our sensibilities and technology—most evident in the big cities by way of flyovers, malls, and metro railways.

On the other hand, there is the poverty, inhuman living conditions of slum dwellers and poor water and hygiene facilities in rural schools.

The key challenges faced by our country are the need to prevent corruption, provide access to quality education, offer better health care, and curtail population growth.

All these are achievable with honesty of purpose, which makes character building the biggest challenge before us today. As an Indian, let us take an oath to make our country a peaceful and developed nation.

Jai Hind!

Marie Banu

EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu

Looking into the unconscious

“When you were a monkey you did not decide “I’ll become human being.” Nature just pushed you on but now you’re conscious enough to decide “I want to evolve from where I am to whatever is possible.” -Sadhguru



Recently I was introduced to The Leadership Circle, a model that can be used to develop leaders. The first conversation on the basis of a 360 degree assessment is all about discovering “unconscious” beliefs that create reactive behaviors and therefore impact creation of competencies that enhance leadership effectiveness. I could see the mental tug of war that each leader was going through while looking at their assessment. The conversation on beliefs that underlie habitual behaviors was a new pathway for most, albeit one they experienced with discomfort. The conversation could help them name their beliefs, make them more “visible”.

The beliefs could be like “I am good if I am liked” or “I am important because of the results I create”. None of these beliefs are so well articulated in our minds—it is unconscious. How is it that we do not inquire into the unconscious? I realized that the unconscious has given us desires like being good, being an achiever and so on. However, such desires masquerade as purpose. In other words, the beliefs “run” us. So, there is no reason why one would inquire.

One would begin to question it when one begins to tune towards causing greater good, creating an impact in the society--- in such a situation one can step out of “I, me, mine” world and decide to change course. This is the first step towards questioning the unconscious. At this point, it is not abandoning our beliefs but to give it a larger context, a meaningful direction. One can still be good, not to fulfill a personal cause but causes that would make a

difference to the world; one can still achieve results with drive, now with a vision.

We cannot see the unconscious directly, and so we need some kind of mirror with which to see the dynamic forces that operate within us. Mandala art is one of the ways to experience such a mirror. Mandala means ‘circle’ in the Sanskrit language, and mandala art refers to symbols that are drawn, sketched or painted in a circular frame.

There are many ways to create a mandala, but first we would need to draw a circle on a sheet of paper or on a canvas. We can fill the circle in spontaneously, letting the drawing emerge step by step in a creatively unpredictable way. Within the circle we can capture important scenes from everyday life, or objects of fascination from the world of nature. Filling the circle in is the first step. When the mandala is complete, we have an interesting, often beautifully wholistic snapshot of what is going on within us and of our present reality. We can then look at the symbol with curiosity and wonder, figure out what the structures, colors, and interacting elements mean and thereby gain an expanded view of how our lives are working.

While making a mandala or meditating does give an opportunity to touch the unconscious, suffering too makes us aware of the unconscious and urges us to make conscious choices.

Would we want external circumstances to cause the inquiry into the unconscious or would we want to evolve from unconscious to conscious with curiosity and willingness?

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.



THE RIGHTS INSTINCT

Rights based approach to development was conceptualized with five key principles – participation, accountability, non-discrimination/equality, empowerment and legality. Intending to wipe out distinction between human and economic development, rights based approach is essentially about building human capacities – as beneficiaries, duty bearers, facilitators, etc. The people who fight for the rights of under privileged people find this approach relevant and also significant to build microsystems that can demonstrate how rights can transcend class differences. “I knew nothing about all this when I was a regular school going child. Kamal Hassan’s movie ‘Unnal Mudiyum Thambi’ inspired me. I felt a strong force in me to do something for my community. Fortunately, me and my like-minded friends decided to start off with any little we could do at that time,” shares Mr K Sahadevan, Founder of Bright Way India Charitable Trust, in Nagamalai Village, Chengalpattu district, Tamil Nadu.

Sahadevan and friends began by removing thorns and climbers that had grown on an electricity line. Soon after, they also worked to drain rain water from inundated roads. While doing all this, they also harbored the dream to eradicate alcohol in their village. “Alcohol was a serious problem in my village and it affected almost every family in the community. In the movie, the protagonist successfully makes his village alcohol free and that touched me. I didn’t want age or any factor to be an obstacle. Which is why we started doing things within our reach. Why save passion and energy for the right age?” he asks.

As a school student dressed in his uniform, he went to police station to register complaint about alcohol preparation in his village. He also filed petitions to resolve water scarcity in his village. Sahadevan also formed women SHGs while he was in class eleven. As a socially active student, it wasn’t a surprise when he was chosen to be a part of Arivoli Iyakkam – a state

government scheme for adult education in Tamil Nadu. In 2001, Sahadevan was also suggested to contest in the panchayat election. However, he worked with his friends to help the female candidate win. He then joined as the Panchayat Clerk soon after completing class 12.

He volunteered with many NGOs and each time, he learnt new skills. “The learning was more about comprehending layers of an issue. I saw needs. I saw priorities unaddressed for decades. I saw the scope for intervention. I wanted to establish development as a mutually responsible, collaborative process,” adds Sahadevan. His volunteering experience also led him to work with NGO accounts and a reference helped him enroll for CSIM’s Post Graduate Diploma in Social Entrepreneurship. “It was CSIM that brought me to Chennai,” he laughs.

First time in a city, away from rural setting and closely connected neighborhoods, his stay in Chennai further helped him associate with people’s rights. “Rural or urban, basic needs are the same and the fundamental concerns are also the same. Sometimes I was amused to observe such efficient adaptation skills from both populations. But then, it all provoked me to explore practical, long term solutions and social change, in the real sense,” shares Sahadevan. He established the trust in 2008 and focused on numerous issues at the same time.

“CSIM took me closer to people who also thought like me. They valued my experience as much as I did. But the best part was they never judged anybody’s activities. There was an inherent understanding that what we did was the best we could do from our respective circumstances. This inculcates respect for fellow men’s work which I couldn’t see earlier,” he recalls. Sahadevan went back to his village to use his newly learnt skills and continue his work. He was happy that he could now write proposals independently. However, he later understood that funds are a real challenge for rights based organisations.

But Sahadevan was undeterred and planned activities relevant to his village. Right from health, education, tribal welfare and technology in agriculture, he worked with volunteers to address one issue after another. “We met a 96 year old lady, born and married in the same village but did not own a piece of land. Land, more than rights, is an assurance, a mode of security that could be cashed when needed. We intervened and got her land patta. Later we also applied for an electricity line near her house,” he explains. Case after case, his team surveyed and petitioned to ensure people realised their fundamental rights. But all this, he admits, is a time consuming process.

In Arcot village (Chithambur Block), floods created havoc and every time Sahadevan had to request local government school’s Head Master many times to give the key so that victims could take shelter. While this was a policy here, somebody has to ask for it repeatedly. He condemned this and undertook all efforts to build a rehabilitation colony. A three-acre land was allotted for the purpose and the facility now houses 35-40 families. This process took about nine years but he has no complaints. “At the end of the day, victims also have their fundamental rights and they cannot be taken for granted,” he warns.

Laying pipelines for households, arranging cooked food for flood victims, securing land pattas for landless families, etc have been a part of regular work and each intervention involves diligent follow up with government authorities.

Sahadevan feels that the focus on processes, even if it consumes time, allows the beneficiary population to see how much it takes to ensure their entitlements. “Only when they know, they will learn to protect their rights and also fight for them when circumstances press for it. Rights must be respected by all actors,” asserts Sahadevan.

Shanmuga Priya.T

THE GIFT OF KINDNESS

Change is a perspective, a stand point one intends to arrive at after working on a set of actions within his/her sphere of influence. From conception to contribution, change as an end result goes through a journey of influences that not only add value to its final manifestation, but also enhance its impact on social systems. Therefore, in order to learn the complete cycle of contribution for and by the change, it is essential to clearly define an individual's or organisation's sphere of influence. Mr Shaikh Sadaqathulla, a Trustee at Kayalpatnam Medical Trust Hospital in Thoothukudi district, not only agrees but also adds that we must strategise the medium through which we reach out.

From attending regular school to then taking up religious lessons, Sadaqathulla was always inclined to do something independently. Taking over his father's property management business did not deter him from working on his personal interests like radio. "To me, HAM radio is a remarkable technology to connect with people. It never fails you. Portable, inexpensive and consistently adapting with evolving technology, radio has been an excellent communication support, especially during disasters," he says passionately.

After taking classes from Loyola College in Chennai, Sadaqathulla obtained HAM Radio licence from DOT, Minister of Communication, New Delhi in 1991 and joined the Madras Amateur Radio Society. This was a big feat at the age of 21 years. He was fully excited about this development and used HAM radio to send across wishes for birthdays, anniversaries, etc. Business and radio kept him fully occupied and he was happy about managing them in his style.

The year 1993 changed the course of his life and the call for donors with AB negative blood group startled him. "Can life be this sensitive? How can few blood groups be rare? I didn't even know that mine was a rare blood group," admits Sadaqathulla. However, the whole experience enriched his know-how about blood donations and he felt the urge to build awareness about the same.

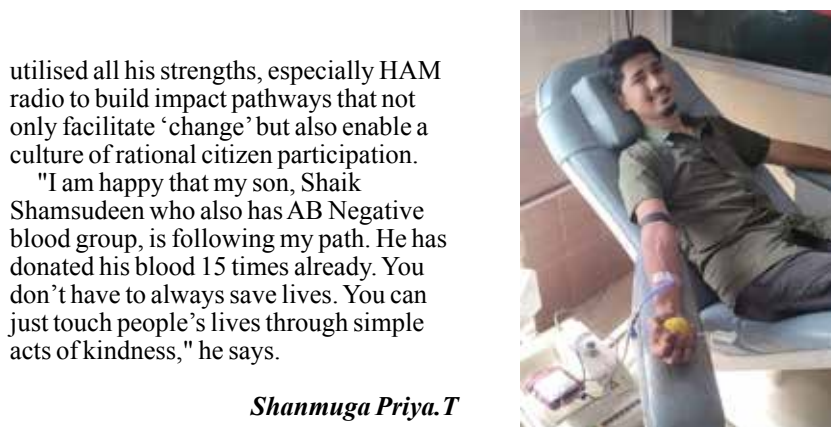
Having donated blood 53 times, his social circle kept widening and he consciously took note of actions that were feasible from his end. This led him to become a member of various organisations like the Lions Blood Bank in Chennai, St John Ambulance Association in Tamil Nadu, Lions Club of Mylapore, Indian Red Cross Society in Tamil Nadu and many others. "The fact that I could play a role in saving somebody's life not only became an inner drive, but also humbled me. I got to dispel the myths around blood donation and that is when I realised how easily people get misinformed. In spite of the revolution in communication technology, there is not much scrutiny/control over the quality of information that reaches them," he laments.

Sadaqathulla consciously became active on social media platforms to promote awareness, share feeds on arising needs (need for blood donors, education

sponsorship, medical assistance services, etc). All this while, his use of HAM radio also underwent a himalayan change and he became instrumental in coordinating relief activities during floods and tsunami. His active participation in programs like book distribution for underprivileged college students allowed him to come in contact with different age groups. "To be able to communicate with such a wide audience was a golden opportunity, not only to talk about blood donation, but to help people see the value in supporting each other. The fact that every life matters is yet to be realistically understood, but yes, we have come a long way from what we were," he acknowledges.

Sadaqathulla has consistently overseen the work of Kayalpatnam Medical Trust Hospital as a Trustee, since 2007. This 40-bed hospital offers primary and secondary health care services to the needy at a nominal cost. Specialists like paediatricians, gynaecologists, anaesthetists, orthopedics visit twice a week. He established simple processes to connect with doctors from nearby towns so that they could be available in times of emergencies and also visit the hospital regularly without any hindrance.

Whether blood donation or medical support services or any other activity for that matter, his basic concern remains availability and accessibility. He designs and establishes simple processes to connect his sphere of influence with the people he wants to reach out to. In this endeavour, he has tirelessly



utilised all his strengths, especially HAM radio to build impact pathways that not only facilitate 'change' but also enable a culture of rational citizen participation.

"I am happy that my son, Shaik Shamsudeen who also has AB Negative blood group, is following my path. He has donated his blood 15 times already. You don't have to always save lives. You can just touch people's lives through simple acts of kindness," he says.

Shanmuga Priya.T

SPINNING THE WHEELS OF CHANGE IN BALI

They've been told that they were cursed, but for people with disabilities in Bali's Cahaya Mutiara Ubud, life is a blessing.



▶ While they work to create a supportive space for PWDs, CMU's greatest desire is for society to accept them and to treat them with dignity

With Bali's Mount Batur looming in the distance, a car comes to a stop in front of a house in a village in Kintamani. "We are here," says I Wayan Karmen as he clambered onto his wheelchair.

Karmen is here to meet a fellow wheelchair user as part of Yayasan Cahaya Mutiara Ubud's (CMU) outreach, a foundation established by Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) to help other PWDs. "We usually go visit them to see what their conditions are like," says Karmen, who is Secretary of CMU. "Because of their physical condition, they're shy and feel inferior compared to others. We want to build confidence in each PWD."

An estimated nine per cent of Indonesia's population have some form of disability. PWDs continue to face challenges in accessing basic services such as education, social protection including health insurance, and have trouble finding employment. In Bali, one of the main obstacles faced by PWDs is a lack of accessibility, with few ramps and other mobility aids in public spaces like schools and hospitals. Discrimination is also a huge challenge. "A PWD was told by her teacher in school that, as she could not attend Physical Education Classes, she was not allowed to study there anymore," said Karmen. "Every person has equal opportunity and rights. The lack of access for PWDs will hinder our ability



▶ To help give PWDs access to education, volunteers organise a range of classes and activities

to develop to our full potential."

Such obstacles prompted CMU to start a dormitory, which aims to be a self-sustaining community where PWDs can support each other in acquiring the skills and resilience to lead independent lives. Here volunteer teachers host free classes for CMU's 42 members, ranging from languages to sports. "I am taking English and computer lessons every week," says I Komang Sukatriadnyana, a recent addition to the CMU family. "More importantly I can meet people and not feel embarrassed in front of them."

"The most important part of co-living is that we can learn from each other, share stories and experiences," says Karmen. "We want to create an environment where every member of CMU can live an independent life."

CMU's model of encouragement and inclusion has not just created a safe space where PWDs feel included, it has also allowed its residents to be empowered. One of its members is presently employed by a Japanese wig company. "When she joined us she made a 180-degree transformation, joined a school equivalency program, and almost every activity we arranged," recalls Karmen. "With her income she now has her own vehicle and all of us are very proud of her!"

As other members try to forge their own paths, Karmen is happy with the optimistic atmosphere permeating through CMU. "I feel that when I'm here, I have the power to face life's problems," says Karmen. "There's so many friends and activities, we forget



about our disabilities and are grateful for what we have."

ABOUT CAHAYA MUTIARA UBUD

Cahaya Mutiara Ubud (CMU) is a Balinese foundation founded by persons with disabilities (PWDs) to help other PWDs become productive members of society. Besides establishing a residence where PWDs can have an inclusive living space, CMU actively looks out for opportunities to help their members to fulfil their full potential.

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

www.ourbetterworld.org

BEING THE CHANGE



It was November of the year 2018 when a cyclone named Gaja made its appearance in Southern India and affected over 80,000 people. Relief camps were set up at several locations, required help was provided to those in need. And in times like these volunteering played a crucial role. Thanks to the support from hundreds of volunteers, the relief work could be done even more effectively.

Thuvakkam, a Chennai based NGO came out to support during this disaster in full force. They placed volunteers at different locations who took care of the specific requirements of the victims.

Each region has a unique characteristic and need attached to it and that it had to be dealt with accordingly. Alex Joseph from Thuvakkam said: "We visited each area individually, and after having understood their need, we decided to provide the necessary items to fulfill people's requirement to the fullest." They were able to help over 1,000 families with necessary items includes dry rations, tarpaulin, dry grass mat depends on their needs.

This is one of many instances when a simple act of volunteering managed to create unmeasurable impact in the lives of people.

Thuvakkam was started in 2014 by a group of college students who were all in their twenties.

Their motto of 'Be the change you wish to see' birthed in a casual conversation with friends. As the discussion on the untidy beach, other societal issues and blaming everyone was in progress, the thought of 'let us be the change we want to see in the society' came to be.

The organisation works in three core areas; environment, education, and humanity.

From organic gardening and tree donation to urban forestry and native tree plantation, Thuvakkam touches upon various topics in the field of environment. Their team ventures into the root of the issue and involves the community to preserve the plants after they are sown. By instilling responsibility in every person, Thuvakkam hopes to seed a sustainable future for all to live in. They even follow Miyawaki method of plantation which involves creating mini forests in small areas using only the native trees.

Thuvakkam joined hands with an automobile company and created an urban forest inside his Industrial plant with 170 saplings at 1500 square feet. They not only planted but came back regularly for its maintenance until the whole forest grew very well. Today, over 40 urban forests with 1,30,000 indigenous plants have been created by Thuvakkam.

In the field of education, Thuvakkam runs a



programme called Karka Kasandra. In this project, the kids are taught using practical methodologies. Unconventional topics relating to society's political, scientific, and social aspects such as, 'Who am I?', 'Soil, Plants, and Food,' 'Good touch, bad touch,' and 'Learn politics' are taught to kids to expose them to societal happenings and their part in the world as a whole.

"By doing so, the kids start developing societal awareness that instills morality in them at a young age by learning to act rather than react to the things happening around them. It helps them find self-purpose and teaches them a way to connect with their community," said Jeba Rupavathi from Thuvakkam.

Through another initiative called Sponsor for Success, quality education is provided to the kids from the lesser privileged community. This initiative helps ease their economic burden and supports the student to grow and become an independent person. Through this project, Thuvakkam is not just helping just the children, but also assisting the entire family in progressing economically. Over 68 children have been given financial aid to complete their education and more than 150 students have been benefitted through the holistic teaching program.

Although, Thuvakkam's journey is an inspiring

one, they shared several challenges on the way.

Mr. Krishna Kumar Suresh Founder/President, Thuvakkam said: "Initiating an organisation at our twenties leaves us to learn everything ourselves, like getting permissions from authorities, meeting officials and all the relevant do's and don't's had to be self-taught. We have great people mentoring and guiding us, but gaining the experience ourselves was a task and have faced difficulties a lot of time."

At present Thuvakkam has 35 full time employees and over 2,000 volunteers working with them. Majority of the projects and initiatives are funded through CSR. There are also regular donors who support specific initiatives.

"We believe, holistic development, in any nature of initiative/program/project, is the sustainability in it. Thuvakkam, believing it, has our focus on strengthening the sustainability in the projects we do," Jeba said.

Seeing the immense positive effects of their model, Alex concluded stating, "The volunteering made me and my fellow volunteers from Thuvakkam confident and also helped us understand that we would be able to serve the people in any kind of a disaster in the years to come."

Shreya Pareek



WHAT'S THE NEXT STEP?

There is a time when many need to come to terms with not having a fixed routine of going to the office, instead finding that we have to seek alternative ways of keeping ourselves mentally occupied and feeling productive. The dreaded 'r' word is a part of every employee's vocabulary – whether retirement or the harsher version, redundancy.

Most of us know someone who has left employment and is having to deal with the psychological, social and financial aspects of a change in status.

I'm among those whose job was restructured, leaving me at somewhat of a loose end. From a 7am to 7pm day, I had a lot of time on my hands. The day I heard, I remember it was a Wednesday, I was in shock. That night I spent a sleepless night wondering what on earth I would do next. Like many of my colleagues, my life and my emotions had been largely invested in my workplace and while theoretically I knew that anything could happen, I never really believed that I would be affected.

Starting to cope

My general reaction to any kind of stress is to make a list. Lists bring order into my life. I sat down with pen and paper to take inventory of my skills and qualifications, but to my slight dismay the list was quite short. I knew how to run a bank department, how to work well with my colleagues, but those skills would only help me if I got a similar job.

Reflecting on six areas

Chance brought me in touch with a corporate trainer who spoke about six areas to focus on, to work towards happiness. These are : family and personal life, business and career, finances, health, personal growth and community work. He had explained that a simple way forward was to create a goal for ourselves in



each area and then plan on short term, achievable milestones towards the goal.

Reflecting on these showed I had been focussing only on family and job, to the exclusion of all else. Whilst these were definitely top-priority, there were other aspects completely forgotten. Working out goals in these areas was an uphill task, but had to be done.

There's an old adage, What gets measured gets done, and perhaps that's true of planning as well. Looking back, I was amazed at how life started to unfold, after that day, though often the changes came about at a very slow pace.

Implementing my plans

Small dreams came true, and brought great contentment. On the lighter side, I found myself enjoying new hobbies as a beginner. Oil painting was one such, where my skill levels were low but enjoyment levels high!

Looking at the different aspects helped unlock other critical tasks, like regular health checks, making a will and volunteering in the community with a special needs school. The move away from haphazardness gave me control of my life, which in turn brought a sense of balance.

But learning the lesson and absorbing it permanently are different skills! Once I got another job it took a great deal of effort to ensure progress towards all my goals, not just the work. Nearly all the experiences that had brought me contentment faded away and it was only by strenuous effort that I was able to bring that feeling back.

Years later, I'm wiser and older and know the benefits of keeping the balance. I regularly tune into my goals in those critical six areas.

Karuna Luthar

INSPIRING CONVERSATIONS WITH SRI RAMANA MAHARISHI

A large group of Punjabis arrived here in a pilgrim special. They came to the Ramanasramam at about 8-45 a.m. and sat quiet for a long time. At about 9-20 one of them said: "Your reputation has spread in the Punjab. We have travelled a long distance to have your darshan. Kindly tell us something by way of instruction." There was no oral reply. Sri Bhagavan smiled and gazed on. After some time the visitor asked: "Which is the best - the yoga, the bhakti or the jnana path?" Still Sri Bhagavan smiled and gazed as before.

Sri Bhagavan left the hall for a few minutes. The visitors began to disperse. Still a sprinkling of them continued to sit in the hall. A long standing disciple told the visitor that Sri Bhagavan had replied to his questions by His Silence which was even more eloquent than words.

After Sri Bhagavan returned, the visitor began to speak a little. In the course of his speech, he asked:

D.: It is all right for those who believe in God. Others ask - Is there a God?

M.: Are you there?

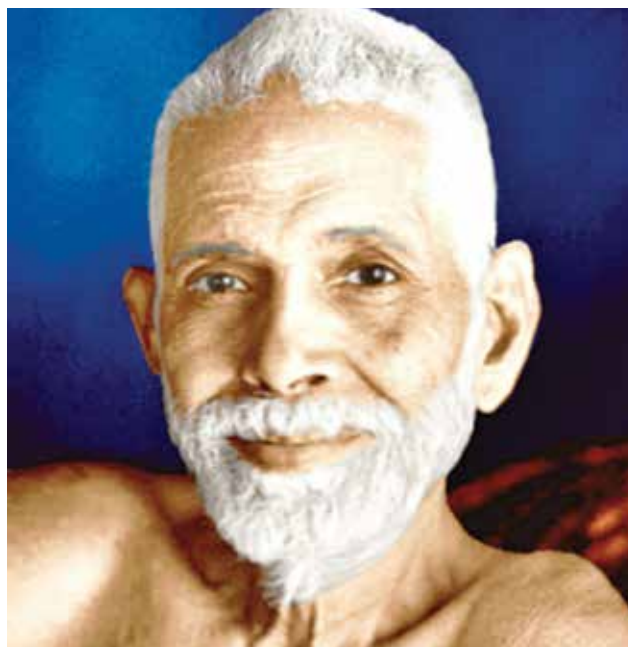
D.: Quite so. That is the question. I see before my eyes a battalion of sepoy's passing. Therefore I am. The world must have been created by God. How shall I see the Creator?

M.: See yourself, who sees these, and the problem is solved.

D.: Is it to sit silent or to read sacred books or to concentrate the mind? Bhakti helps concentration. People fall at the feet of the bhakta. If it does not happen he feels disappointed and his bhakti fades.

M.: The longing for happiness never fades. That is bhakti.

D.: How shall I get it quicker? Suppose I concentrate two hours today. If I try to lengthen the period the next day, I fall



asleep because I get tired of the job.

M.: You do not get tired in sleep. The same person is now present here. Why should you be tired now? Because your mind is restless and wanders, it gets tired, and not you.

D.: I am a business man. How shall I get on with business and get peace of mind also?

M.: This is also a thought. Give up this thought also and remain as your true Self.

D.: It is said: Do your duty without any expectation of results. How shall I get that frame of mind?

M.: You need not aspire for or get any new state. Get rid of your present thoughts, that is all.

D.: How shall I get the bhakti necessary for it?

M.: It is bhakti to get rid of thoughts which are only alien to you (i.e. the Self).

D.: What is thought-force, mesmerism, etc.? There was a doctor in Paris called Dr. Coue. He was illiterate, but yet was able to cure many incurable diseases by will-force. He used to say: Generate power to cure yourself. The power is within you.

M.: It is through the same will-power that the seat of all diseases, the body, has risen.

D.: So it is said thoughts manifest as objects.

M.: This thought must be for mukti (liberation).

D.: God must enable us to get rid of the other thoughts.

M.: This is again a thought. Let that which has incarnated raise the question. You are not that because you are free from thoughts.

Source: Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi

THE WORLD NEEDS A BIT MORE CARE



Since the dawn of the millennium, Care Earth Trust has dedicated itself to science and human welfare. The organization has gone the extra mile to utilize and harness the value of science in biodiversity, gauging the human impact on the ecology and environment. It has managed to do this through clear-cut strategies that have helped in making the world and the environment at large, a better place.

Training and capacity building are two methods that Care Earth has adopted to bring about biodiversity conservation, even as the organization has deep-dived into developing resource-based materials to push its agenda of conservation forward, and take it to the next level. “We share the planet with approximately 18 million species,” says Jayshree Vencatesan, Managing Trustee at Care Earth Trust, “As the only species that can impact every aspect of the planet, we need to be more responsible and prudent.”

Over the years, the organization has been recognized for its stellar work. In 2009, Care Earth was awarded the Indira Gandhi Paryavaran Puraskar Award by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change for its pioneering work in conserving Chennai’s Pallikarainai Marshland and the Nanmangalam Forests. It did this, even as its contribution to the recovery and restoration in the IIT Madras campus was earmarked as a key achievement in the trust’s tenure as an environmental organization.

“A number of people and organizations consider our work to be useful and relevant today, and that to us is a good metric of how successful we have been over the last couple of decades,” says Jayshree. Some of Care Earth’s work includes drafting the first-ever management plan for the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve for UNESCO’s Man and Biosphere Programme.

Care Earth has been instrumental in drafting the country’s first report to comply with Article 6 of the convention

on biological diversity for the Ministry of Environment and Forestry as well as the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for the Western Ghats. One of the organization’s most noticeable work came in 2004 when Care Earth was tasked with assessing the impact of the Tsunami on wildlife habitats in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The organization was even involved in drafting Bangladesh’s biodiversity strategy and action plan for the Asia office of the World



Conservation Union and drafting guidelines for the preparation of biodiversity strategy and action plans for South Asia, for Asia office of the World Conservation Union.

Through its work in various spheres concerning the ecology and environment, the group has maintained a strong and stoic advocacy of science and research. In fact, Jayshree maintains that this is key to the work the organization does. “We have absolute faith in research and collaboration,” she says, “Our unwavering commitment to the project or intervention for a long period of time has also helped. I believe in being persistent and tenacious.”

Given that Care Earth Trust has spent

over two decades in conservation, research and study, with a number of programmes and initiatives to boot, which of its programmes have been the most successful? “Our biggest success has come by way of programmes where we have worked with government ages,” says Jayshree, “That is probably because these programmes have all been driven by data.”

Over the years Care Earth has been invested in facilitating the care and support and sick, stray and abandoned

surrounding animal care and rehabilitation.

Despite all its achievements and the rich legacy it has built for itself in this millennium, Jayshree says the plan is far more ambitious. “Our future goal is to evolve into a knowledge hub for biodiversity, and at present, that is the only goal we are pursuing,” she says. Given the times we live in, and how rapidly misinformation spreads, the need to create a strong knowledge hub, many would agree, is more relevant now than ever before. This also takes on a greater relevance during an era of climate change, environmental stress and the constant need to defend and protect our environment.

In fact, the “greed and avarice” for natural resources is one of the key challenges that Care Earth continues to deal with today, Jayshree says.

However, if there’s another issue that the organization is contending with, it’s the disregard for science. “The disdain for science and collaboration, coupled with turf wars and the greed and avarice for consumption of natural resources—these are some of the major challenges we face today,” she summarizes.

There’s no doubt that with the pace of development, consumption of natural resources and their depleting levels, now would be a good time to leverage on our knowledge of science, and understanding of the environment to help protect the environment. Care Earth Trust has gone about doing that, and has managed to fight the good fight in doing it.

Rahul Philip

As the only species that can impact every aspect of the planet, we need to be more responsible and prudent

animals. The organization oversees the running of the Dax Memorial Animal Rehabilitation and Resource Centre in Urapakkam, on the outskirts of Chennai. There’s a story here: the centre was founded to pay tribute to a dachshund named Dax who the organization says made an impact on many lives. The centre was inaugurated in 2009, and began serving the public from 2010 onwards, with the singular purpose of rescuing and rehabilitating animals with a focus on orientation, training and tele-counselling

BETTING LIFE FOR MONEY

Bittu lost his eyesight due to the toxic gases inside a sewer and Hari lost his life at an age of 30. These are just a few examples of how dangerous manual scavenging is. Over 300 workers lost their lives in 2017 while cleaning sewers. Read more about the horrendous profession, the life of scavengers and possible solutions to this problem.

On the busy streets of Rohini, Delhi, just outside the government toilet on the 40-foot road, sits a group of Manual Scavengers waiting to get picked up by nearby residents to clean their sewer. With just a broomstick in their hand and wearing only their undergarments, they enter the sewer full of shit.

As disgusting this practice may sound to others it's their source of bread and butter. The act of manual scavenging was first prohibited by the government in 1993. The ban was re-initiated in 2013 with rehabilitation measures laid out for those still engaged in this profession. However, till date, nothing much has changed and we are still counting our Manual Scavengers.

Inheritance Of Scavenging

Bittu and his 17-year-old son Hritik work as human scavengers. Bittu entered this profession at an age of 16. His father too spent his entire life cleaning sewers. Not wanting his son to follow the same path, Bittu sent his son to school. However, Hritik had no interest in studies and he soon dropped out of the school. After that, he had no other choice. He did not know anything else and sadly, he too, like his father and grandfather became part of this filthy reality. "I have lost a part of my vision. I cannot see properly because of the toxic waste that once entered my eyes. I hope my son does not face these problems," he says.

Hritik who has been working as a manual scavenger for about two years now says: "I earn around Rs 400 a day and I am okay with that. I didn't want to study, I have no interest in it. If I get a better job as a cleaner at a restaurant or any hotel then that would be good for me. Lekin Jo Kismat Mein Likha Hain Vahi Hoga, Meri Kismat Mein Sewer Saaf Karna Hain Toh Vahi Sahi (Whatever lies in my fate is bound to happen. If I am destined to clean the sewage then that's ok'."

Another father-son duo of Naresh and Aakash are also risking their lives every day by working this odd job. Sixteen-years-old Aakash started scavenging three years ago.

"I started doing this after dropping out from the school. I was initially scared as I once saw my father faint while cleaning the sewer. I eventually I overcame that fear," Aakash said.

Naresh once inhaled a toxic gas due to which he fainted, luckily his friends were there to save him. But not everyone is as lucky as Naresh. Many people have lost their lives.

The practice of manual scavenging is linked to the caste system, the work is



done by people belonging to the Scheduled Caste community. This is why the practice of scavenging is often passed through generations.

Death Of Scavengers

Despite the ban on Manual Scavenging in India, over 300 cases of deaths have been reported in 2017. The main cause of death is inhaling of the toxic gas produced from the waste.

Bittu and Naresh are lucky to be alive. Unfortunately, Hari, another manual scavenger from Delhi did not meet a good end. Thirty-years-old Hari's life ended while cleaning the

sewer due to the inhalation of toxic gas from the waste.

"Hari was very brave. He used to go deep in the sewer to clean it, but four years back, while cleaning he inhaled the toxic gas and fainted there. When his body was brought on the ground he was declared dead. We all were shocked at that time," Naresh said.

sewer due to the inhalation of toxic gas from the waste.

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Bezwada Wilson, an activist who has been fighting for the rights of the manual scavengers for years said: "Till now, the government has made very little or no progress to uplift the community. Many state governments earlier made false claims regarding the number of scavengers present in the state. The government has offered rehabilitation schemes for them. But, how can one avail the benefits of the

Possible Solution and Unique Innovations

Since many of the workers die due to toxic gases in the sewer, Kevin Thakkar, a 19-year-old boy from Mumbai has come up with an innovation to reduce the number of fatalities in this field.

Thakkar has designed a motor, which pumps in fresh air from outside into the sewers. The device has a solar-powered LED lighting system, a toxic gas sensor, and an oxygen level sensor. This small device helps in maintaining a safe environment inside the sewer while the scavengers are working.

"I have successfully tested the machine at different sewers and it has worked perfectly in all aspects. It provides fresh air and Oxygen, bright LED light and has an alarm, which beeps when Oxygen levels are low," explained Thakkar.

In addition, Thakkar has also been organizing free Tuberculosis checkups and health camps for the workers and their family members.

"It is a problem that violets the basic human rights. I initially designed a robot to clean the sewers, but the task is too complicated for a robot and I did not have enough resources to design

that. So I came up with this affordable machine that offers a portable and a long-term solution to the problem," Thakkar added.

GenRobotics Innovations has built a robot called Bandicoot, a semiautomatic robotic system for manhole and sewer line cleaning.

Many more innovations have come in the past but what's missing is the will to act. If the government starts funding these innovators and become serious in prohibiting human scavenging then possibly in the next two to three years, scavenging could get extinct in India.

Rahul Satija

Source: <https://thestoriesofchange.com>

IT'S TIME FOR CELEBRATION!

Lok Sabha clears Bill to include Narikoravan and Kurivikkaran tribes in ST list of Tamil Nadu



The Narikuravars is one of the most deprived and vulnerable communities living in Tamil Nadu. Recently, the Union Cabinet passed the bill include Narikuravar in Scheduled Tribe list of Tamil Nadu.

Shri. P.N. Devarajan, Founder of MSDS Trust, had extended support to several Narikuravar children to pursue their education. Few of these children were instrumental in lobbying with the government for gaining Scheduled Tribe Status.

As a mark of gratitude towards PND and celebrating the success of the lobbying efforts, Mr. Shankar, Asoka Fellow and Founder of Tribal Society visited CSIM on 29.12.2022 along with 20 Narikuravar children.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Shankar said: "I brought the children to CSIM for them to know more about PND. Each of them are first generation learners and we are grateful to PND for paving the path of education for my community."

Children rejoiced by singing and dancing and sharing their life's stories with CSIM team.



Centre for Social Initiative and Management

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).

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"Hardwork, Compassion, and empathy are the key learnings I have imbibed from P.N.Devarajan."

Shri. K.N. Vasanth shares his memories with Shri P.N. Devarajan

About your association with Shri. P.N. Devarajan?

I joined Chemicals and Plastics India Limited (now Chemplast) at Mettur as Shift Chemical Engineer in 1966 where PND was working as Senior Chemical Engineer. We were engaged in erecting and commissioning of the plant along with 30 other engineers. His intellectual application attracted me towards him and we became friends later on. The bond became closer when we realised that both of us had studied at AC College Technology Chennai.

Shri. P.N. Devarajan (PND) was special person. He would delve deeper into a problem to solve it with immaculate, acute analytical mind. He will make us understand why the problem existed. This character in him attracted me very much and I used to follow him very closely within the plant. He left Chemplast after 6 years, and we remained in touch.

When I met him in Chennai, he said that if at all I wanted to work under a Chemical Engineer, it should be with Dr. Garud at DCM, Delhi. In fact, PND was ten times more intelligent than Dr. Garud, but was humble to appreciate him.

I left Chemplast and Joined Voltas. Later, on PND's advice, I joined Abu Kamash Chemical Complex in Libya where the company was working on PVC matters. This helped me immensely in my later years in the field of Chemical Engineering.

After returning from Libya, Mr R.Chidambaran (who was working in DCW as Works Manager and was my immediate boss in Chemplast) called me for taking up a PVC project in Dhrangadara Chemical Works Ltd. In Tuticorin. On advice of PND I accepted the offer. The factory was interested to make PVC from imported Vinyl Chloride Monomer (VCM). As I was handling a similar project in Libya, he felt that I was best suited for this job.

I erected a big storage (5000 cu.m. capacity) at Tuticorin Port for VCM in India. We were the first company to import VCM from abroad,

store, and make PVC out of it. This was the first of its kind in India; even Reliance was not ready during this phase. We had to get clearance from explosives department, and there were very few contractors available. The major help was from PND who was with Reliance at this point in time. He guided me on how to make the sphere for storage and referred a contractor to construct it. He was the one who made this project viable. I became the plant head of VCM, and attribute my success to PND.

Whenever I visited my headquarters in Mumbai, he used to invite me for several intellectual meetings with Mr. Dhirubai Ambani. Our friendship grew even closer.

Which of the traits do you admire in PND?

PND always had the helping tendency. Similar to our present Prime Minister's vision of 'Make in India', when PND was the MD of Hindustan Organic Chemicals, he used to say that we could make the chemicals which were imported and was a giant at this.

Shri. Dhirubai Ambani had built a very big chemical complex at Jamnagar. PND has set his foot on every inch of this property before the plant was erected. I would say that Shri. Dhirubai Ambani grew because of PND.

PND served as Director of RBI and helped many people to start their own industries. He encouraged a person who was supplying water tankers to make his son pursue Chemical Engineering; this boy later became a big entrepreneur.

He will always see that people not only work hard, but also work smart. He was able to distinguish people and allocate work based on their potential. He always said that no one is useless; it is the input that we give makes the act successful or not.

His intellectual approach and hard work is unmatched. Whenever PND fixes a goal, he ensures to achieve it. That was a beautiful trait he had.

When he was a chemical engineer, he spent some of his



Shri. K.N. Vasanth with Shri. P.N. Devarajan and Swami Nityananda Giri of Tapovanam

time on religious activities as well. He funded the construction of a Mahabhuja Lakshmi temple in Salem and also a Muruga Temple in the campus. He considered his work first, before worship.

opportunity to earn money the way we did.

He said that this will develop the habit of giving in the family as the parents would explain to their children the purpose of this scheme.

surprised to see her progress and told her that she did not require asthma medication anymore.

What are the key learnings you had from PND?

PND used to say that everyone should get into the minute details he is doing, even if it involves working in the kitchen.

Hardwork, Compassion, and empathy are the key learnings I have imbibed from PND. He never failed to help someone who was suffering. He believed in equipping a person so that he can fend for himself.

The whole of me is a result of PND's inspiration. He used to personally connect with my family while I was away in Libya and I really miss him.

We interacted with a lot of foreigners, whom he treated only as 'foreigners'. I say this, because in the 1960's, foreigners were regarded as supreme beings. He used to say that they are just like us. When we worked with Germans, he would retort boldly which was not common.

PND was a dedicated person. Next my parents and spouse, I regard PND close to my heart. In all my pursuits in the field of Chemical Engineering, I am yet to see a technical giant like PND who used to stay in the plant three to four days a week.

PND is a legend. If only he was involved in active politics, he would have achieved even more in philanthropy.



Smt. Vanjula Vasanth receiving the DOS Volunteer Award from Shri. R.V. Shekar, Managing Director, Lancor Holdings Limited

Your interactions with PND as a philanthropist?

PND's involvement in charitable activities is an inspiration. When I settled in Chennai after retirement, PND visited me and said that wanted to launch the Dal, Oil, Sugar (DOS) scheme. In fact, it was his Brother-in-law Mr. Margabandhu who had influenced him to visit a Home in the neighbourhood and start engaging in social work.

He said that we knew a lot of people whom we can influence to donate Dal, Oil, and Sugar on a monthly basis to those who do not have the

Once, we walked around the temple in Tiruvannamalai and asked every household on the way for donation of DOS.

My wife Mrs. Vanjula Vasanth was involved as a volunteer to collect DOS from our neighbours. Initially, we were collecting 600 kilos a month, and later went on to collect 1000 kilos a month. She was a severe asthmatic patient and was undergoing treatment at Trinity hospital. Within five months of engaging in DOS activity, she started breathing properly and her asthma got cured in eight-months' time. The doctor was