

# Conversations Today

*Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises*

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About Bharatiya Yuva Shakti Trust and its activities



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growth, but also an earnest reflection  
of the values it stands for."**

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Group Chief Executive, Technology  
& Operations at Cognizant



# From the Editor

Dear Friend,

In addition to rapid population growth, India is also witnessing an explosive growth in the population residing in the urban areas. It is estimated that of the nearly 30 percent of India's population or about 300 million people live in towns and cities. Mathematical modeling reveals that this population may up to reach 534 million by 2026.

Nearly one-third of India's urban population or nearly 100 million live in slums which are characterized by overcrowding, poor hygiene and sanitation and the absence of proper civic services.

In India, the health of the urban poor is as worse as the rural population. Private healthcare costs are much more than public healthcare. The latest NSS health survey states that the hospitalisation differences are four times, ie. over 70 percent of rural and urban Indians are treated at private sector facilities.

Although there are instances of private health care facilities being better than that of the government facilities, the reason for the preference for private treatment is simple: the government does not have the funds to develop the kind of healthcare that India needs. While Brazil and China spend 4.7 percent and 3.1 percent of their GDP in health care, India has just spent 1.3 percent in 2013.

The Government has the advantage of having access to infrastructure easily whereas the private sector faces many challenges in acquiring land and all the required permissions thereof. The solution to this issue is evolving a partnership between the Government and the private sector so that the latter's ability can be utilized to spend and organise health care services better.

It would be wise for the Government to partner with well-known health providers that have made a meaningful impact in the society. Public to private-run transition in healthcare should be done with regulation in order to ensure that healthcare is accessible for the economically weaker sections of the population.

The changemakers featured in this issue have taken efforts to promote health care for the underprivileged.

Please read and be inspired!

—Marie Banu

## Positive Living - Mindful Living!



**O**ftentimes I have been asked the question, "How can one follow spiritual practices when they are laden with worldly duties and responsibilities?" The following story amply illustrates the same.

Once, a single mother with three children, who was keenly interested in pursuing the spiritual path, made time to go for a 3-day spiritual retreat. She diligently practised all that was taught and thoroughly enjoyed her time there. On the last day, as all the participants were preparing to leave, the Lama at the retreat encouraged all of them to continue to meditate for at least an hour every day, after they return to their regular lives. At this, the lady informed the Lama that her routine would not allow her to meditate regularly for an hour. She tried to explain the details of her busy routine, but the Lama insisted that each one, no matter what their life was like, could make time for meditation, if they so desired. After going back and forth with this discussion, the lady went silent. Later, as she left the retreat, she invited the Lama to come and stay at her house for a few days when he passes by that city. The next time when Lama was going by that

city, he chose to go and stay with this lady's family for a few days. During his time here, he saw that she woke up really early in the morning, did all the house work, left for work, got back home before her children returned from school, took care of their needs through the evening, and rounded off the day by cleaning up the kitchen and arranging things for the next day. On the day before he was to leave, he confessed to her that she was right about her routine and that he noticed how it truly didn't leave her much time to do anything else. However, he also told her that he would teach her how to pursue the spiritual practices through mindfulness. He spent that whole day with her and taught her to be mindful when she did her dishes, laundry, cooking, cleaning, etc. Also, her house layout was such that she had to cross a small hallway each time she moved from one part of the house to another. He suggested she walk mindfully each time she enters the room until she exits it. He taught her mindful walking. Having done his duty, he left on his journey the next day. This lady diligently continued all the mindful practices embedded into

her routine and the mindful walking through the hallway. She did this for many years thereafter, as the children grew to become young adults. Once the children left home to pursue their dreams, she decided to go back to the retreat. This time, she was in no rush to return to her regular life. To her great surprise, she noticed that she slipped into a deep trance every time she sat down to meditate. The Lama then told her that as she lived each day of her life mindfully, she had become adept at calming her mind and bringing all of her focus to the current moment. In this way, her mindful living had primed her sufficiently for the meditative practices. She had all along been pursuing the spiritual path, even as she fulfilled her duties and responsibilities, without waiting for that one day, when she would be free to go live in a retreat.

Mindful living pervades all aspects of life; we can walk mindfully, talk mindfully, eat mindfully, perform all our tasks mindfully, and so on. Simply put, mindfulness is living in the present moment. This practice balances all our energies – body, mind, emotions, and spirit, and keeps us healthy, content, energizing, and joyful.

### Yours Energetically

*Dr. Bhulakshmi V and Ms. Bhuvaneshwari Ravi are trainers and facilitators of the Positive Energy (PE) program. They are spiritual seekers with a vision of transforming their own energy state from surviving to being. In this journey they have gathered deep insights and are 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, the authors are working in the Organization Development and Leadership Development space.*

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# Diversified Social Interests

*As an orthopaedician with many years of experience, Dr VSN Raju is now focussing on micro surgical procedures to restore traumatised limbs, crush wounds and amputations to useful function.*

Following our parents' path in the choice of career is not new to us and someone who tries to attempt something different can also come back to follow suit eventually. Dr V S N Raju, Chief Orthopaedic Surgeon and CEO of A R C Orthopaedic Clinic in Hyderabad did just that. He first pursued his graduation in Engineering and then discontinued as a sophomore to pursue medicine, inspired by his father who was an allopath. "Hereditry got me hooked. My grandfather was engaged in plantation, and always prepared his own medicines and distributed it to the poor. I decided to follow his path, because I realised how complicated Right to Health can be for the poorest of the poor," recalls Raju who grew up watching his family help the poor with their medical needs.

As an orthopaedician with many years of experience, Raju is now focussing on micro surgical procedures to restore traumatised limbs, crush wounds and amputations to useful function. "We do not let anything to be amputated and even if amputated, we do all that is needed to put it back together. For victims of domestic and industrial orthopaedic ailments, this could mean an assurance of employment and income. When you recall the impact of these surgeries, it feels like we have reconstructed lives," says Raju who has also been practicing traumatology since 1992.

Despite the rich knowledge and experience, Raju was disappointed as he had no say in the finance matters of his leadership. When his thoughts varied on the cost of a procedure, he could hardly communicate or negotiate on that.

"This was actually the trigger that led to the establishment of ARC Hospital. When it is my hospital, I will be able to decide on the cost factors. I can also choose to reduce costs for poor patients, without compromising the quality of health care. Since costs often discourage

poor from accessing health care, I wanted ARC Hospital to break the economic barrier and reach out to as many poor patients as possible," says Raju. The rich patients who were treated at ARC hospital came forward to make donations to help Raju achieve his vision. After all,



restoring limbs could help restore livelihood to many households.

Raju came to know about CSIM through an acquaintance. "As it was a short term course, I did not want to expect much. It turned out to become a mentoring process and I saw what more I could do

outside the medical field. Non-medical aspects like fund generation, regulation, registration were made easier and manageable. Exposure to different models from across the globe was a surprise to me. All my present work and things that I wanted to do sooner seemed easier now,

because I had learnt what I wanted to do," shares Raju.

According to Raju, development as a process has evolved over the years. It is now a time where social development has been prioritised along the lines of economic development, but there are large scale models with pronounced potential that have failed. Contemplating on these

***As it was a short term course at CSIM, I did not want to expect much. It turned out to become a mentoring process and I saw what more I could do outside the medical field. Non-medical aspects like fund generation, regulation, registration were made easier and manageable.***

constructs, Raju decided to diversify his engagement in the development sector. A member of many reputed institutions like the Indian Medical Association, International Society for Surgery in Orthopaedics & Traumatology, Indian Society of Surgeons for Hand, Indian Association for Occupational Health, Raju got associated with the Gargi Trust, an NGO in Hyderabad that promotes the use of natural, bio degradable materials in

food, clothing and housing industries.

Raju has personally been promoting the use of organic materials like vegetables, grains, paddy and saw dust in making Ganesh idols since 2004. More conscious of the implications of this effort, he is planning for a mass production of such Ganesh idols for school students to create awareness and encourage use of natural, perishable products. There is more that he wants to do. "Every year on the 2nd of October, I organise a cycle rally for school children to encourage cycling. Presently, I have been trying to design a container that will collect all the water dripping from air conditioners and allow birds to quench their thirst by consuming this water. We are now carrying out tests to check the suitability of this water for consumption," he explains.

Raju's efforts at personal level do not end here. Being passionate about blood and organ donation, he organises regular camps in collaboration with other likeminded organisations. He dreams of establishing an NGO in the name of SAHAS (Socially Active Hands Aided Severally) soon, whose primary task would be to create an organ donation registry. "More dreams and more tasks. They keep me going," smiles Raju.

—Shanmuga Priya.T





# Relieving the deprived of pain and instilling confidence: RAMAKRISHNAN

**Polio has varied levels of impact. Some victims have been fortunate to suffer a limited impact that does not seriously cripple them and allows them to continue with a normal life.**

**I**t is a sad reality that some people are born physically challenged. The physical challenges could be deformed limbs, disability in movement or insufficiently developed organs. Physical challenges that come with birth are usually genetic disorders. For the physically challenged, life can be testing, but they usually learn to manage and cope with over the years. Unfortunately, physically challenged people invariably are confined to a narrow range of activities, and their world view is limited to a small horizon. This kind of confinement usually happens because of their reaction to insensitivity or even outright unkindness from other people, or even because other people actually compel them to stay out of public view as much as possible, because they are seen as liabilities in their families.

In the days before eradication of polio in India, we had the misfortune to see that disease affect many children who landed up becoming physically challenged. In such cases, the disorder occurs at a young age, when the victims will not have experienced much of life. More or less, they are equivalent to the first category of people described above.

Polio has varied levels of impact. Some victims have been fortunate to suffer a limited impact that does not seriously cripple them and allows them to continue with a normal life. In those cases where deep infection hampered normal life, there was a system of support available for such affected people to pursue a near normal life.

Another category of physically challenged people is those who have the misfortune of being through accidents that physically disable them. The worse cases, of course, are those people who meet with an accident in their prime. There are many examples of young people in their teens losing limbs in accidents. These victims must learn to refocus and rebuild their lives to achieve relative normalcy.

We rarely come across a person who falls in this category, and who not only restructures his life, but also manages to set up an institution to serve the physically challenged. In this write up, we discuss S. Ramakrishnan, the founder of Amar Seva Sangam, who became a quadriplegic in 1975 at the age of 21.

**Early days:** Ramakrishnan was a brilliant student all through his childhood. He was born in to a middle class orthodox family at a village called Ayikudy, located in southern Tamil Nadu, an area that was earlier a part of the kingdom of Travancore. After completing his schooling at the Government High School



in Ayikudy, he went to Sri Paramakalyani College, Alwarkuchi, Tirunelveli district, for his pre-university course. He nursed ambitions of graduating in engineering and then serving the country by joining the Defense Services. He joined the Government College of Technology at Coimbatore, where he pursued his engineering studies. In 1975, while he was in the fourth year of his engineering course, he appeared for Defense Services examinations at Bangalore. On the last day of the physical tests, he met with an accident: he fell from a tree. He was rushed to the Air force Command Hospital in Bangalore. After the necessary medical tests, he was found to be affected with quadriplegia—a person with this condition has restricted ability to function physically, and as a consequence, one also becomes mentally and socially constrained as the spine and other parts of the nervous system connecting the limbs get severely damaged. Ramakrishnan proved this wrong by overcoming physical constraints with extraordinary mental agility and capability to fight in the society for a larger cause!

Initially, Ramakrishnan felt devastated. After four months, he was shifted to the Defense Hospital at Kirkee in Pune for further treatment. He was treated by Doctor Air Marshall Amarjit Singh Chahal and remained in the hospital until the middle of 1976. When he first came to know of his limitations, he felt miserable and was inconsolable. One can imagine and sympathize with his position. This condition was most unfortunate for a brilliant engineer from a village down

south who was aspiring to make a difference in his and others' lives by serving the nation's defense forces and bringing pride and economic well-being to his family.

Incidentally, Ramakrishnan met a Major in the hospital who told him "Once, I had more than 3,000 people reporting to me in a battalion. On a normal day, more than 1,000 people would salute me, but today I am crippled. Instead of looking backwards and lamenting over my misery, I am trying to cope with and face my destiny. I would advise you, Ramakrishnan, to face this reality with courage for the rest of your life".

Ramakrishnan's life turned topsy-turvy, from a brilliant aspiring engineer to a young man confined to his bed, needing support to carry out even the daily routines of life. He returned to Ayikudy intending to spend the rest of his life there.

**Return to Ayikudy:** Returning to Ayikudy was more a compulsion than a choice. Since the accident had happened during the selection process, he was not eligible for medical support provided to people in confirmed service. He got an opportunity to be at a Red Cross home in Bangalore. However, a Red Cross Sister there advised him that his condition would require a lot of continuous assistance from others even for daily routine, and that as a young man, he had to learn to balance his own strong spirit with support from others to fight the disablement. That was when he decided to move to Ayikudy.

Ramakrishnan's physical condition required a separate dwelling unit at

Ayikudy. He moved into an old dilapidated house just opposite the house where his family continues to live. One of his classmates from Ayikudy, who had been trained to handle him, became his great supporting pillar. Ramakrishnan had a tough time coping with the reality of his life, as his mind was agile, but his body could not catch up. His constant companion was a transistor, and he spent his time in learning about the world through radio programs.

He used to call out to people who were passing by on the street and chat with them for a while. People often avoided him. To make his life more meaningful, he used to call his three brothers and his sister and help them out with their studies. Slowly, he extended this practice to a few other people in his village. However, for the major part of the day, he felt empty, and his emptiness forced him to feel his helplessness.

Two things happened during this period. One afternoon on a working day, a sympathetic passerby gave him 10 rupees, asking him to buy something useful. This triggered the thought that people empathize with others' inability and help in small ways. He thought, "If my misfortune can make others empathize with me, why don't I create a larger purpose for my life by setting up some enterprise that would benefit other physically challenged people in the region? I see so many of my fellow humans around me who have been affected by polio or have had some disability right from birth through some genetic disorder." It was still like receiving a big favor for a physically challenged person to get a wheel chair and a suitable bed officially sanctioned, as he or she would have to submit an application and go through a lengthy process. This rubbed the emotions and self-respect of physically challenged persons on the wrong side. Ramakrishnan wants to do away with the tears of such people in his region and bring smile on their faces. Now, if we happen to interact with his beneficiaries in Ayikudy, we will experience their unfathomable joy and pride first hand!

As these thoughts were churning deep in him, he heard on the radio that 1981 had been declared the "International Year of the Disabled". Many programs were announced for disabled people through financial support in the form of aid packages and grants. In 1981, Ramakrishnan and a few friends registered his brainchild Amar Seva Sangam under the Tamil Nadu Societies Registration Act, 1975. The organization, named after his doctor and mentor Dr. Amrjit Singh, helps the physically challenged.

**Initial years:** Ramakrishnan was clear that he would organize polio eradication programs and camps, and provide support for the physically challenged in the region by enabling access to education, skill development and a secured dwelling environment. One can imagine how ambitious such a project was for a wheelchair-bound person who spent a lot of time lying down and seeking help from others for all routine functions. It was not going to be easy to get money to find its way to Ayikudy.

He had a doctor friend who was actively associated with the Rotary Club. This friend had been conducting programs on family planning and health. He offered to help Ramakrishnan. Ramakrishnan also got in touch with Dr. Venkataswamy of Aravind Eye Hospital and Foundation. Dr. Venkataswamy motivated Ramakrishnan to pursue his dreams. He also connected Ramakrishnan to other social activists. Things were not always positive. There was a number of depressing experiences as well. Ramakrishnan recalls how the father of one of his friends coerced him to submit application to five different sources and managed to get paltry support in return. However, this did not dissuade Ramakrishnan as he looked into the positive side of this!

Ramakrishnan decided that he would travel to Chennai to mobilize funds. In Chennai, he stayed at his cousin's house at Valsaravakkam and moved around in a taxi to meet people. He used to leave home by 8 am and had continuous meetings with people until around 3 pm. After his taxi driver dropped him back home and left, he would freshen up and request his uncles to support him in writing diary and a letter of thanks to all those met during the day. Many a time, he would not get a hearing from those whom he approached for fund. This never deterred him from his efforts to seek support. This phase lasted 6 to 8 months in 1990.

A famous author, Siva Sankari, published a 5-page story about him titled '*Uchimeethu vaanidinthu veezkindra pothilum*' in the Ananda Vikatan magazine. After reading this article, Sulochana from Kolkata sent him a number of letters of encouragement, together with a contribution. She also connected him with the Jindal Trust for further contribution. Ramakrishnan learnt from the Jindal Trust that more than frugality, appropriate utilization is the key to effective use of development finance, and he started using his resources meaningfully. One must understand that he was not an Accountant, nor could he afford one! He expanded his tuition centre and Kindergarten to Primary School with the funds.

Ramakrishnan got a few introductions and references to great musicians in 1991. He went to a famous Carnatic singer's house, but her secretary advised not to meet as she has become old. However, on seeing Ramakrishnan being moved from his wheelchair to the car, the secretary became compassionate and got an immediate appointment. As Ramakrishnan entered the house to wait for the musician, a female voice welcomed him by name. The lady had heard about him through a known source to her at Ayikudy who used to

sympathize with him. He achieved another breakthrough that day when the Carnatic singer and her husband supported him with funds and promised to help him mobilize more funds.

Ramakrishnan used to visit another legendary Carnatic musician. He was not received with kindness, and was given a small amount of money as a token donation. He had to be literally carried from his car to the place of meeting and back. That day, as his driver was carrying him back to the car, he told the legendary singer that he was the grandson of Ayikudy Shri. A.K. Ramakrishnan, a well-known social worker who got facilities like school and hospital for people in and around Ayikudy. After reaching Ayikudy, Ramakrishnan was pleasantly surprised to receive a more substantial financial contribution as well as a commitment to help his cause.

These great musicians encouraged him to organize performances for fundraising. Another well-known musician, Maharajapuram Santhanam, performed at an event.

**Humble beginning at Ayikudy:** Ramakrishnan bought an old house and refurbished it. He started running support classes at this place for children in his village by appointing a few teachers. He also took in a few physically challenged persons as residents in the house. He started some skill development activities for those who wanted to earn some money for their livelihood. He had surveyed the region with local support, and tried to connect with physically challenged people to encourage them to make use of Amar Seva Sangam.

He used to dream a lot. Sometimes, his associates thought that he was in an imaginary world of his own, and used to spare time to listen to him out of respect and sympathy! He recalls how passionately Vice President of Amar Seva Sangam who by profession a mason used to come regularly after dinner at 7.30 pm and listen to him until they retired to bed. According to Ramakrishnan, his dreams were real influences in his activities and helped him to be a visionary.

Though his was a visionary effort he managed with strong leadership, it had its own challenges. He required constantly larger investments and organization capabilities to run his services. This resulted in more fund raising trips to different places. Ramakrishnan recalls the support of his driver Ramachandran at Chennai and the emotional bonding that developed between them. Ramachandran was using a cab painted in the traditional dark black and yellow. Security at certain offices did not allow the taxi into the premises. One day Ramachandran did not come to work. Ramakrishnan was worried that Ramachandran had been dissuaded by the limitations on cabs in the name of protocol. The next day he saw, to his surprise, that Ramachandran had repainted his taxi black. He proudly told Ramakrishnan that driving on fund raising activities for a noble cause was more emotionally satisfying than running a commercial taxi. This kind of bondage was important for Ramakrishnan as he

continued his struggle toward institution building.

Meanwhile, in 1987 a letter to Sulochana returned undelivered, as the addressee could not be found. This worried Ramakrishnan. To his surprise later, Sulochana connected with Amar Seva and visited them. Ramakrishnan came to know then that she is the spouse of a nationalized bank's Chairman.

A friend from Tenkasi and another friend who was his classmate introduced Ramakrishnan to a scientist who was active with the Jaycees in Tuticorin. This scientist gave Ramakrishnan and Amar Seva introductions to Jaycees members at the state and the national level.

**Meeting of minds:** In 1991, Dr. T.S. Chandra, Professor, IIT, Madras requested Ramakrishnan to come for a meeting with a select audience of members of the Tamil Nadu Physically Handicapped Welfare Association. At an event organized by Amar Seva Sangam following this meet is where Ramakrishnan met the parents of S. Sankara Raman, a Chartered Accountant who had been physically handicapped by a genetic disorder. They were impressed by the work that Ramakrishnan was doing and told Sankara Raman about it. After a few discussion and visits, Sankara Raman decided to join Ramakrishnan.

Ramakrishnan was particular that Sankara Raman must be comfortable at Ayikudy. They all lived in the same premises and created office space that could help them to be independent and work comfortably on their joint mission. Ramakrishnan being the President of Amar Seva Sangam, focused more on connecting with people and stakeholders, while Sankara Raman worked as the Secretary, with larger operating responsibilities. It may be noted here that even the most professional of organizations often experience severe leadership stress when people of a high caliber and high aspirations come together. One can imagine just how challenging it could have been for physically challenged people with different levels of energy, stamina and agility to come together for a bigger cause. The Ramakrishnan-Sankara Raman team succeeded in overcoming all obstacles because of oneness of purpose.

**Family support:** Ramakrishnan mentions that everything he achieved became possible only because of the relentless support and confidence boosting given by his parents and siblings. His father always encouraged him to think progressively and face the world with courage. The contributions of his siblings were equally humongous.

Ramakrishnan fondly recollects one particular incident. During the early days of fund raising, Ramakrishnan used to reach out to people who were of high standing in society through references. Bharat Ratna C. Subramaniam was a huge supporter of Ramakrishnan's cause. Similarly, he got in touch with a leading cricket star of those days through a reference. The cricketer invited him to Bombay, now called as Mumbai. Ramakrishnan and his brother decided to travel by train to Mumbai. He lacked the confidence to travel far for

pursuing this further. He had a temperature and felt sick. His younger brother still wanted him to pursue his journey. His brother had written to his friends at Chennai about their plans. To the surprise of Ramakrishnan, 15 people came to Chennai Railway Station, took him to a hospital and arranged for his treatment. Once he was discharged, they continued onward to Mumbai.

However, the meeting at Mumbai was not fruitful, as the potential donor insisted that the beneficiary had to be a resident of Mumbai. Though Ramakrishnan was disappointed, his brother felt that the experience was a key lesson for them. Building an infrastructure in and around Ayikudy for the benefit of the physically challenged in the region was a dream to translate into reality!

Ramakrishnan is married and his wife supports him strongly. His marriage itself was an interesting turn of event in the life of such an uncommon person! He narrated to the author the first time he heard the voice of his wife in a school music program. He asked her to meet him. Impressed by her desire to teach poor students, he proposed to her in 1986. She asked for time to reply to the proposal, but confirmed her willingness to support him in his endeavors to help the physically challenged achieve independence. Ramakrishnan mentions: "She lavishly cared me when it was unsolicited! She showed interest in office administration and her contribution was unique in various ways." However, they were able to marry only after a decade.

Ramakrishnan respected the space required for any person to pursue his or her dreams and become independent. He holds the view that it was this attitude that led to his family, friends and the media supporting his endeavors. A number of magazines covered his life story and featured articles on the success of Amar Seva. Awards and accolades are still pouring in. Ramakrishnan does not allow them to sway him away from his goal of helping the physically challenged to live with self-pride and confidence.

**Conclusion:** Ramakrishnan and Sankara Raman's efforts have culminated in a large organization that touches the lives of thousands of physically challenged people every year. Ramakrishnan's grit and commitment to making a difference to his own life and to those of his fellow physically disabled are phenomenal. The compassion and contribution of good-hearted people in mobilizing resources for a good cause were important in converting his dreams into reality. How much direct help a physically challenged person gets does count, but more important is how much he incorporates social goodwill into his own efforts to become an effective social entrepreneur serving the deprived humans of society. Just think of this: for every Ramakrishnan the society comes out with, the lives of a few hundred or even a few thousand physically challenged people undergo appreciable improvements!

— This is part of the book "*Incredible Champions*" authored by N. Chandrasekaran and published by Partridge Publishers 2014.



# Growing an idea

*In keeping with the traditional Guru-Sishya Parampara model of mentorship, mentors often take budding entrepreneurs at BYST, under their fold.*

In 1991, Lakshmi Venkataraman Venkatesan, daughter of the Late President R Venkataraman set the ball rolling for the establishment of a trust. With the support of eminent industrialists JRD Tata and Rahul Bajaj, establishing the Bharatiya Yuva Shakti Trust (BYST) was a landmark that she helped achieve. Through the course of the next 24 years, BYST would go on to change the lives of India's youth. When the trust was formed in 1991, its purpose was simple: provide support to budding entrepreneurs and thereby aid in job creation. "We began by handing out a seed capital of Rs 50,000 per entrepreneur and helped his venture by way of providing him or her with able mentorship," says the head of the Tamil Nadu Circle of the Bharatiya Yuva Shakti Trust. For 16 years, BYST continued functioning through financial assistance and mentorship, with its singular goal more-or-less achieved.

In 2007, however, a turning point in BYST's journey would forever change the trust's approach towards entrepreneurship. After tying up with a number of nationalised banks, BYST soon began evolving its model. "These banks were willing to sanction loans of one lakh rupees to as much as fifty lakh rupees," says the Tamil Nadu Circle official. Incidentally, such loans were provided without demands of security or collateral of any kind. BYST, however, still had an important role to play. It's a role that it plays even to this day: mentorship. "Our Co-founder Lakshmi Venkatesan got the mentorship idea from Prince Charles," explains the official. "It has, since, been one of our favourite models of nurturing entrepreneurship." In keeping with the traditional Guru-Sishya Parampara model of mentorship, mentors often take budding entrepreneurs at BYST, under their fold. "Our mentors conduct due diligence as far the prospective candidate is concerned, his business idea, paper verification, and we help the shortlisted candidate secure a loan from the bank," explains the official. "Our mentors accompany the entrepreneur even while he is being interviewed by the bank. Once a loan is sanctioned and the money disbursed, a one-to-one mentorship model is introduced, and our prospective entrepreneur is hand-held through his entrepreneurship journey."

All mentors at BYST are volunteers.



***In keeping with the traditional Guru-Sishya Parampara model of mentorship, mentors often take budding entrepreneurs at BYST, under their fold.***

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The one-on-one mentorship lasts for about 24 months. The role of a mentor is realized in areas where the entrepreneur lacks experience. "Although an entrepreneur may be technically sound, he may not know how to maintain accounts, or may not be well-versed in licensing or branding. That's where our voluntary mentors step up." Accordingly, BYST helps entrepreneurs organise trade shows in an attempt to provide market support to the entrepreneur. "But the bigger picture, the long-term plan is to create jobs," says the official. "We want job-seekers to turn into job-givers."

In the Tamil Nadu circle alone, BYST has so far launched 788 entrepreneurs (as of last year). Since its inception, the trust has launched nearly 4,500

entrepreneurs across India, while the last fiscal year alone saw 113 entrepreneurs in Tamil Nadu. More than 500 entrepreneurs all India were launched in the last fiscal year alone. That year also saw the trust tie up with Assam's Entrepreneur Generation Mission (EGM) programme. "Just last year in Orissa, with the support of Tata steel, we launched a project in the State, as we did in Aurangabad with the help of Bajaj." The trust is now looking at expanding its Tamil Nadu Circle in the attempt to move beyond Chennai and Kanchipuram, where it has so far, established its presence.

However, not all who apply generally get the support they want. Since its inception, the trust has counselled more than 75,000 entrepreneurs, while basic

training has been imparted to nearly 10,000 to 15,000 entrepreneurs. "In Tamil Nadu alone, just last year, we counselled 1,400 entrepreneurs, and sent nearly 550 for training, while only 113 entrepreneurs were picked for the next stage."

As long as it has been around, BYST has helped in a great manner. Part of its noble work includes creating success stories. The trust has also notched up some impressive employment numbers. "For every entrepreneur we train, we manage to get at least 10 people employed, with an average loan amount of Rs 5 lakh per entrepreneur." BYST has its presence in some of India's major

cities like Chennai and Delhi. The aim now, is to get BYST all over India, while creating public awareness about the trust is also numero uno on its priority list. "Financial institutions also have no qualms supporting these entrepreneurs since our presence matters a lot. These banks trust us," says the official. "We also have a non-performing asset of just 0.28%, which means that all our entrepreneurs are immediate success stories."

One of the more interesting initiatives that the trust has launched is the 'green box'. "A number of prospective entrepreneurs go to banks for assistance. Bankers don't normally

have the time for such business ideas. We managed to set up a green box at most of our partner banks," says the official. "Whenever a prospective entrepreneur would visit a bank branch for financial support, he would be redirected to the green box, where he would drop in his contact details. We at BYST then get back to him and help him work out his financial requirements."

The goal now, BYST says is to reach one lakh entrepreneurs in the next five years. "That means, we also plan on having created 10 lakh jobs by 2020. That's a target that we are keen on meeting. It will be a perfect conclusion to the years of work."





# Closer to giving every indian a health account

*At present, nearly one million users book close to 1,20,000 appointments on a monthly basis at Practo.*

**P**racto, Asia's largest doctor search engine has a monthly tally of one million users who book close to 1,20,000 appointments through its platform. In just a year, its mobile application has grown exponentially to account for 60 per cent of its user traffic and with a mobile-first approach, the team is looking to generate far greater usage in this fiscal. The healthcare industry in India today is growing at a CAGR of 17 per cent according to a report published by Indian Brand Equity Foundation. By 2017, the report suggests that the market size will grow to US\$160 billion and by 2020, US\$280 billion. It is no wonder then that many new businesses are identifying a niche for themselves in this space to service this growing market. One such business is Bengaluru-based Practo Technologies (Practo), a prominent doctor search engine in Asia. At present, nearly one million users book close to 1,20,000 appointments on a monthly basis at Practo.

When we last spoke to Practo in May 2014 the company was gearing up towards its growth phase and inching closer to its founder's vision of enabling every individual to have a health account. In February 2015, the company received its latest round of funding to the tune of US\$30 million from Sequoia Capital and Matrix Partners. The company intends to utilise a large portion of this towards strengthening its team, entering new geographies and spreading the word on its efforts.

## Gaining ground

Over the last fiscal, Practo has expanded to over 37 cities across India, Singapore and Philippines

THEN	NOW
Strength: 200	Strength: 1,000
Presence: 6 cities in India	Presence: 37 cities including Singapore and Manila
Investors: Sequoia Capital	Investors: Sequoia Capital, Matrix Partners
Investment: US\$ 5 million	Investment: Second round of US\$ 30 million

and is looking to enter new, developing markets. "We are interested in developing countries where mobile Internet penetration is growing at a pace that is similar to India's or lagging just behind," says Shashank ND, co-founder, Practo. It also took the inorganic route to growth by acquiring FitHo, a lifestyle disease management application and website, in April 2015. In the next half of the current fiscal, Practo will make use of FitHo's proprietary technology to launch a new preventive product while the latter's founders, Dhruv Gupta and Prachi Gupta, will join its management team

as product head for preventive healthcare and general manager-operations (new segments), respectively. "FitHo is first of several acquisitions we are exploring. It is the next step in our mission to make a single health app which offers consumers a more comprehensive solution ranging from preventive to curative healthcare," adds Shashank.

In this time period Practo has had significant traction on mobile with the medium accounting for nearly 60 per cent of its overall user traffic. "About 80 per cent of our bookings are happening through the mobile and this is a definite focus area for us," shares Shashank. With mobile technology driving the healthcare industry through increased penetration, especially in tier-II and tier-III regions, Practo has hit a growth rate of nearly 25 per cent from 5 per cent in the previous fiscal, for these regions.

## Hiring smart

To keep pace with the company's growth, its team has grown exponentially from about 200 last May to its current strength of over 1,000 employees. By the end of this fiscal, Shashank shares that the company is likely to grow to 2,000 employees to support its operations world over. "We made the second highest number of job offers (25) at Indian School of Business this year," says Shashank, while reiterating that hiring from top-end business and technology institutions has helped upgrade the quality of the team. This being said, the company is also encouraging of young employees who come from business schools in the Tier-II and Tier-III regions, to join its workforce.

Shashank points out that hiring the right member remains a primary challenge for the company and the founding team and top management spend a fair bit of their time in making qualitative assessments on whom to hire.

Shashank also emphasises that attrition is minimal at Practo thanks to its flat structure and transparent work culture. "At Practo, culture is of extreme importance to us. Our employees are called Practeons and we spend enormous energy in finding like-minded people who want to join us to solve problems that people haven't even dared to solve before. Our motto is 'do-great' which means that every Practeon wants to excel at everything they do, not for want of reward or recognition (which they get) but because that is what they expect of themselves," he elaborates.

## Making the right noise

Practo is well aware of the need to generate awareness about what it does and for this very reason, it has invested heavily in marketing, especially on mass media such as television. The recently concluded Indian Premier League saw Practo advertise alongside some of the biggest players across various industries and it is this aggressive approach that is helping the brand gain top recall in the healthcare segment. "Through our television campaign we want to put out the word to people to stop ignoring their health niggles and to take immediate action to address these," says Shashank. Practo has also invested in social media and has orchestrated special campaigns such as its Mother's Day special video. "In just a couple of days the video went viral and had over a half million hits," states Shashank.

In the short while that it has been around, Practo has proven that it is not afraid to go out and create a big wave of change by way of urging technology adoption to meet healthcare needs. Given that the company has its checks and balances in place to seize growth opportunities that come its way, Practo is one of the exciting prospects to emerge in the Indian health-tech space.

—Divya M. Chandramouli  
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# The Colours of Regenboog

*From a mobile medical clinic, Regenboog has morphed to provide what the poor needed.*

The recent finding that 85 percent of our population does not have any kind of support to meet their medical expenditure is not much of a surprise. This could be due to increased privatisation of health services and the resultant increasing costs of health care that pushes many families below poverty line. Planners and social scientists rightly call this ‘catastrophic health expenditure’. With more than 50 percent of the population depending on private health care services, increasing costs force households to dig into their savings to access good quality health care. Worse is the case of families who do not possess any such back up that can come in handy during need. Mr Madhan Mohan, Founder of Regenboog India Foundation in Thiruvannamalai, knows this better.

Soon after his graduation in Physics, Madhan Mohan worked with a charity organisation in Thiruvannamalai, a town situated 185 km from Chennai. Disheartened with misappropriate utilisation of resources and planning of programmes, he left to gain experience in the corporate sector in the Finance and Administration units. Chennai and Bangalore, as metro cities, exposed Madhan Mohan to multiple possibilities within and outside the corporate sector. As someone still figuring out his path, he took over Arunachala Village School Trust, a school for the poor children in Thiruvannamalai, initiated by a therapist from Switzerland. “As a young President of this organisation, all that mattered and also guided me was my father’s words – happiness comes from making others happy,” recalls Madhan Mohan.

Alongside all these developments in his life, his father’s health worsened as they could not access the necessary treatment. “There was no proper medical care available here. We were not able to help my father in anyway and, we lost him in 1998,” says Madhan Mohan who soon resolved to build a hospital in this town that would offer medical care for poor people. Thus, Regenboog India Foundation was founded in 2006. “Naming an organisation is as crucial as establishing it. In a town like ours, everything started with Lord Shiva’s name ‘Arunachala’. I wanted to give a name that aroused curiosity and made people listen to our thoughts. While we



zeroed in on ‘rainbow’ we realised that there were many organisations with this name. So chose to use the Dutch word for rainbows. This was how our organisation got its name,” smiles Madhan Mohan.

In order to help people in remote areas access quality health care, Regenboog India Foundation started a mobile clinic that currently serves over 38,000 patients every year. ‘This mobile clinic visits remote rural villages five days a week (Monday to Friday) and is manned by a professionally qualified and well-experienced team that consists of a doctor, two nurses, a pharmacist, a lab technician and a driver cum social worker. The team examines the patients and offers treatments and medicines at the doorstep of villagers, free of cost.

The mobile clinic does not stop only with treatment, but also offers health education and counseling. The team raises awareness on various issues such as diabetes, hypertension, vitamin deficiencies, arthritis, and various kinds of air and waterborne diseases’. With consistent efforts to improve the reach of services, Regenboog has built its capacity to reach double the number of patients this year. When you see your initiative growing and creating a positive impact in many lives, you naturally begin to dream bigger. I also did. I felt the need to do much more in order to ensure some kind of support services to the poor people of Thiruvannamalai,” says Madhan Mohan who wants to focus on



the issue of abandoned girl children next.

With many children getting abandoned and those with single parents having to miss their childhood to add to the family’s earnings, there were many children, especially girls, who require extra care and protection to re-live their childhood. Moved by the plight of these girls, Regenboog India Foundation started ‘Sarasvathi Children’s Home’ to provide education along with life skills and extra-curricular activities. The girls are also taught yoga here. Completely solar powered and fed by an organic garden, the home serves as a landmark to the Vedyappanur village. Children are allowed to participate in planning, budgeting, admission of new girl children and also assist in resolving issues within the campus. This makes them realise their right to participation and become able decision makers.

As the work with children in this home progressed, Regenboog team observed many slum kids being out of school. “Parents in the slums hardly had time to introspect on the significance of education for their children. With inevitable apprehensions of economic pursuit, their children are left vulnerable to anti-social practices like child labour and child marriage. It was therefore crucial to start learning centres for such children that guaranteed education for all and left no room for school drop-outs,” recounts Madhan Mohan.

Evening schools engaged children

after school hours, and during exams classes were conducted before school hours. “When teachers ask children how their day was, children have a whole lot of stories to narrate. They are happy when they are heard!” says Madhan Mohan.

While evening schools support over 550 children, Regenboog also became conscious of the distractions for children and decided to inculcate the habit of reading amongst rural children. The Mobile Library Project was initiated in 2010 to distribute books to children on a fortnightly basis. “This is a very cost effective initiative. We began with just a motorbike and few hundred books. We had to increase our capacity to keep up with the growing enthusiasm of the children,” says Madhan Mohan. Regenboog purchased an ACE vehicle in 2013 and equipped this mobile library with a power supply unit, adequate lighting and storage spaces to display more than 3,000 books. The library will soon reach a subscription of 12,000 readers.

From a mobile medical clinic, Regenboog has morphed to provide what the poor needed. As cost effective initiatives, the programmes have been able to reach a wider audience and sustain the impact created. Still observant of the community’s needs, Regenboog has many more colours to reveal!

—Shanmuga Priya.T



## Inspiring Conversations with Shri Ramana Maharishi

D.: The world is materialistic. What is the remedy for it?

M.: Materialistic or spiritual, it is according to your outlook. *Drishtim jnanamayim kritva, Brahma mayam pasyet jagat* — Make your outlook right. The Creator knows how to take care of His Creation.

D.: What is the best thing to do for ensuring the future?

M.: Take care of the present, the future will take care of itself.

D.: The future is the result of the present. So, what should I do to make it good? Or should I keep still?

M.: Whose is the doubt? Who is it that

wants a course of action? Find the doubter. If you hold the doubter the doubts will disappear. Having lost hold of the Self the thoughts afflict you; the world is seen, doubts arise, also anxiety for the future. Hold fast to the Self, these will disappear.

D.: How to do it?

M.: This question is relevant to matters of non-self, but not to the Self. Do you doubt the existence of your own Self?

D.: No. But still, I want to know how the Self could be realised. Is there any method leading to it?

M.: Make effort. Just as water is got by boring a well, so also you realise the Self by investigation.

D.: Yes. But some find water readily and others with difficulty.

M.: But you already see the moisture on the surface. You are hazily aware of the Self. Pursue it. When the effort ceases the Self shines forth.

D.: How to train the mind to look within?

M.: By practice. The mind is the intelligent phase leading to its own destruction, for Self to manifest.

D.: How to destroy the mind?

M.: Water cannot be made dry water. Seek the Self; the mind will be destroyed.

—Excerpted from talks with  
Shri Ramana Maharish



## Cost Management – Vitamin M for action

Cost or Money is an important and vital factor in managing the project. It is like a vitamin – too much or too less / deficiency becomes an issue. Right amount, right usage at the right time for the right things gives the maximum benefit. More than the availability of Money, it is the management of the cost that needs greater focus. Whatever the nature of business, the minute there is a task to be accomplished, that would need resources & the cost factor occupies a significant space.

In social organizations, right from funding until the end of project, 'COST' and its management occupies significant time and energy. Added to this not all social entrepreneurs are number savvy. They in fact think that engagement with numbers many a time eats away the creativity and ideation from their minds. Therefore, though it is a vital and critical factor, management of costs does not get the space, energy and time that it actually requires in social organizations. These also make the cost management more a retrospective auditing exercise than a proactive planning exercise.

Cost is an amount that has to be paid or spent to buy or obtain something. In a business context, cost is usually a monetary valuation of effort, material, resources, time and utilities consumed, risks incurred, and opportunity forgone in production and delivery of a good or service. In a social organization more than the cost that is to be incurred we need to focus on the ROI – return on investment for the expenses incurred. All cost may be expenses but all expenses are not costs. Some may be assets that have a long term earning or growing capacity. For example, training or project management may involve cost but it may enhance the skill and productivity. They may have high ROI.

When there is an estimated budget calculated, it is important to keep an eye on the costs that are incurred. If constant

monitoring and management were not there, the leakages would drain the resource. Any project over run or mismanagement including incorrect estimates affects the costs. Sometimes unrealistic designs, projected duration of the tasks, approvals, human resource required can add up to cost over runs. Changes in the scope of the project are a major contributor. A social organization is highly dependent on the Donor's funding and dynamic context makes cost management an energy drainer for many social entrepreneurs.

How do we make cost management a simple, regular process in project management? There are two dimensions – a) the technical aspect of cost management and b) the mindsets that promote cost management. Technical aspects can be relatively managed with expert advice and support; but the mindset has to be acquired through having the right beliefs that will seem cost as a vital, simple, essential process of project management. Both are discussed in the following paragraphs.

There are varieties of costs that are incurred and need to be managed – Fixed Cost; Variable Cost; Direct labor; Indirect or Overhead; Opportunity cost and so on. Each of these costs have to be planned and accurately estimated with a large amount of data pertaining to understanding the scope of work; time schedule; environmental factors; people required and so on. Some of the well-known estimation methods are:

- Expert Judgment
- Analogous Estimating
- Parametric Estimating
- Bottom-Up Estimating
- Three-Point Estimates
- Reserve Analysis
- Cost of Quality
- Project Management Software
- Vendor Bid Analysis
- Group Decision-Making Techniques

One of the most commonly used formulas is PERT- Program Evaluation Review Technique to ESTIMATE COST = (Pessimistic + 4\*(Most likely) + Optimistic) / 6. This formula will ensure that we do not just stop with simple averages but go ahead and take the best case, worst case and most likely case into consideration for estimation.

Advantage of using appropriate techniques would eradicate guesswork and assumption based estimations. There are many techniques available for budgeting exercise. Using these methods / techniques would ensure a strong and clear budget output that can help you define the cost baseline, project-funding requirements, and this can get added to the overall plan. Monitoring Work Performance Information, Cost Forecasts, Change Requests, and Project Management Plan Updates would help monitor costs.

The usual cost mindsets that social organizations have:–

- That money is from the donor and so I am totally responsible for every rupee. For this thriftiness is essential.
- In order to show cost management spending energy, time and resource on paper work and bookkeeping, auditing and evidence is justified.
- Coming from varied backgrounds, we cannot read numbers, it is difficult, and it is a headache. Therefore, budgeting and monitoring are not interesting activities.
- The main concern is money in and money out and the real requirements are only considered based on money available. Finding money is not easy and not many can do it. Therefore, it is better to live within the resources available.

The appropriate mindsets for cost consciousness in a social organization

would include -

- Knowing how much different products and services cost, and not wanting to spend more money than is necessary is being cost conscious.
- To keep a tab, using technology on where the money is drawn on a weekly basis - is that in our delivery, training, execution, audits/ compliance, user experience/ benefit, people/resources or any other petty areas.
- Being aware and constantly deliberating and strategising for optimal methods / ways to monitor and control the cost through innovative alternatives and constant sourcing for better methods and better products.
- Monitoring better through strong vendor – supplier management; transparency as deemed appropriate in managing funds; understanding legal and compliance requirements; Look for open source, free, technology driven solutions rather than licensed / lock-in models of engagement ; Look at flexible and dynamic contracting models which can help you evolve are some measures
- Having a collaborative execution system, communication channels would help monitor costs better
- Common sense drives costs better. Cost management is not about being frugal mindlessly. It is a discipline and self-directed process of mindful management on a day-to-day basis of all the relevant resources that needs money to be used. It is actually ensuring that the vision and scope of the project is never sacrificed due to Vitamin Cost/ Money deficiency.

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath and Prathaap B





## Social Entrepreneurship can complement business entrepreneurship

A panel discussion held during the alumni meet of Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) Hyderabad on 27 June 2015 concluded with a message that social entrepreneurship and business entrepreneurship are complementary to each other, and both types of entrepreneurship should be promoted. The theme of the panel discussion was: “Need of the hour-- Social Entrepreneur or Business Entrepreneur”. The panel included Dr. Kinnera Murthy, Ex Dean of ASCI; Mr. Mangesh Gupte, Head of CSR, Dr. Reddy's; Ms. Padma Rajgopal, Industrialist; and Mr. Diyanat Ali, Founder & CEO of Greater Hyderabad Adventure Club and Outlife. The panel discussion was moderated by Mr. Sanjay Vomkrey, a student of CSIM.

The panelists noted the growing importance of social entrepreneurship in India for ensuring inclusive development. It was highlighted that

while business entrepreneurs focus on wealth generation, social entrepreneurs work for social change. The country needs wealth as well as social equity. The need for collaboration between corporate organizations and social entrepreneurs was also stressed.

This panel discussion was part of the alumni meet of CSIM Hyderabad, and it was organized by the 25th batch participants attending NGO Management and Social Entrepreneurship course in partnership with CSIM staff. The organizing committee included Chintamani, Sandip Poddar, Ajendra, Vibha and Sanjay (all students). The function was coordinated by Ms. Vibha Jain, an entrepreneur and student of CSIM. Over 70 persons participated in the meet.

The meet started with presentation of a brief report on the work of CSIM since its inception.

During the meet, presentations were

made by members of alumni group, sponsors of the event and a few NGOs (Helping Hand Humanity, Wave Foundation, Cherish Foundation, Ashray Akruti, Magas Life and Youth4Jobs). In addition, Dr. V.S.N.Raju, a socially conscious Orthopedic Surgeon (and alumnus of CSIM) discussed his experience in treating patients from economically weaker sections with a spirit of social service.

The event proved to be a good forum for interactions and networking. The need for organizing alumni meet on an annual basis was highlighted during the meet.

At the end of the meet, Prof. KL Srivastava, Director, CSIM Hyderabad, thanked the alumni, faculty members, mentors and guests for their contribution towards social change and making the event a success.

—KL Srivastava



## Editorial

Latha Suresh  
Marie Banu

## CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INITIATIVE AND MANAGEMENT

Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) is a unit of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani. It is a learning centre that promotes the concept of social entrepreneurship. CSIM offers training and consultancy to social enterprises – for-profits and non-profits – to facilitate

them to apply successful business practices and yet retain their social mission. It also offers training and hand holding support to prospective social entrepreneurs and enable them to launch their social initiatives. CSIM operates in Chennai, Coimbatore, Hyderabad and Bangalore.

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CSIM also facilitates Social Audit for social enterprises through Social Audit Network, UK and SAN, India.  
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## “Giving back to the society is not only imperative to the company’s growth, but also an earnest reflection of the values it stands for.”

**Chandrasekaran shares with Marie Banu about two Corporate Social Responsibility arms of Cognizant.**

**S**hri. R. Chandrasekaran has over 25 years of experience in the global information technology industry and is the Group Chief Executive, Technology & Operations at Cognizant Technology Solutions, which is a part of the NASDAQ 100 and S&P 500 indices, and the Fortune 500 list.

His experience spans key functions such as corporate strategy, customer relationship management, and business development and operations management. Chandra has been associated with Cognizant since its founding in 1994, propelling its growth into a global delivery organization, spearheading newer solutions and championing crucial process initiatives.

As an Executive Officer at Cognizant, he drives the Company’s global delivery management, capacity growth and process initiatives, proactively nurturing key alliances and leveraging business partnerships. Prior to joining Cognizant, Chandra worked with Tata Consultancy Services, and was responsible for setting up its offices across the US and Europe. He has a Bachelor’s degree in Mechanical Engineering from Regional Engineering College, Trichy, and an MBA from the IIM, Bangalore.

*In an interview, Chandrasekaran shares with Marie Banu about two Corporate Social Responsibility arms of Cognizant.*

**IT industry plays a major role in India’s financial economy. How do you think it can contribute**

**to the social economy and development?**

Technology companies bring a huge employment potential not just within the IT industry but also create ancillary jobs. For every IT job there are three to four ancillary jobs created and with the expansion of IT companies into Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, they increasingly contribute to both the financial economy and social development in these areas. Every year when new entrants join us in our campus, we notice the profile of the graduates joining us changing – many of them are from rural/semi urban areas. We also see Parents accompany some of them and they are all proud that their wards have a bright future ahead of them.

IT industry is uniquely positioned to leverage its core competencies to enable NGO partners to scale and sustain their social development programs. They can bring their strong experience in program management and technology and help social programs drive larger societal impact.

Being a part of an industry with a vast pool of knowledge workers gives them immense opportunities to play a key role in these programs.

Cognizant engages and leverages the passion, skill and experience of our associates such that their vast knowledge and technical and managerial skills add value to our CSR initiatives in Education, Digital Literacy and supporting technology-focused projects.

**What is Cognizant’s role in this?**

At Cognizant, we firmly believe that corporate actions play a very important role in creating a climate of positive opinion and that giving back to the society is not only imperative to the company’s growth, but also an earnest reflection of the values it stands for.

Cognizant Foundation and Outreach are two Corporate Social Responsibility arms of Cognizant, spearheading our initiatives in the field of community service.

**Cognizant Foundation (CF):** Established with the objective of improving, guiding and inspiring the lives of underprivileged people, Cognizant Foundation focuses primarily on the areas of Education, Health care and Livelihood. The prime objective of Cognizant Foundation is to reach out to the economically & socially backward sections of the Society and make a meaningful impact in their lives and in their quest for a better future. The Foundation supports deserving institutions/organizations working in the focus areas of Education & Health care, through financial support towards equipment purchase & enhancement of infrastructure facilities. The project locations are spread across India, mostly in states where Cognizant has offices.

**Cognizant Outreach:** Towards the end of 2007 when Cognizant crossed the second billion dollar revenue mark, the Outreach program was launched to address the twin challenges that were prevalent : to improve the quality of education; and to provide an official and unified platform for interested Cognizant employees to participate in community service initiatives, focused entirely on education. The program was a perfect bridge between the employees of Cognizant who are passionate about giving back to society and the schools which are in need of a holistic support for the long-term towards improving the quality of education through sustained corporate partnerships.

When we started this program we didn’t realize how much we are going to get back in return. It is so gratifying to see the smiles on people’s faces, sparkles in children’s eyes. We have seen hope, that inspires us to move ahead and dream bigger.

Sound stewardship of natural resources is another pillar of Cognizant’s CSR initiatives. Cognizant has successfully pursued a range of efforts to reduce impact on the environment to protect vital and irreplaceable resources and better manage climate change risks. Cognizant sustainability team “Go Green” also extends their expertise and passion in improving Cognizant’s environmental practices around the communities we live and work to make a positive impact to the environment.

**Campus Connect:** Cognizant is committed to comprehensive professional development and training programs for the underprivileged through Campus Connect projects. Campus Connect mainly focuses on providing various skills to the underprivileged enabling them to seek employment opportunities.

**With the government being more firm**

**on foreign funding for NGOs, they will be now dependent on corporate funding for their projects. Your thoughts?**

The new legislation will bring in a sizeable number of medium sized companies under its ambit. In general, the societal impact is expected to be positive with the added CSR participation of such mid-sized companies spread across the country. Even before the new legislation was introduced, large corporations were already driving CSR initiatives. Larger corporates who have built strength for implementing these programs can guide/mentor others with their expertise in program selection, governance and in choosing the right partners to maximize the impact of their CSR spends. It is important to choose the right NGO partners with track record of legal and financial compliance and creating the right impact to the society.

**You head/associated with Nasscom foundation. What social initiatives are they involved in and what is your contribution to society through Nasscom?**

One of the key drivers for formation of Nasscom foundation is to promote social development through the application of ICT leveraging the strengths of its member companies. The Nasscom Foundation focuses on two functional program areas – Fostering ICT for development and promoting Business responsibility within the IT industry in India.

Nasscom acts as a catalyst capturing and disseminating best practices and encouraging the member companies to do more and as a channel partner for CSR activities of the member companies through its various programs such as Skills initiative to enable meaningful employment through ICT, Disability Initiative to build inclusive workplaces, Impact Sourcing to facilitate hiring from excluded communities, Nasscom Social Innovation Forum to nurture and promote technology innovations for inclusive growth etc.

National Digital Literacy Mission (NDLM) is one such initiative aligned to the Government of India’s vision of making one person in each and every household in the country digitally literate by 2020. NDLM is a platform created for digital literacy awareness and training programs in both rural and urban communities empowering them to fully participate and interact in an increasingly digital world. With the participation of Nasscom Member companies and their collective efforts to bring down the divisive digital wall will help India take a lead in shaping an inclusive global digital economy.

