

Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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Cover Story - Pg 6

GREEN REVOLUTION

About Exnora International and its programmes



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Alumni Talk Pg 3

Reviving rural lives
Arulmozhi's efforts to
educate children from his
village and enable youth
obtain respectable jobs



Profile Pg 9

Building Back Better
All India Disaster
Management Institute and
its work in promoting risk
awareness at all levels



Chit Chat Pg 12

**"Humanity is beyond
anything!"**
An exclusive interview with
Dr. M.B. Nirmal



From the Editor

Dear Reader,

The month of June is declared as the National Environment Month in many countries including India. World Environment Day has been celebrated worldwide as an annual event on 5th of June since 1973. Its focus is to raise the global awareness about the importance of a healthy and green environment for human lives, and to solve the environmental issues by implementing positive environmental actions.

It is also aimed to make the common man realise that not only Government or Non-government organizations, but each one of us have a responsibility to save our environment.

This month aims to inspire people to take action to prevent the growing strain on planet Earth from reaching its breaking point. The social change agents featured this month are consciously working to make our planet clean and green.

Let us all pledge to raise environmental awareness and to take positive action to protect our nature and planet earth.

Latha Suresh

Editorial

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu

Conversations with Shri Ramana Maharishi

Mr. Ranganathan, I. C. S: In Srimad Bhagavad Gita there is a passage: One's own *dharma* is the best; an alien *dharma* is full of risks. What is the significance of one's own *dharma*?

M.: It is usually interpreted to mean the duties of the orders and of the different castes. The physical environment must also be taken into consideration.

D.: If *varnasrama dharma* be meant, such *dharma* prevails only in India. On the other hand the Gita should be universally applicable.

M.: There is *varnasrama* in some form or other in every land. The significance is that one should hold on to the single *Atman* and not swerve therefrom. That is the whole gist of it.

sva = one's own, i.e., of the Self, of the *Atman*.

para = the other's, i.e., of the non-self, of the *anatma*.

Atma Dharma is inherence in the Self. There will be no distraction and no fear. Troubles arise only when there is a second to oneself. If the *Atman* be realised to be only unitary, there is no second and therefore no cause for fear. The man, as he is now, confounds the *anatma* (non-Self) *dharma* with *atma* (the Self) *dharma* and suffers. Let him know the Self and abide in it; there is an end of fear, and there are no doubts.

Even if interpreted as *varnasrama dharma* the significance is only this much. Such *dharma* bears fruit only when done selflessly. That is, one must realise that he is not the doer, but that he is only a tool of some Higher Power. Let the Higher Power do what is inevitable and let me act only according to its dictates. The actions are not mine. Therefore the result of the actions cannot be mine. If one thinks and acts so, where is the trouble? Be it *varnasrama dharma* or *laukika dharma* (worldly activities), it is immaterial. Finally, it amounts to this: *sva* = *atmanah* (of the Self)

para = *anaatmanah* (of the non-self)

Such doubts are natural. The orthodox interpretation cannot be reconciled with the life of a modern man obliged to work for his livelihood in different capacities.

A man from Pondy interposed: *Sarva dharmaan parityajya maamekam saranam vraja* (leaving all duties surrender to me only).

Sri Bhagavan: (All) *Sarva* is only *anaatmanah* (of the non-self); the emphasis is on *ekam* (only). To the man who has strong hold of the *eka* (one) where are the *dharma*s? It means, "Be sunk in the Self."



D.: The Gita was taught for action.

M.: What does the Gita say? Arjuna refused to fight.

Krishna said, "So long as you refuse to fight, you have the sense of doership. Who are you to refrain or to act? Give up the notion of doership. Until that sense disappears you are bound to act. You are being manipulated by a Higher Power. You are admitting it by your own refusal to submit to it. Instead recognise the Power and submit as a tool. (Or to put it differently), if you refuse you will be forcibly drawn into it. Instead of being an unwilling worker, be a willing one."

"Rather, be fixed in the Self and act according to nature without the thought of doership. Then the results of action will not affect you. That is manliness and heroism."

Thus, 'inherence in the Self' is the sum and substance of Gita teaching. Finally, the Master Himself added, "If a man be established in the Self these doubts would not arise. They arise only until he is established there."

D.: Then of what use is such reply to the enquirer?

M.: The words still have force and will surely operate in due course.

A moulvi asked: How does sleep overtake one?

M.: If the enquirer knows who is awake in the wakeful condition he will also know how sleep comes on. The enquiry arises only to the waking man and not to the sleeper. It must be easier to know the waking Self than the sleeping Self.

D.: I know how I awoke. But I do not know how sleep comes on. I am aware of my wakeful state. For instance if anyone takes away my stick I prevent his doing so, whereas I cannot do so in sleep or in dream. The proof of wakefulness is evident. But what is the proof of sleep?

M.: Your ignorance is the evidence of sleep: your awareness is that of wakefulness.

D.: My wakefulness is known by the opening of my eye. But how does sleep overtake me?

M.: In the same way as sleep overtakes you, wakefulness also overtakes you.

D.: But I do not perceive how sleep comes on in the same way as I know my wakefulness.

M.: Never mind.

D.: Please describe what is sleep, without illustrations. Sleep by itself should be known. I want a real picture of sleep.

M.: Such picture is sleep itself.

D.: Is it better to reach salvation, being married, or being a hermit?

M.: Whatever you think better.

D.: Visvamitra had no fall when in the married state, whereas he had a fall in his hermit life. Does it not apply to others also?

M.: Visvamitra was as pure in the hermit life as when he was married. There was no difference. He was as contaminated when married as when he was a hermit.

D.: Was he a *rishi*?

M.: When contaminated he was not a *rishi*.

D.: Can he become a *rishi* even afterwards?

M.: Yes. By proper *bhakti* he could become a good *rishi*. Repentance and prayer will set him right.

D.: With all your penance for so many years what have you got?

M.: I have got what need be got. I see what need be seen.

D.: Can all see the same?

M.: I see only just what all do. It is immanent in all.

D.: Is this the way for seeing It?

M.: Method may be anything. From whatever directions the pilgrims may foregather, they must enter the *Kaaba* only by one route (passage) or all gather only to enter the *Kaaba*.

D.: Please tell me two *upadesas* on the way to salvation as known by you.

M.: What *upadesa* do I know? Everything is *upadesa*. Worship of God is the only *upadesa*.

—Source: Talks with
Sri Ramana Maharshi

Reviving Rural Lives



Fast paced urbanisation and now its re-conceptualization 'rurbanisation' has created hopes for rural youth who are desperately looking for reliable work opportunities. With rural livelihoods facing their own challenges, penetration of education has helped prepare the rural youth for this perennial predicament. In this conversation, Mr Arulmozhi, Founder of Anisha Education & Charitable Trust in Arur, Tamil Nadu, shares how he equipped himself with all possible skills and resources to face this predicament and has resolved to educate children from his village and enabled youth obtain respectable jobs.

Urbanisation led to migration into peripheral areas where rural youth found solace in entry level jobs, unable to survive with returns from traditional livelihoods. "This was a result of changes on both rural and urban front. Foot loose migrations managed to address both sides. Unless things improved in rural areas for the better, enduring poor standards of living and the uncertainty in survival will only lead to multi-generational poverty. I realised the difference education could make and wanted to use this as the vehicle for social change," explains Arulmozhi, recounting worse situations in some of the neighbouring villages.

Having struggled hard to complete his schooling and unable to pursue higher education, Arulmozhi took advantage of every opportunity he had in order to study. Informed by the developments in his village near Arur, he did a diploma in short

hand and secured a job at Kaalai Kathir, a popular local magazine. Soon, he became a reporter and the ensuing movement between villages allowed him to understand different dimensions of poverty. "The more I was drawn to the cause, I strongly felt that I must do something. Experience from the press also helped me see the huge gap between resources and schemes from government, their relevance and rate of utilisation," says Arulmozhi who volunteered with different organisations to learn the basics of social work.

"I used to visit orphanages and distribute aids for hearing/speech impaired children. The little information I could gather during these visits helped me to rationalise my decisions. Now, I know the impact that organised work can do on a large scale," he smiles.

Arulmozhi always had to face a volley of questions whenever his experience was discussed. "I narrated my life every time and the incidents that have shaped my vision. That is all I knew and fortunately, my intent was clear," he recalls.

Arulmozhi launched Anisha Education Charitable Trust and Anisha Nursing Home in 2013 to redefine the scope of

education and vocational training for village youth. Nursing Courses were organised in two different formats. Passing class five was the minimum qualification required to enrol in the courses. According to the minimum qualification that the candidates possessed, they were trained to become lab technicians, cleaners, PHC administrators, hygiene inspectors, etc., at the local primary health centres, hospitals and nursing homes. Practical training was offered at the Nursing Home.

Medical camps were organised every year to expose and sensitise candidates on health issues.

"Hospitals in our villages are not fully equipped and there is lack of basic awareness amongst people. It is not easy for outsiders to influence the health seeking behaviour of villagers. Hence, the trust decided to build a cadre of professionals from the village who will not only influence health seeking behaviour, but also assist during emergency situations. As people saw the need for medical attention and the impact of short term courses, significance of education was recognised," says Arulmozhi who is encouraged by the developments in the education and health

sectors. As the Trust also utilised government schemes in enrolment and placement, the village youth were kept informed of their entitlements.

For Arulmozhi, the Trust's biggest achievement is the change in mind-set amongst the girls. Girls in the villages are relatively less exposed than boys and early marriages results in higher dropout rates. However, girls who received education through the Trust ensured that their siblings attended school regularly. "Our girls are confident in making household decisions. They are rational and ambitious. I am happy with this change. They will show us the way," says a content Arulmozhi. The Trust also supports the education of orphans and children of widowed/divorced parents.

The Social Entrepreneurship Outlook programme (SEOP) at CSIM helped Arulmozhi validate his own experience. While he was able to re-assess the management of his Trust according to principles that he learnt at CSIM, he feels that his own experience helped him shape the Trust further. "The CSIM course reminded me that this was just the beginning and that developments in my village will show me the way forward," says a proud Arulmozhi, who looks forward to establish a school in his village.

"This is my dream. I want to see children mentored from their formative years. I want to see the next generation taking bold decisions that will revive the glory of rural life," he says.

—Shanmuga Priya.T

The Social Entrepreneurship Outlook programme at CSIM helped Arulmozhi validate his own experience. While he was

B for Braille

Banking on advertising revenues, young entrepreneur Upasana Makati is publishing a multi-faceted literature magazine for the visually impaired in India, while creating awareness about the need to teach Braille literature for them through her maiden initiative, B for Braille.

When Upasana Makati was figuring out how to improve the quality of content in her Braille magazine, White Print, she remembered a conversation she once had with one of her readers, a visually impaired girl. The reader said, every time I step out of the house, I have to apply my favourite brand of lipstick endorsed by actress Katrina Kaif. “I naively asked her why she likes Katrina and she said, because her voice is beautiful,” recalls Makati. It was feedback like this that led Makati to learn several lessons about developing literature in Braille for the visually impaired. “For one, they also want to know more about and use all the products and services we do and they love reading about anything, from fashion to entertainment to politics and short stories,” she cites.

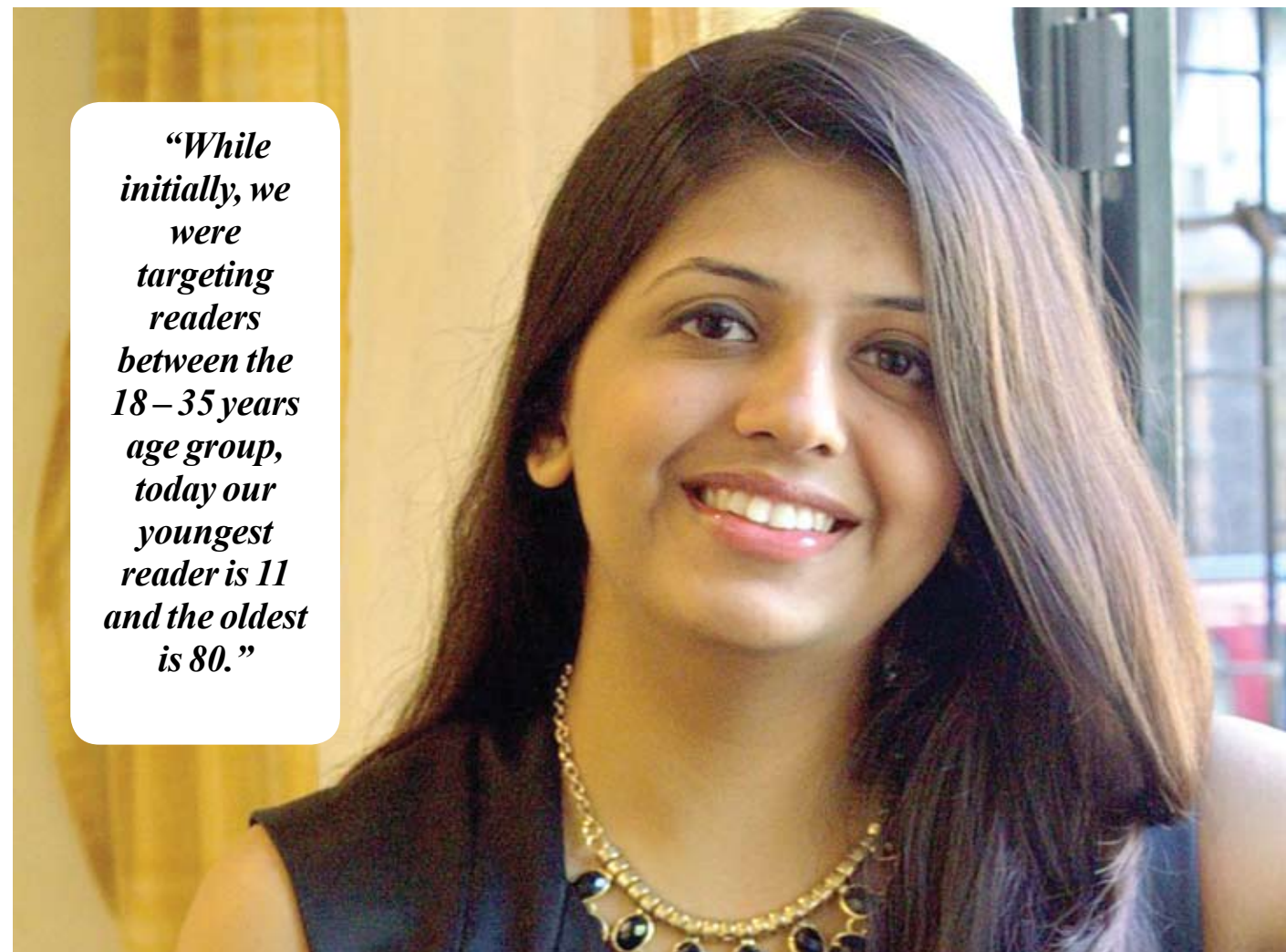
Solely dependent on advertising revenues, White Print now banks on this one woman army who is supported by a few freelance writers. “I write two to three columns every edition, and through editorial partnerships with publications such as Caravan, I receive one article every month,” she notes. In fact, her magazine also boasts of political columns from renowned journalists such as Barkha Dutt, and enjoys a readership of 400 people across schools, colleges, healthcare institutions and individual subscriptions. “The journey hasn’t been easy. But I look at the positives and feel, I can now take up new challenges and face them head on,” she says.

Tracing Back the Journey

A graduate in Mass Communications from the University of Ottawa, Canada, Makati was content with a job at a Public Relations agency. Yet, every night when she lay down on her bed, she had a nagging feeling that she wasn’t using her potential to its fullest. “There were several occasions when I would discuss with my friends about doing something more but we never found an answer to it,” she recalls. And then, one night as she sat to review her day, a thought struck her out of the blue, what do the visually impaired read? What kind of literature is being developed for them? This question led her from Google to the gates of the National Association for Blind, where she found that if anything, there were only monthly or quarterly newsletters created for them. “I was shocked. Then I asked them, what if I create a magazine for them?”

The Legal Process

It took Makati eight months and two failed attempts to firm up on a title for the



“While initially, we were targeting readers between the 18–35 years age group, today our youngest reader is 11 and the oldest is 80.”

magazine. During this process, she banked on the money she received from freelance jobs to keep the dice rolling. “I remember, after the first failed attempt, I approached an advocate who said it would cost Rs. 40,000 to get the magazine registered. I said I can’t afford it and in the third attempt, I succeeded by just spending Rs. 10 on it,” she chuckles.

She was clear that she didn’t want to establish the business as an NGO but as a for-profit business because she wanted to bust the ideology that the visually impaired need to be sympathised with. Hence, she decided to bank on revenues from advertisement to keep the publication alive. “Initially, we made many cold calls and sent several emails to companies but there wasn’t much recall. Then, we decided to directly get in touch with the marketing heads and founders. The first company which signed the deal with us was Raymond. They gave a five-page advertorial about their Spring-Summer collection,” shares an enthusiastic Makati. Ever since, the magazine has invited

advertisements from the big guys like Coca Cola, Vodafone and Aircel, which set the pace for Makati to approach other big ticket clients to advertise in her magazine.

While this helped sustain her venture, another key advantage she had was that the Government does not levy postal charges for literature in Braille. Hence, she didn’t have to incur distribution costs. From the first release in May 2013, the magazine has continuously taken reader feedback and expanded content in its magazine to include a variety of features on travel, lifestyle, music, politics, entertainment and more. “While initially, we were targeting readers between the 18–35 years age group, today our youngest reader is 11 and the oldest is 80,” she shares.

Stepping Into the Future

Since there is very limited Braille literature available in the market, a lot of visually impaired people began shifting to audio. Additionally, unless they learnt how to read Braille, they wouldn’t be able to access books or magazines. Keeping this

in mind, Makati and a team of directors and production managers developed a five-minute short film titled ‘B for Braille’. “The ratio of visually impaired and literate visually impaired is heavily skewed in India. There is an urgent need to educate and empower them,” she opines. In fact, everywhere she goes, she makes it a point to play the video because it creates a deep impact in the minds of the viewers.

In the coming years, Makati has a clear goal in mind; to increase subscriptions for the magazine and to eventually, write books about developing content for the visually impaired. “There was a time when we didn’t have advertisers for six months. Even then, what kept us going was the encouraging feedback we received from our readers. This showed that what we were doing was worth the while,” she states, on a parting note.

—**Madhumita Prabhakar**
This article was first published in
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(www.thesmartceo.in)

Meet the Wonder Women of Indonesia

Battling the darkness of poverty with lamps, filters and stoves one at a time.



I came to know Rovina Surat, one of our Wonder Women in late 2014. Living in the driest part of Lembata Island, in East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, is already tough to begin with, but the challenge for Ibu Rovina goes beyond the dry well and months of failed harvest.

She is a single mother of two, and had been living in her brother's living room since her then-husband left for Malaysia in 2012, and never returned. She said that this was rock bottom.

Left to care for her daughters alone, she made ends meet through various creative ways: from renting out her old motorcycle to neighbours, to gathering honey from the forest, to skillfully using a traditional harpoon to hunt squid and sea cucumbers.

Simple dream

In 2014, she joined Kopernik's Wonder Women programme in the hope of realising one simple dream: to build a home for her children.

At every opportunity, she enthusiastically talked about the d.light

S300 solar light, which she always carried with her when hunting for squid before dawn. This demonstration of simple technology in action worked better than any big budget advertising campaign, and Rovina began to sell more and more technologies.

Within a year and a half, she had saved enough money to start building her house, and in June 2015, she finished. It is a simple house made of bricks and bamboo, but up on a hill with a million dollar view overlooking the beautiful Flores Sea, mountains, and breath-taking sunset.

To see Rovina standing in front of her house during sunset made me smile - and still makes me smile each time I remember it. She is such an inspiration!

One villager in her community said: "I'm so proud to see Rovina now. She has transformed from a weeping widow without a house to an inspiring woman in our village." When asked her what her next dream was, she said she wanted to open her own small kiosk selling everyday goods.

"I used to keep all of my money in a soap tin and bury it in the ground. Now I'm starting to open my own bank account, so I can save more and make this dream come true."

To see her grow through the journey she's gone through, and transform from a woman to a "wonder woman", is one of the most inspiring things about Kopernik's Ibu Inspirasi programme.

Micro-social-entrepreneurs

Rovina is one of hundreds of "wonder women" in the initiative that has empowered women to become clean energy micro-social-entrepreneurs, connecting life-changing solar lights, clean cookstoves, and water filters with last mile communities in some of Indonesia's poorest provinces.

More than 80 million people live without any electricity in Indonesia, and many more live with unreliable access to electricity. Almost 100 million people rely on smoky, fuel-hungry three-stone fires for cooking. And clean drinking water is often a costly luxury.

There is great demand for affordable, clean energy technologies, especially in the poorest provinces of eastern Indonesia, but geography and demography make energy access a huge challenge. This is where Kopernik's Wonder Women Eastern Indonesia initiative comes in.

Equipping women with the skills and resources to become clean energy micro-social entrepreneurs is a viable, sustainable way of connecting these technologies with the people who need them the most. It creates access to clean energy technologies for last mile communities, allowing people to save money and time spent collecting firewood, buying costly kerosene, boiling water, or buying costly drinking water. It allows them to enjoy improved health and safety.

Not only that, the wonder women like Rovina and Ibu Bakti, get training on financial management, sales and marketing, public speaking, technology use and maintenance, as well as mentoring to motivate them to expand their businesses. They also get the clean energy technologies on consignment, so they can start their own business without going into debt, and they earn something from every sale.

These women's determination to help their families and villages, along with their smiles and laughter often seen amid challenging situations, make them truly some of the most inspiring people you'll ever meet.

—A story by Our Better World – the digital storytelling initiative of the Singapore International Foundation (www.ourbetterworld.org)



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.

For more information, please visit our website 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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Green Revolution



“Necessity is the mother of invention”. In the words of M B Nirmal, Founder, Exnora International, the entire purpose of his now-famous NGO, can be summed up in that one sentence. He explains, “When we were younger, we moved to a house that was surrounded by a slum. The sheer population that we witnessed inspired me with an idea.” He continues, “I thought to myself: why can’t these people become a solid source of social capital? They can be made to contribute to the environment and the society around them.” In many ways, that was the moment the seed was sown – the idea for Exnora

International was born, then.

Over the last three decades, the cause of Exnora has stayed the same, but in Nirmal’s words, “the rules have changed”. He takes us back to how Exnora International began, with some big celebrity faces as endorsement and an ever-available helping hand. “Actors like Kamal Haasan and Manorama, for instance, were presidents of their respective Exnoras,” Nirmal recalls, “These smaller civic bodies were excellent in that they complemented existing government bodies like corporations. At one point, there were nearly 180 to 190 well-known faces who were part

of Exnora International. This included over 25 IAS and IPS officers, all of whom were office-bearers too.” Re-tracing the baby-steps that Exnora International made back in 1989, Nirmal says that it was precisely this promising start that, which became the rock for the NGO’s foundation.

One of the earliest initiatives which won Exnora International, widespread praise, was its source segregation programme. And in Nirmal’s own words, understanding the basis and need for source-segregation, was a challenge in itself. “Earlier, the focus was cleanliness. We needed to keep our surroundings clean,” he says, “As long

as our garbage wasn’t in our backyard, everything was fine. We didn’t stop for a moment to think that the garbage that makes its way out of our backyard goes to a larger garbage dump in Kodungaiyur.” In several ways, that revelation helped Exnora International make a name for itself through its source-segregation programme. Its green and blue waste-collection tricycles soon became an enduring image. In Nirmal’s own words, they signified a shift from “cleanliness” to “environmental upkeep”.

With the growing popularity, a long line of challenges also came Exnora International’s way. The first of those

These days, Nirmal is busy promoting the concept of home Exnoras. Speaking excitedly about the concept, he explains how certain adjustments to the home environment could go a long way in conservation and promotion of enviro-friendly living.



challenges occurred when garbage collection was contracted out to an international enterprise, who Nirmal says didn’t quite have the city’s best interests at heart. “We noticed that this company was falling into the same pitfall of focussing on cleanliness as opposed to environmental upkeep,” he says, “The company wasn’t practicing source-segregation, which remains the most environmentally conscious practice of keeping your surroundings clean. For instance, the company began clearing debris from construction companies, through their trucks — it wasn’t quite helping the cause.”

These days, Nirmal is busy promoting the concept of home exnoras. Speaking excitedly about the concept, he explains how certain adjustments to the home environment could go a long way in conservation and promotion of enviro-friendly living. “A simple example lies in the way we use our water,” he explains, “Today, it’s incorrect to use the term ‘waste water’. At Exnora International, we call it grey water. This could be water that’s left after washing utensils or the waste water from anyone’s kitchens. This water can be used as organic soap water, and also be used to water plants, for instance. That way, it isn’t wasted and finds its own purpose and function.” Apart from these initiatives, Nirmal has also taken it upon himself to promote the use of bio-toilets. “Bacteria are extremely beneficial to all of us. So, owning a toilet that’s eco-friendly and causes minimum damage to the environment, is most certainly the need of the hour.”

Nirmal believes that the need to conserve stems from the fact that India needs a lot more environmental-awareness than ever before. “Consider this stat: only 14% of our drainage systems are closed, while the US has all of its drains closed,” he says, “This shows you how open and easy drainage is one of the problems we are left to contend with.”

Today, looking back on the NGO’s three-decade journey, Nirmal is a satisfied man. Ask him which of Exnora International’s achievements lets him beam with pride, and the answer is instantaneous: “Just the fact that we are today, a school subject. That itself is a testament to the kind of work we have done and have been doing.” He continues: “The Government recently launched the Swachh Bharat plan, but I’m happy to inform you that we began the initiative as part of Exnora International, several years ago. We really did have a vision before Swachh Bharat.” It’s some of these lofty achievements that Nirmal hopes will propel Exnora International into history books. “We’ve had several revolutions that have resulted in a system that was much better than before. Dr Kurien was the Father of the White Revolution. I believe the work we at Exnora tirelessly do, could well qualify us for a Green Revolution.”

In the last thirty years, by way of its existence, Exnora International has been not just keeping surroundings clean, but also caring for the environment. Needless to say, the stellar contribution of individuals like Nirmal have contributed to this renewed priority of the organisation. And why not? The next Green Revolution may not be too far away.

Should we put a financial figure on all the impacts made by a social enterprise?



In Jonathan Coe's book 'Number 11 or Tales that Witness Madness' one of the characters joins the 'Institute for Quality Valuation' that is intent on putting a financial value on practically anything and everything. The character is describing society in general when they say... "We are dealing with people who have no notion at all that something is important unless you can put a price on it. So rather than have them dismiss... well, human emotion, altogether, as something completely worthless, I think it's better if someone like me comes along and tries to help them out. Makes some sort of case for the defence. Se we've coined a new term – 'hedonic value' that might refer to, say, the feeling you get when you look at a beautiful stretch of coastline. And we try to prove that this feeling is actually worth a few thousand pounds..."

This is, of course, fiction and other characters in the book are skeptical at the idea of putting financial value on all things. But it is surprising how in a relatively short period of time the seemingly accepted way of assessing social impact for organisations with a central social purpose is to convert all their social outcomes into a financial figure.

This idea was first introduced into the UK by the new economic foundation who built on and developed pioneering work carried out by the Roberts Enterprise Development Fund in California. It was referred to as Social Return on Investment or SROI. This has led in the further development of the 'social impact industry' although there is a whole array of other measures which are forming part of that industry – such as 'value for money' figures, extending the role of Cost Benefit Analysis, and so on.

But should we really, as a society, be

trying to put a financial value on all things? Certainly, to do this has a function. If you were a policy-maker and trying to decide how to spend restricted financial resources on, say, building more care homes for elderly people or putting the resources into taking care services to people in their own homes, you could then assess the costs, use an 'impact map' to identify outcomes, provide them with a financial value and finally work out the most cost effective path.

As a tool to decide on investment, it might work well. Investors like the idea of providing a more tangible value on things that, although valued, have not traditionally had a financial value put on them. Very often investors and funders want to know the 'bang they get for their buck' – what amount of 'social value' comes from their initial investment expressed in pounds and pence.

But my argument is that if this is what is required by investors then investors should be the ones that calculate the social return on their investment. It does not follow that all social enterprises should be encouraged to measure their success by using an approach that monetises all the outcomes from the social enterprises' activities.

To go back to Coe's entertaining book, the same character as before was trying to put a price on the myth (is it a myth?) of the Loch Ness Monster. Belief in the Monster does contribute to the tourist industry and you can translate the myth into some sort of financial figure. I would argue that that should be done by people wanting to sustain the myth and support the tourist industry. We do not put the onus on the



Loch Ness Monster to carry out an SROI! They, no doubt, are busy being monstrous...

We at the Social Audit Network (SAN) believe that although looking at the social return arising from an input of resources has a place, it is much more helpful for an organisation with a social purpose to keep an account of their performance and to try as much as possible to demonstrate their impact on people, the environment and the society more generally. Since the mid-2000s SAN has engaged with SROI colleagues, discussing and considering our different approaches, undertaken research which helped to shape underpinning principles to this whole area of social impact. However, whilst SROI has its place, for us there are a number of central reasons that make our approaches distinct. I would like to outline them here.

Firstly, context matters. Where a social or community enterprise is working and with whom, can matter tremendously. Therefore, within social accounting the contextual information is encouraged – as it provides background and explains more fully the social need being addressed.

Secondly, by requiring to put a financial figure on all outcomes, there is a tendency to see the solution to addressing the social need as financial. Often people working in the development of communities or in addressing a deficient social need will tell you that putting money into addressing these needs solves only part of the problem. A social need requires social solutions.

Thirdly, social accounting and audit tries to get organisations to address their overall

performance against their objectives and does not only ask for the impact an organisation has. For us, it matters what type of structure and values an organisation espouses – and this should be reported on.

Fourthly, there is a danger in having to put a financial figure on all the outcomes in order to come up with a financial 'return'. We believe that not everything can be valued in financial terms and the extensive use of financial proxies (which is often the case using SROI methodology) can lead to spurious claims and begins to move further away for a 'real' or tangible 'return'.

Fifthly, although developing an 'impact map' of inputs, outputs and outcomes can be really helpful for a social enterprise to plan its strategy, carrying out an exercise in looking at the social return does not necessarily help the organisation to perform better. The SROI process is often very specific and focussed – whereas social accounting is more holistic and a broader approach – thus of more directly related to improvement.

Sixthly, the value for an organisation to regularly report on its performance and impact can be hugely beneficial when the organisation does it themselves. Many exercises in calculating the social return on investment are done by consultants and people outside the organisation. The real value of not only proving the impact you might be having, is also in improving through learning more about your own organisation and retaining that knowledge.

So where does this leave us? Certainly, reporting on one's own organisation in terms of how well the organisation has performed and what kind of impact and degree of social impact one has had, is important. In the future it will inevitably become a requirement – particularly for those organisations in receipt of funding or investment.

The argument that SAN has, is that financialising everything is not a desirable avenue to be going down. A social enterprise should be assessing whether or not it is performing well and what sort of beneficial social change is happening as a result of its activities. But having to stick a financial value on all of that changes seems to us to be crazy.

There are other characters in Coe's novel who listen to the reasons for monetizing social value and poke fun. I do not advocate this, but feel that putting a financial value on all the intangibles that make up a life is a diversion. Instead we should be supporting organisations that improve people's lives and livelihoods and to report regularly on their performance and impact – more generally...

—Alan Kay
Co-Founder,
Social Audit Network, UK

Building Back Better

Disaster management is a long term process and disaster risk reduction (DRR) is an inevitable, parallel process abetted by growing knowledge and resilience. Since community is the first to respond after any disaster, working with communities is the first and crucial step in building resilience. While disasters like the Orissa's super cyclone (1999) and Gujarat earthquake (2001) challenged our capacity to manage rescue and rehabilitation efforts, they paved way for the evolution of a National Disaster Management Policy. From the idea of mitigating droughts and floods through watershed development programmes and specially designed programmes for drought prone areas, focus shifted to disaster preparedness and disaster mitigation. However, all such efforts needed decentralised and micro level planning to address concerns arising before and after a disaster.

With disaster management plans taking shape at the district, state and national level, civil society organisations led the movement for community level disaster preparedness. "Risk awareness is the critical link in this ecosystem. The drought in Gujarat during 1987-1989 revealed the lack of risk planning in development projects resulting in the poor becoming poorer and even more vulnerable. Development is omnipresent, and we cannot do away with it. It is therefore essential to assess risk at all times. Thus, All India Disaster Management Institute (AIDMI) was established in Ahmedabad in 1989 to promote risk awareness in development programmes at the national and regional levels," says Mr Mihir Bhatt, Founder and Director, AIDMI.

Deriving inspiration from the work of Shri Ravishankar Maharaj, a grassroots leader who had initiated drought relief programmes with a developmental approach, AIDMI strives to make India's development process 'risk sensitive'. In the initial years, AIDMI worked on advocating the agenda of disaster risk reduction as response and relief dominated the humanitarian agenda. "We have studied the reasons behind disasters, the patterns between their occurrences and have drawn clues for mitigation and risk reduction," he says.

Right from the 2001 Gujarat earthquake, AIDMI has been responding to all types of disasters (whether major or small) and accidents in South Asia thereby demonstrating the 'human security approach' and advocating for 'livelihood security' during rehabilitation processes. "We see this as an opportunity to foster poverty alleviation by supporting the marginalised communities through



sustained efforts," he says.

AIDMI's primary objective is to capacitate local communities to build their resilience and coping mechanisms after a disaster. The organisation understood the significance of capacity building in their mission, as participatory planning is a prerequisite in disaster management and risk reduction process. With an exclusive focus on leadership in emergency response situations, all stakeholders—panchayat/local leaders, school teachers, children, community members, government officials, civil society organisations—are trained on pertinent topics so that any ensuing effort emerges as a dynamic and collective effort at the ground level. This is the key to building community resilience.

AIDMI has conducted over 550 training programmes across 14 states in India as well as in neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Myanmar, Maldives. Besides, 25 national and regional courses have been designed with universities in Switzerland, UK and Bangladesh, and training of trainers programme have been conducted for civil society organisations and government officials in Afghanistan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Iran, in addition to 9 states in India.

AIDMI's work has influenced the DRR policies in India and other South Asian countries. Over the years AIDMI has worked with more than 5,000 schools, 10,000 teachers and children in 12 states of India to make schools a safer place. Expertise from their consistent evaluations of disaster management efforts, safety audits, mock drills and community initiatives has allowed AIDMI to introduce mitigation measures

in more than 1,200 schools, prepare 915 school disaster management plans (DMPs), 15 departmental DMPs, 11 city DMPs, 63 DRR knowledge products and also generated demand for risk transfer with 4500 small business units. AIDMI introduced the concept of disaster micro-insurance in 3 cities of Assam, Tamil Nadu and Odisha, thereby resulting in local market recovery and ensuring smooth movement of supplies to disaster affected locations.

Reiterating participatory planning at the micro and macro level, AIDMI took upon the task of building platforms to facilitate such dialogues. Seminars, Workshops and Consultations were organised at national and regional levels to ensure local participation in planning disaster related programmes. As these dialogues saw multiple stakeholders coming together, it was more convenient for AIDMI to advocate for a pro-poor agenda, mainstream needs of the marginalised communities, and address gender concerns and safety for all children.

"The idea is to make everyone resonate with 'build back better'. It becomes more relevant in the context of rapid urbanisation and the resulting vulnerability of marginalised communities living in the peripheries. In 2001, AIDMI was invited to focus on four towns of Kutch—Bhuj, Bhachau, Rapar and Nakhatrana—and has since worked on urban recovery and resilience in over 20 towns and cities in India. Urban resilience is now on the national agenda. AIDMI is working to include resilience building in the 100 Smart Cities programmes. The communities have a lot to offer in this effort," he adds.

AIDMI was also part of the expert panel that prepared the Ahmedabad Heat Action Plan. Their work received appreciation and soon the team was invited by Karachi Municipal Corporation to initiate the process of deriving a heat wave action plan.

AIDMI is a pioneer in evaluation of humanitarian efforts in South and South East Asia. With more than 28 evaluations to its credit, the team has been promoting joint evaluations that not only improve accountability, but also help in focussing on the poor and marginalised. "We have come a long way in understanding disasters and risk reduction efforts. What we still lack is a direct focus on the poor and most vulnerable in humanitarian action. Our programmes must endeavour to bring them out of both – poverty and risk. Unless their needs and concerns are mainstreamed, any effort will remain incomplete," he laments.

"For an organisation with humble beginnings, the recognition we received has been overwhelming. We would now like to assess the role of common assets like air, water and inventions like internet that is the heart of DRR. Schumacher called us joint owners of these 'hidden assets', and we at AIDMI call them 'humanitarian commons'. We will be examining them while reviewing European Union's work in India and Nepal," he shares.

Mr Bhatt hopes to see the bottom-up linkages in DRR planning and implementation strengthened in the coming years. "After all, without such linkages, our efforts may not result in a 'transformative process' that we look forward to," he signs off.

—Shanmuga Priya.T

Nruthya Bodhini – Musings of an Artiste

10 – Silver lining - Stay focussed but stay foolish

“Stay focused but stay foolish”

Sadhana whispered to herself in class. “Whaaat? What did you say?” Bindya asked puzzled. “Oh, nothing. I just motivated myself”. Sadhana had found a way to talk to herself whenever she needed to remain positive in a challenging environment or situation. This habit had helped her to push through and succeed instead of quitting, enabling her to solve issues and hold onto her relationships. “Bindya, do you think we are getting anywhere in life? Merely coming to class 4 days a week, practicing, learning new pieces to perform, waiting for our annual performance or a tiny shows once in a blue moon...I’m getting frustrated and I don’t think I know what I’m doing anymore.” Sadhana was thinking out loud, more than expecting Bindya to really answer. “What do you want to do? What is not happening? I don’t get you. Quit thinking so much and practice!” Bindya dismissed Sadhana with a nod. She was always a cheerful person and didn’t want anything to ruin her mood.

Social entrepreneurship is about questioning status quo. It is all about moving away from any pattern that is not enabling growth and change in the direction of betterment. A true social entrepreneur is never afraid to question when there is stagnation, even when the initial idea of the social entrepreneur gets to a dead end. It is not about continuation and sustenance; it is also about evolution. Comfort zones in terms of funding, teams, known spaces and similarity have to be periodically questioned despite the possibility of arising problems.

“A ship is always safe at the shore, but that is not what it is built for.” - Albert Einstein

That evening was a significant one. Uncle Kittu was taking a stroll and found Sadhana coming home from the dance class. Uncle Kittu was a loud, loving, cheerful person who was also a connoisseur of music and dance. His was the rustic kind that came from traditional upbringing. “Hey, Sadhana. Where have you been? I have been thinking of taking you to meet my friend who is a manager and conducts dance and music tours. Come, let me take you tomorrow and



introduce him to you. Be ready by 6pm and we’ll go!”. No questions asked! Many may think its imposing but Sadhana loved the way Uncle Kittu took charge of her life. She knew he loved her as his own daughter. Sadhana’s eyes twinkled. She hoped for a new beginning and a silver lining shone in the mundane life she was having taking care of her mother, the house, her college, dance classes...

“Amma, this was a wonderful evening. How exciting to meet so many dancers from many different schools in one place. I never knew Uncle Kittu knew so many people. I am going to be practicing for so many shows and touring with the group!! I made new friends, Amma. I was a bit nervous initially but they all made me feel at home. Suju, Neetu, Gayatri...I am not sure my teacher will approve of all the tours; but, I have to convince her and take this next step in my career. What do you think?”. “Sadhana, remember that you need to be sincere and honest in whatever you do. If you give your best, the Universe will support you in your efforts. Why do you keep pre-empting the future? Please sleep now.

I’m very happy for you and all will be well. Past your bedtime and its late. Go to bed now, goodnight dear”, Amma kissed her bubbly daughter with deep satisfaction and gently got up to go to her room.

Most people who have been successful in life to tide over difficult moments would say godfathers come in various forms. That is the Universe’s way of supporting an idea and a vision. For this to happen, faith is very important; faith that someone is watching out for us and is constantly laying down the ground if we are willing to pave the path. Rationality many a time does not allow faith to find its roots. But most social entrepreneurs are not rational. They are focused and they are foolish. They are willing to flow and move into new spaces, exploring different paths for their vision.

The next six months were full of action for Sadhana. She made new

friends and most evenings and weekends were spent in rehearsals and new choreography. She learnt many different genres of songs and dances from India. What began as small role took large chunks of time and energy with expanding possibilities. Every weekend show led to train and road

travel, meeting new people, new audiences and new stage opportunities. Her

friendship with new people, Neetu and Suju grew stronger day by day. Sadhana had never traveled without her family. She saw herself going into small towns and new cities for performances. This also made Amma take over the house and kitchen matters much more. Her health improved seeing Sadhana happy and energetic. Amma got occupied helping the girls in music and rhythm. Appa never liked Sadhana going out much but could not do more than silently protest, having two powerful women at home in euphoria all the time.



Slowly, attending dance classes with her teacher reduced and became once a week to catch up with old friends and teacher. Bindya and Radhu didn't bother much but Seeta was very upset with Sadhana for not spending enough time with her and Mala had become indifferent to the new things Sadhana brought on table. "You have changed a lot, Sadhana. You talk so much and you are always on the move coming up with so many ideas!" Bindya said as she patted Sadhana's back. "Oh! Her new found friends and ideas are making her tipsy," quipped Mala. "True. Life experiences teaches us a lot. I think it's important that I bring all that I learn there to all of you here. That will make this journey more worthy," Sadhana answered with hope and enthusiasm. "I met those girls the other day at your house. I can't stand them. They are all a bunch of arrogant girls and can't dance to save their lives. After being through this traditional rigour I don't know how you can tolerate their steps. Maybe the lure of the stage and money got the better of you!" Seetha said, dampening Sadhana's enthusiasm.

Walking back home from class, Sadhana felt very alone. "Why can't



we learn from each other? Why are we so judgemental about other people who are doing the same thing, just differently? Why are they rejecting

me?" These thoughts filled Sadhana's mind. She felt she had been forced to make a choice between her old friends and new ones. She hated it. She never

liked to make such choices in relationships. Her heart sank. She stood by the window lost in thoughts till the sun set and the moon rose.

It is an interesting discovery when you realize how you can't pass learnings from one space to another easily. Be it a social organization or elsewhere, learning from the competitor can only grow you and your organization to next level. When one person from the group learns it is not easy to pass the learning to others, there is an internal resistance to accept peer learning since learning has somewhere over the years got equated to expertise and supremacy. There seems to be a great joy in reinventing the wheel and proving the beaten path as the best. There's no surprise in having thousands of small social organizations in the country refusing to collaborate in the fear of losing their identity. Thoughts on resource utilisation is therefore limited within the organization but at the risk of the intention for the country as a whole. This needs serious thought and consideration.

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

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath

Conditioning



A man once read in an ancient book about a black stone on the shores of the Black Sea, which could on contact, turn any metal into gold. The stone would be warm to the touch. So he went to the Black Sea, and found there a heap of black stones. He was convinced one of these would be the miracle stone.

He picked up a stone, felt it on his cheek, found it cold, and flung it into the sea. The second stone too was cold and followed the first one into the sea. He did this from morning to evening, every day for weeks, months and then years. Three years passed. One day he put a stone to his cheek, threw it into the sea and then realised that was the stone he was looking for!



Explicit Learning

- A. We soon get into habits.
- B. Our conditioning sometimes prevents us from seeing reality.
- C. In the process of conditioning, we lose the charm of life.



Introspective Learning

- A. What is the nature of 'Conditioning'?
- B. What prevents me from seeing each experience as independent?
- C. How do I break the patterns I have got into?

“Humanity is beyond anything!”

Dr. M.B. Nirmal shares with **Marie Banu** his passion in environmental management

Dr M. B. Nirmal is the Founder and Chairman of Exnora International, a civic movement in Chennai, which deals with environmental issues. He is a globally known Motivator, Innovator, Change-Maker, Mind Programmer, Humorist, Orator, Trainer, Environmentalist, Social Reformer & Social Activist. He has addressed meetings on topics of global concern, in the UN bodies, and World Bank.

Dr. Nirmal did his schooling in Government Higher secondary school Kundrathur and obtained his graduation from Pachappa's college in Chennai. He obtained his degree in Law from Madras Law College.

He served last as the Chief Public Relations Officer of Indian Overseas Bank before he took voluntary retirement. In addition to his involvement in Exnora, Dr. Nirmal is also involved in consumer advocacy, afforestation programmes, and rehabilitation of convicts among others.

Dr. M.B. Nirmal has received the Environmental Leadership Award Presented by US consul General in November 2005, The Distinguished Citizen Award presented by Mr. N Ravi, Editor in 2005, Best Environmental Service Organisation Award Presented by Honourable Minister for Environment in 2003, besides several others.

He is author of twelve books in Tamil and six books in English written on individual and societal development.

In an exclusive interview, Dr. M.B. Nirmal shares with Marie Banu his passion in environmental management.

What inspired you to launch Exnora International?

I hail from Chengelpet district and belong to a very rich family. We had our own dairy farm, and owned five villages. People like Late Chief Minister Dr. M.G Ramachandran, Dr. J. Jayalalitha, and Shri. Kamaraj had visited my family then.

While I was young, my grandfather lost all his wealth and so we had to move to a house in T Nagar which was surrounded by a slum. One of my friends asked me: “why not move to a better place. I replied: “I do not have any other option, but to make this place better.” The spark to launch Exnora came from this question.

We hear you are an avid gardener and have your own terrace garden. Tell us more about that hobby.

As I told you, we had owned a lot of land and property. When I moved to my home in T Nagar, I encouraged myself saying: “Sky is the Limit!” That’s how I started a terrace garden in 1995.

I once told a lady to segregate the waste in her home and use it as manure, she asked me what she could do with the manure. I then asked her to use it as fertilizer for her garden. She said that she did not have space for a garden for which I told her to grow one on her terrace.

Many people wonder if they can grow vegetables on a terrace garden. Yes, this is possible. Milk trays, pipes, drums, bamboo poles, and mud pots can be used to grow plants.

My innovation spread like ‘Jack and the bean stalk’. I initiated the vegetable basket programme where people in apartments can come together to grow vegetables in their terrace.

In my Koyembedu apartment, except for my bedroom and a small portion of my kitchen, the entire space, including the veranda and terrace, have plants. As plant produces oxygen during day time, my flat is full of oxygen sans pollution. As plants exhale carbon dioxide during the night, it is better to avoid it in your bedroom.

I took the concept of foldable lawn that was created from coco peat from Kerala. I refined this idea and created a terrace lawn.

Necessity made me innovate such projects. Creativity came from necessity.

About your home where you have provided people from various religions a place of worship?

I do not discriminate anybody based on their caste, language or religion. One of my life’s philosophies is “Human is for Human. Humanity is beyond anything!”

Once my daughter who lives in the US gave a wonderful lecture and people asked her where she learnt to speak such good English. She replied that nuns of Chennai Church Park School, where she studied, taught her English.

We are a mutual dependent society and we cannot deny that. I created a common place of worship in my apartment in Koyembedu where people belonging to any religion can come for worship. I have modified each room to have the ambience of a temple, mosque, church Gurdwara, etc. where Hindus,

Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, Zoroastrians can visit for prayer.

Exnora also dedicates its time and energy towards educating children about use of toilets. How has that experience been?

I found the toilets not to be sufficient for children and not child-friendly. Hence, we planned for a Joy-let. There would be books, newspapers, and carom board which the toilet using adults can use as a diversion while waiting for their turn to use the toilet.

We created a ‘Toy-let’ for children where there would be rocking horse/swan, black board where the children can write what they want, some toys in the shelf where the hand wash was kept, and things like that. This was a great source of attraction for children to go only to the TOY-LET.

These simple steps would make a child get interested to use the toilet instead of choosing to defecate in the open. We have to capture such ideas and use it in places where children come.

About People’s Toilet in Trichy?

“Waste is not waste until wasted.” We created a public toilet called ‘People’s Toilet’ in Trichy. It was the first in India and was unlike the ‘Pay and Use’ toilet. In People’s Toilet, we looked out for three kinds of resources – gaseous waste, liquid waste, and solid waste. Gaseous waste can be also called as Methane which can be used in the canteen as cooking gas and for lighting liquid waste is treated with bacteria and can be used for the garden cum horticulture; and the remaining solid waste (minus methane) is composted and used as manure for the garden.

Mr. Subbaraman developed this idea further and launched a programme ‘Use and Receive’ wherein he pays 10 rupees to a person who uses the toilet for 30 times. This is economically viable.

What has been your proudest moment in Exnora International?

We had a vision much before ‘Swachh Bharat’. The American Ambassador, who visited us recently, said that our project should be replicated by all the developing nations. While we were in one of our project sites, we saw a lady selling masala vada on the pavement. The American Ambassador bought a vada and said that he is eating the vada as his certification for the clean environment there.” I felt proud when he ate the vada.

