

# Conversations Today

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

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Photo: Marie Banu

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## From the Editor

Dear Friend,

The origin of International Women's Day is drawn from more than one historical event and began as an acknowledgement of women's struggle to make their workplaces better. Created out of protest and political action, it is a symbol for all those who honour women's struggles to improve their lives.

International Women's Day gives us an opportunity to celebrate the many achievements on the journey to gender equality. It also gives us pause to assess where we are in that journey. We are reminded daily that millions of women in developing countries struggle for personal and economic freedom, including the freedom to learn, work, and participation. This day is now an occasion for women to review how far they have come in their struggle for equality, peace and development.

Most of the stories featured in this edition highlight the power of women in harnessing the learning patterns amongst children. Be it a teacher, a home maker or a change maker, women have been instrumental in changing the set patterns in society and bring about a systemic change that would help create a better world around them.

Let us salute the inspiring actions of women this day and pledge towards a path of gender equality in the coming years.

Happy reading!

**Latha Suresh &  
Marie Banu**

# Integration, Centeredness and Oneness

At times, we all experience moments of perfect harmony, moments when everything around us and inside us, align so well to create joy, a joy not triggered by external reasons, a joy so deep and intense, that we cannot even explain it.

Similarly, some tunes seem to directly reach our heart; tunes of unexplainable melody, touching any heart. At other times, we walk into nature and find the beauty of God's creation in all its glory. Everything feels centered, they all seem to be in their due place in the larger scheme of the universe, and there is a calming comfort in their presence. All this makes us wonder – what makes these moments, tunes, settings, so centered?

When all the elements of a composition, be it a tune, delicacy, or person, are balanced and integrated, then it seems so natural and joyful. Every human being has multiple energy dimensions to themselves – physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Much like the earth that rotates on its own axis as well revolves around the sun, each energy dimension needs to be centered in itself and seamlessly integrated with all the other energy dimensions. When all four energy dimensions are in integrated, then the person is centered within.

A centered person enjoys immense completeness with oneself and everything around. Such a person stops seeking things outside one self. Such people live in alignment with what matters to them and their true self and purpose. This true self and purpose then becomes the pivot on which everything else in their life rests and rotates - with ease and grace. And what is miraculous is that when one is centered, actions and people that no longer serve them, belief systems and habits that no longer aid in the fulfilment of their purpose – all exit their life.

A centered person radiates calm, expansiveness and has an aura that brings others also calmness in their presence.

In the spiritual path there are multiple rituals and practices that enable a person achieve a state of centeredness.

Meditation is one such practice – regular meditation is an essential practice in this journey. Given here is a

particular, just assume it's there. Know that it is always with you every moment of your life.

Now move slowly to the mental level. Imagine yourself very mentally clear and alert. Imagine that you believe in

result it feels healthy, fit, alive and beautiful. Imagine feeling comfortable and happy in your body.

Now expand that feeling to your surroundings. Imagine yourself feeling comfortable and confident in the physical world, able to take good care of yourself and handle the practical aspects of life easily and efficiently.

When you feel complete with this, slowly open your eyes, stretch gently and go about your life.

Have a wonderful journey!

While integrating the four energy dimensions is a way to experience centeredness, spiritual centeredness is the master key. This is the place where one lives life connected to spiritual energy and not to one's ego. Such a shift clears up the space for magnificence at physical, emotional and mental levels.

Let this article and the meditation give you the experience of stillness, because in it you will discover Oneness.

— **Dr. Bhulakshmi V and  
Ms. Bhuvaneshwari Ravi**



meditation that activates, balances, and integrates all the energy dimensions in a person, leading them towards centeredness.

### Integration Meditation (from The four levels of Healing, by Shakti Gawain)

This meditation helps you integrate all four dimensions of energy.

Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes and relax. Take a deep breath and as you exhale let go of everything you don't need to focus on right now. Take another deep breath and as you exhale let your awareness move deep inside. Keep breathing slowly and fully and allow your attention to move deeper and deeper inside. Move deeper than your body, mind or emotions until you come to a quiet place inside.

In this quiet place, open to feeling and experiencing your spiritual essence. Whether or not you feel anything in

yourself, you have a confidence in your power to create and manifest whatever you want in your life. You believe that life is supporting you in every way.

Now check in with yourself on the emotional level. How are you feeling right now? Can you accept and be with your feelings? Imagine you are feeling comfortable with your emotions. Know that as human beings we have many deep feelings that are gifts to help us take care of ourselves, to teach about life. So imagine yourself respecting and honoring all your feelings and learning to express them appropriately and constructively.

Become aware of your physical body and begin to sense how it feels. Give your body the love and appreciation it needs and deserves. Imagine that you are learning to listen to your body and pay attention to what it needs and feels. You take good care of it, and as a

### 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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# I Wish To Do Something I Can

Author Rashmi Bansal identifies three kinds of people in her book, 'I have a dream'. Some who think, some who feel, and the very few that think and feel. It is this last category of people who strive to do something to help society move forward, and share their concern for self and their brethren. Although she calls them social entrepreneurs, there are friends out there who are not social entrepreneurs, yet their role fits this description very aptly. One such person is our alumnus for today—Abhijit Bhide, Vice President, Fiberlink Communications, Bangalore.

Hailing from Pune, Abhijit did his Masters in Industrial Engineering from North Carolina State University, US. A career spanning more than 18 years in software did not affect his enthusiasm to do something for children and the status of education in the country. However, it was all sporadic. "I was dabbling with social development sector even while in the US. Volunteering and donations gave me the space and a sense of contribution for the betterment of society. But then, there was no structured engagement with those in the field," admits Abhijit.

There did come a time when Abhijit realized his ardent desire to do something substantial. "All of us have desires. We need some direction and foundation. My need for a mentor led me to extensive research on the internet. I was looking for someone who can channelize what I excelled at. This is how I landed at CSIM Bangalore," he smiles.

Abhijit expresses that the Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Programme at CSIM enabled him to identify and work on areas—children and education—that he holds close to his heart. Abhijit's association with CSIM has grown to be more constructive, without being annulled after the completion of the course.

He says, "There are three things that I have learnt from CSIM – foundational knowledge on how the sector worked & successful social entrepreneurship models that are exemplars in self sustainability. Secondly, the networking with like-minded people—those whom I could talk to, work or engage with, learn from and understand. This removed every mental barrier, encouraging me to think independently. All of us can't be social entrepreneurs, but we can always do what we best can, with the time we allocate."

"CSIM will help you do that with efficiency and effectiveness. Lastly, the first hand experience in executing an idea during the internship. It made me feel fresh and capable of planning my engagement with this sector," he adds.

Abhijit has been very categorical about how individuals relate to those who handle the resource sessions and the probable reasons that put off youngsters who are overwhelmed with the present state of affairs.



He gives us an analogy to make things clear. Once there was a teacher who explained to his students the difference between Mahatma Gandhi's approach and other freedom fighters' approach, who chose an armed struggle as against non-violent strategies. All our freedom fighters were patriotic, and were ready to give their lives for the sake of country's independence. Those who chose an armed struggle expected a small number of people to give their 100 percent while Gandhi expected 100 percent of the people to contribute a small amount of their involvement in the freedom struggle. So, 100 percent of the population who gave some of their time and involvement worked more effectively than the small number that contributed 100 percent of themselves for it.

"This story holds a lot of meaning for us," he explains.

"The role models during our CSIM sessions were a great source of inspiration. They were extraordinary in what they chose to do. But, we cannot expect most to give up all they have for the sake of society's betterment. We do need inspirations, but the focus on emulating these role models drains out all our energies, giving little space to work on our strengths. It leaves us to struggle with scaling up or moving forward.

This is the trap many individuals and NGOs have fallen into. The better model is to inspire and direct each of us to do what we can, manage our constraints while contributing something in the social



sector. This will bring in tremendous energy and scale, the accumulation of which can lead to positive changes in the society. I think if organizations can focus on harnessing this energy and create a sustainable model for all to give what time, effort and ideas they have, the social sector will go a long way."

Abhijit strongly believes that whatever we try to do must be impactful, sustainable and consistent. "I cannot give up everything, but can certainly do what I can, from where I am.

Youth today want to do a lot for the society. The level of awareness on social problems is much more today than never before. Unfortunately, the portrayal of full time engagement as a necessity affects efforts at the micro level," he laments. He believes time is, ultimately, a relative commodity. One can believe that there is no time or otherwise. His actions reflect these thought processes.

Abhijit believes that the time to give up private sector to do something for the society has not come for him. He therefore allocates time to use his skills for personal enrichment and satisfaction. "I have been teaching for 2 hours every Sunday for the last 4 years. Taking out time from a Sunday

does not seem an obstacle any more, as I have committed myself to do impactful, sustainable and consistent teaching."

Besides teaching, Abhijit has led many socially conscious projects at Fiberlink. The recent of all being the employment programme for physically challenged youngsters and/or from impoverished families. Without a usual technical interview, the deserving candidates are identified, brought in, trained on software testing and personality growth while being employed here. Beginning with just 3 such employees, Fiberlink today has 35 of them. "Although they are extremely poor or physically challenged and in most cases, both, they want to prove themselves. We try to give them one window of opportunity without judging them right at the start."

He has created and implemented a Career Counseling model. The content is free, and available to anyone who wants to use it for the benefit of children from disadvantaged communities. This model aims to make career counseling easy and possible for anyone with interest and passion. He has also formulated an online knowledge management portal for NGOs which is free and could be used to manage their data for day to day operations and archiving. It also provides ways to collaborate and share knowledge between different NGOs.

Abhijit is very actively involved with CSIM Bangalore. He addresses the students and also helps to evaluate their projects. "My happiness comes from consistency. If I commit half an hour a day, I do it all the way," he asserts. He finally, shares his desire to engage in this sector full time and hopes that this will happen in the near future.

—ShanmugaPriya.T



# Little drops make an ocean: Jayanti Ramesh

Some conventional professionals are highly educated, and were able to find employment in multinational companies early in life. They may also have done well in their career progression. Others found exceptional opportunities working in cozy jobs in the Middle East for the best of the world's brands. Just imagine somebody in such a position, who suddenly faced family pressure to relocate back to India with family, so that the children could be given quality education and absorb family traditions and native social and cultural facets like dance and music. Normally such a person could easily relocate to another IT job in India, especially if that person is an early stage qualifier for Project Management Professional certification!

This article discusses a person who could do all of this, but decided to do something else. If you consider the face value of the actions of this person, they may not be astounding. However, if you could realize the spirit behind those actions, you would be stunned! The path Jayanthi Ramesh chose to follow was to impact children in her neighborhood. Let us understand the trigger and challenges that sent her down this path.

## Early days:

Jayanthi was born in a conservative, high-class family to parents who believed in ensuring she imbibed the right values and spirits from childhood. Her father worked at Dalmia Cements in Dalmiapuram (also called Kallakudi), which is about 42 kms from Trichy. He lived with his family in a residential campus that was pretty much a cosmopolitan society, as the personnel and their families were from all parts of the country. Jayanthi grew up learning and understanding the philanthropy of Y.H. Dalmia through the projects he sponsored. These projects were focused on Dalmiapuram and its surrounding areas, as well as in UP and Eastern India, where the Dalmia group had a strong base.

Under the leadership of N. Gopalaswamy, the then General Manager of Dalmia Cements, the company used to organize various activities. These activities include sports at the national and state levels; religious discourses by veterans such as Pulavar Keeran and Krupanandha Variyar; musical performances by great singers including the world famous M. S. Subbulakshmi; bhajans; debates on Tamil literary values by stalwarts; various dramas and skits with moral messages performed again by stalwarts such as Manohar and Cho. Ramaswamy. This type of a 'positive' environment served not only for mere recreation, but also as seeds of personality development.

As she was in school, Jayanthi read the works of Mother Teresa. Jayanthi was deeply touched by these humble works. She strongly felt that the characteristics described in those works needed to be imbibed by anyone who wants to serve his



*“Not all of us  
can do great  
things. But we  
can do small  
things with  
great love”*

or her fellow humans. Even in her younger age, Jayanthi was influenced by the following quote of Mother Teresa: “Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love”.

Apart from the influence Mother Teresa's work had on her, Jayanthi's parents also influenced her parents' humility in their conduct towards society. Her father was a soft-spoken man who introduced her to philosophy. Her mother was the embodiment of service in her own way. She used to keep buttermilk during the summer in a vessel outside her home for public consumption, and never bothered to find out who availed of the

and did very well. Immediately after her studies, she got married to Ramesh, who took her to the Middle East after a few months. She worked for 14 years in the IT field, including 8 years with a leading airline in the UAE.

## Trigger:

Jayanthi loves reading books, especially those by Dr. Abdul Kalam. His vision for India 2020 appealed to her. His positive statements on the scope for each individual to contribute to a 'Developed India' impressed her greatly. Reading Paramacharya's writing titled “Deviathin Kural” influenced Jayanthi further. As mentioned earlier in this article, there came a time when Jayanthi decided to move to Chennai to groom her children. She had domestic help at home. One day, her domestic help naively asked her if her children could also study with Jayanthi's kids and thus get some support for their academic efforts. Jayanthi was thrilled, and asked the help's children to come to her home regularly for study. In fact, she spent more time with the help's two kids, who were in standards eight and six. Though she found some improvement, she was not happy with their progress. The unsatisfied Jayanthi probed further and found out that she had started supporting them rather late, and hence, they were



soothing liquid. She believed that it would quench the thirst of the needy. For her, it was immaterial who exactly the needy were! In the same way, she used to distribute food to people in and around her neighborhood irrespective of considerations like religion or caste. She arranged free tuition for poor children, and further, encouraged them to sing and dance. These activities were not to help her pass time, but were the result of a passion to make people around her happy, healthy and vibrant.

Jayanthi was so highly influenced by her parents that she wanted to take up social work. She studied IT in a college in Trichy

finding it difficult to catch up.

Instead of going back to work for an IT company, she decided to dedicate her time to teaching poor children. During her daily walks, she used to see an anganwadi center near her residence. Anganwadis are centers run by the ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) that provide day care to children in the age group 2 – 6 when their poor parents are out at work. The anganwadi program is government-supported. Most people would assume that these anganwadis were not very exciting to associate with for someone like Jayanthi. However, she made a decision in the



exact opposite direction and started to work the anganwadis, propelled by her passion to provide education for young children.

#### Challenges:

Jayanthi's first challenge was, of course, to decide on the role/capacity to adopt when working with anganwadis.

If she were to engage with anganwadis, she could not do so as an individual. She needed to be part of a formal social welfare set up, or start a trust by herself. Since she was not familiar with the validation processes involved in association with the right kind of NGO, she decided to give up that option. If she had to register a trust, she had to go through bureaucratic processes for which she required help from a legal expert and a chartered accountant. She went through this process and registered "Maitritrust". She took the help of some seniors in social service who had gone through this process.

To teach at anganwadis, Jayanthi required training in the Montessori Method of teaching. Any other pedagogy was not likely to work as well in enabling her to be effective to the maximum extent. She had to invest in material for teaching. As she started working with anganwadis, demands on her time increased. She started finding it difficult to spare enough time to be effective in a few demanding anganwadis. She recruited Montessori-trained teachers to support her cause.

In spite of the support from the government in granting the necessary approvals and the wonderful grasp of the anganwadi children, the primary challenge continued to be motivating the anganwadi workers and helpers to do their jobs in a child-friendly manner. In order to resolve this problem, Jayanthi conducted training on Montessori methodology and basic soft skills for the workers and helpers of 20 anganwadis. She later mentioned that the success rate of 50% gave her the motivation to conduct further training workshops.

#### Add on services:

Jayanthi felt the need to move further ahead, to educating children of higher grades. She visited nearby corporation-run schools and offered her time to conduct value-added courses on topics such as soft skills, value education, environmental awareness, personal health and hygiene



and creativity. Though she knew that she could not do all this by herself, she did not have the money to employ field workers who could deliver these services.

She networked with some likeminded women who could spare a few hours every week. She connected them with the corporation schools. Now she is able to take nearly 23 classes in six different schools. She focuses on helping students to gain higher education so that they were enabled to move on to university education and then make appropriate career choices.

Though funding continues to be a serious challenge that hinders her from upscaling as she would like to, she is still able to deliver an appreciate level of service with the right kind of associations, donors and resource providers like those who give their time free of cost. She is not interested in promoting her trust from the fund raising perspective, as she believes that she must maintain her own ambit of control to enable her to do things well and in a meaningful way. She is not keen to be

known outside her circle for her work, as she feels it to be nothing more her own, personal way of creating value.

#### Family:

Jayanthi's parents gave her lot of encouragement right from her adolescence to explore whatever she wanted to achieve in social service. They taught her the values of humility and an unselfish approach towards service. They also taught her to do what is manageable and clearly measurable as a way of service. After her marriage, her husband and her mother-in-law also encouraged her to pursue her passion to serve her fellow humans, building on her own areas of strength. She is blessed with two children, both of who enjoy their mother's involvement in social service. Though born in the supposedly higher social echelon in this part of India, Jayanthi loves working with anganwadi children, who long for love and affection. For Jayanthi, this is like serving a higher, divine power, as all of us are children of God!

#### Conclusion:

Jayanthi may be doing simple social service in a limited way. However, she believes these are nothing but simple efforts that many others could also quietly make. Such efforts would succeed in bringing about revolutionary social change in India. According to this approach, it may not be important to rely solely on government policies and systems to take care of the poor and the underprivileged. Jayanthi believes that each one of us is obliged to make society healthy and vibrant by donating our time and intellect to uplift our fellow humans. Helping children with education is the best thing to do, as this what which takes them forward to becoming better adult citizens. If only the beliefs and values of Jayanthi were more prevalent, we would be seeing substantive qualitative improvements in the world around us.

— *This is part of the forthcoming book "Incredible Champions" authored by N. Chandrasekaran.*

## Editorial

Latha Suresh  
Marie Banu

## CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INITIATIVE AND MANAGEMENT



**C**entre 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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# Young Little Adults

*Agastya has launched Science Centres and Mobile Science Labs in rural India to enhance learning amongst underprivileged children and unlock the creative potential of India's rural population.*

Punya's day starts at 6 am. Her parents are marginal farmers in a village at Virajpet Taluk in Madikere District. After attending to her daily chores at home, she packs her lunch and walks to her school which is located 3 kilometers away. The school starts at 9:30 am and she reaches much ahead of her fellow students.

In a while, her friends stroll in, some greeting her with a smile, and few asking if she would have time to clarify their doubts. She paused, looked at them and smiled.

Punya, 12, studies at the Government Higher Primary School in Virajpet, a village in Madikere (Coorg) District. She is a Young Instructor Leader trained by Agastya International Foundation.

Agastya International Foundation is an Indian education trust and a non-profit organization, founded in 1999, by Shri Ramji Raghavan and Shri Mahavir Kumar in Bangalore, India. It runs hands-on science education programs in rural and peri-urban regions across 12 Indian states and is one of the largest science education programs catering to economically disadvantaged children and teachers.

Agastya has launched Science Centres and Mobile Science Labs in rural India to enhance learning amongst underprivileged children and unlock the creative potential of India's rural population. Agastya has a variety of innovative methods and channels including a Creativity Lab located on a 172-acre campus in Kuppam, 80 Mobile Science Labs and 35 Science Centres.

Agastya has implemented programs for over 5 million children (50 percent girls) and 150,000 teachers, from vulnerable and economically disadvantaged communities. By making practical, hands-on science education accessible to rural government schools, Agastya aims to transform and stimulate the thinking of underprivileged children and teachers.

While I waited for the teachers to arrive, a few children came towards me.

Lakshmi, 10, held my hand and asked (in Kannada), "Where are you from? Whom do you want to meet?"

"I have come to meet your Head Master to talk about the Mobile Science Lab programme. I am waiting for my friends from Agastya International Foundation to arrive," I replied.

She chuckled. Managing a smile, I felt pleased that I could convey the message in Kannada.

Ravi, 9, was curious to learn why I had a camera, and what the book like gizmo was. "Are you going to take our pictures? I want one with my friends. Shall I call them?" He asked spontaneously.

I voraciously clicked pictures of the children. In less than five minutes, I had more than 40 children around me, each with their own set of friends, posing for pictures.

A loud bell rang, and in a moment the



children assembled for prayers.

Subramanya and his colleague Raghavendra arrived. Subramanya works as the Area In-Charge of Agastya and coordinates the activities at Madikere District; and Raghavendra is In-charge of the Science Centre at the Virajpet Chickpet Junior College and oversees the Mobile Science Lab programmes. Both are full time employees of Agastya and work in coordination with the Government schools at Madikere district. They also form Science Clubs and train young children to teach and demonstrate science experiments to their fellow students.

We entered the School Head Master's room. Shri. Muthappa greeted us and

after exchanging pleasantries, we began the conversation.

"We have 176 students studying in this school. The efforts made by Agastya International Foundation, along with our school lessons, has helped the children improve their knowledge in science. Our children now participate in science fairs. We also have a Science Club in our school and allow the children to visit the Science Centre at the Virajpet Chickpet Junior College and Science Centre which is nearby. Besides, the Mobile Science Lab also visits our school thrice a year," he said.

I requested him to allow us interact with the Science Club students, and he instantly agreed.

The Science Club had nine students; two Young Instructors. As we entered, I noticed the students discussing their science project with Mrs. Pushpa Nachiappa, their mentor.

They rose spontaneously to greet us. Muthappa introduced us to the students and asked them: "What are you learning today?" "We are preparing for the science competition," replied Babu.

"Can one of you explain how the heart functions?" I asked.

Punya, the Young Leader Instructor, narrated the functions of the heart in detail and with confidence. "I like to teach my fellow students. Heart, earth and sun are among my favourite topics. I feel that I am treated with



respect after I became the Young Instructor," said Punya.

While she spoke, the rest grew restless.

"It is not feasible to establish Science Centres in each of the Government schools, hence we initiated the Science Clubs. Our team that handles the Mobile Science Lab trains interested students to become Young Leader Instructors. This not only motivates the children, but also instills confidence in them," said Subramanya.

The Mobile Science Lab at Virajpet visits 60 schools in the taluk, with three visits scheduled per school in a year. Two instructors and a driver coordinate these visits. They teach children science experiments and involve them during the demonstration classes. "Most of the government schools do not have Science Labs equipped to conduct experiments as per the school lesson plan. We address this gap," said Raghavendra.

After spending some time with the enthusiastic children and evoking simple questions to each of them, we bid adieu.

We then visited the Science Centre at Virajpet Chickpet Junior College which was a few kilometers away. Mrs. Poornima was teaching Physics to around 60 students studying in class 9. I interacted with the children, and requested them to join me at the Science Centre, which was situated next to their classroom.

The children grew excited and some forcefully pushed their way through, as they wanted to get their hands first on their favourite experiment.

Poornima said, "Our children enjoy going to the Science Centre. They prefer to spend their free time here. There are around 400 experiments and the lab instructor explains

each of the experiments very clearly. In fact, I too learn along with the children, as I did not have the opportunity to practically engage in most of these experiments when I studied."

While I was going through the experiments displayed in the Science Centre, Ravi explained how a square-wheeled bicycle worked.

We thanked Poornima and the children and left the school campus in a hustle as we were getting late for our next school visit.

A bright yellow colored Tempo Traveler was parked in the Devapura Government School campus and the children were gathered in a large hall. I tiptoed slowly not wanting to distract their attention.

Pandu, Instructor, was demonstrating the experiment on light and both children as well as their teachers actively participated.

"How many types of lenses are there?" He asked.

The chorus response was too loud for my ears.

As the day drew to a close, I thanked the Agastya team and returned to my place of stay. While driving through the winding roads of Madikere I remembered my school teachers. Teaching is indeed the noblest profession!

Agastya's gift of providing rural children with access to science education has certainly made an impact in the lives of these innocent children, thereby enabling them to carve a positive future for themselves and their families.

—Marie Banu

*If you wish to be part of Agastya's efforts, please write to [agastyaaadmin@gmail.com](mailto:agastyaaadmin@gmail.com) or visit their Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/Agastya.Foundation>.*



**Photos: Marie Banu**



# BEACON 2014

## Social Entrepreneurship: A Calling,



**L**IBA—Loyola Institute of Business Administration—organized BEACON 2014 - Social Entrepreneurship: A Calling on 21st February at ITC Grand Chola, Chennai. Shri Sudeep Jain, IAS, Addl. Chief Secretary & CMD - TEDA, Government of Tamilnadu was the Chief Guest for this event. Rev. Fr. S. Peter SJ, Director, LIBA; Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Arockiam SJ, Dean, LIBA; Mr. Murari, Advisor President FICCI were the other dignitaries.

The programme was to sensitise the LIBA students on Social Entrepreneurship. Mr. R. Elango, Ex. Panchayat President of Kuthambakkam Village & Founder - Trust for Village Self Governance; Mr. Maharaja Gokulavasan, Head- CSD, RuralShores Business Services Pvt. Ltd.; and Ms. Latha Suresh, Honorary Director, CSIM, shared their experiences and various aspects of Social Entrepreneurship with the students.



Ms. Latha Suresh highlighted the Importance of Social Audit and mentioned that the recent CSR policy is a boon for Social Entrepreneurs.

Ms. Radhika Ganesh, Founder – Director, IART FOR CHANGE FOUNDATION; Mr. Sameer Chaturvedi, CEO, Jaipur Rugs Company Pvt. Ltd.; and Ms. Deepa, Senior Manager – Operations, Aravind Eye Hospital also spoke on the occasion.

## REMEMBERING

### Dr. G. NAMMALWAR



**C**SIM organised a tribute meet for Dr. G. Nammalwar at Asha Nivas, Chennai, on Friday, the 14th of February, 2014.

Dr. MB Nirmal, Founder, Exnora International, shared his experiences with the organic farmer activist, and advised youth to venture into organic farming.

Dr. G. Nammalwar was born born at Elankadu village near Thiruvaiyaru in 1938. He graduated in agriculture from Annamalai University. In 1963, he joined as an officer in the Agricultural Regional Research Centre, Kovilpatti. Later he served as an agronomist in Island Peace, an organisation founded by Nobel Laureate R.P. Dominic Pyre.

All his life, he championed the cause of natural farming. Gandhigram Rural University honoured him with a doctorate.

He was a crusader against genetically modified crops and spearhead the movement against proposed methane project in Cauvery delta districts.

As CSIM's Academic Council Member and a great human being, we remember Dr. Nammalwar's efforts in the field of agriculture and will remain to admire his untiring courage to promote organic farming



## Memorial



**I**t has been aptly said 'Death leaves a heartache no one can heal and love leaves a memory no one can steal.'

Our collective hearts at CSIM, Chennai are heavy with sympathy at the passing away of our young and vibrant printer cum designer Mr. Arun. He had been associated with us over the last ten years and we can never forget the smile in his face whenever he delivered our publications.

A very creative and talented person, Arun's keen interest in our publications was noteworthy. He would set aside all his prior commitments and ensure that all the printing assignments of CSIM were delivered on time. Arun always appreciated the work done at CSIM and was enthusiastic to be part of our team as he felt his contribution was a way to give back to society. He would print at a very subsidized rates and sponsor a few printing jobs too.

We pray to God Almighty to give his wife and son, the strength and courage to bear with this grief.

You will always live in our hearts and nobody can fill the void that you have created, Arun!!



# From community groups to rural producers associations

I cannot help but get excited whenever I visit Madurai, in Tamil Nadu, because I will be meeting people like Muthu Velaudham. Muthu, as he is known popularly, is in his forties and has a massive ball of energy with passion and ideas. When he was in his early twenties he drove around on a motorbike with Vasimalai as his pillion passenger, who was a key functionary of Pradhan, a reputed NGO.

Muthu grew up living on the farm and making a living out of agriculture. Extended family work ethics and implementing contracts came naturally, he says. "I left home when I was 18. Ever since, I am running about doing things with community." Not a day goes without him doing a minimum of 200 kilometers of driving around. Covenant for Community Development - CCD - is the result of such massive hard work!

CCD's work in the last 12 years is legendary for its particular approach in working with communities. Good aspects of culture and faith is well integrated as it works well resonating positively with the community at large. From the arid lands of Ramnad district CCD has spread across India during the last decade. CCD has engaged in post-disaster rehabilitation, savings, coir making, and herbal markets thereby setting a trail blazing and pioneering record.

A massive community savings programme was handed over to the government, but the mobilisation of the community, solidarity, mutual support, community participation and ownership remains solid and comes in handy as CCD is embarking on path breaking models of producer organizations. These models are run, managed, and provide livelihood for hundreds as much as creates jobs from Herbal factory that adds value to Briquettes made from waste; and Mango pulp factory that brings foreign equity to overcome massive debts. The sheer variety of experiences is a valuable treasure trove for anyone to benefit from.

I had the honour to recently travel and visit all the three units, talking, sharing, questioning and learning from communities and others.

At Sevayur, there is a community run school that educates children from villages up to class 5. The school is surrounded by a forest of wood land, and will stun and make you wonder how this is possible in an otherwise dry, flat, and dry flat lands.

"It took us a decade to make this indigenous forest possible. There are many species of birds and hundreds of local species of trees, shrubs and medical plants. There are more than 200 bird species sighted here including long



range migratory ones," says Muthu.

The water that this dry wooded area traps and saves have helped villages in nearly 5 kms radius to drill and find fresh water. The village children roam around without fear and with much smiles—an experience that is unique! Rabbits sprint and jump while you hear the howl of fox and Peacocks singing freely. Annually, over 100 colleges and schools visit the newly made forest to see the herbal museum too.

Here is an example where nature triumphs and the poorest soil is converted into a veritable habitat for various fauna and flora, not forgetting that the wood lot soaks in the carbon and provides you the critical water that gives life and livelihood across wider areas.

With the visionary ideas of Muthu and the community, CCD were the pioneers in medicinal health, plant collection, processing and marketing. Muthu says that while the demand is more than 30,000 tons, CCD supplies around 600 tons each year.

The processing plant piled up with fruits, twigs, dried flowers and powdered plant material sends a whiff of medicinal perfume that is overpowering in an enduring way.

Seva, meaning, a place of service, is known as the herbal hub. Muthu confirms that there are many others—NGOs community and business—who have followed CCDs work in the Medicinal plant front, but no one has reached to the extent of diversification.

If you are popping a medicinal pill from Dabur or Himalaya, remember, there is a possibility that it came from the hardy hand of a village women in drought prone Ramnad where her mother could have been a victim of drought induced hunger. But, there is no more such a problem when the family is part of CCD programme. Companies have now provided further processing machines to



CCD to add value to the Herbal medicinal plant.

Sustainable values have been ingrained into the enterprise to achieve self-reliance. These include: conserving local resources that are raw material, adopting conservation practices, interacting with the markets, initiating efforts to meet new demands, innovating product presentation and marketing, identifying emerging problems, and addressing them before hand.

Nowhere is the above statement expressed so unequivocally and manifested so truly than in the business of making small bricks from waste for energy. The business of making energy efficient Briquettes in a former dairy shed in at Pullothu in Madurai District has details about the cows that were tended here once. It now runs a very compact and unusual machine which is operated by the community members who are trained to undertake the operation.

A small machine converts all waste, including agricultural waste such as dried ground nut and so on. The end product looks like a smooth sausage which is in high demand for industrial use. The demand outscore the supply, therefore is a great opportunity for expansion and consolidation for the community.

"It all started with energy efficient stoves, but branched into producing the energy efficient and carbon reducing fuel," exclaims Muthu.

CCD sells the Briquettes from small to medium industries; from food to steel industries; in Tamil Nadu. CCD's business supplies are more than 600 tons with demand far more than supply.

On the left of Nathuram road, 17 kilometers north of Madurai is Kadavur village. An area that is at the heart of massive mango production for more than a century. Here, small to medium sized mango pulp factories existed that folded up due to economic reasons. If there is now revival of the pulp factory, the credit should go to the initiative and effort by the Aharam business of CCD. Aharam has revived the mango economy, provided jobs and revenue for the community living here. Presently CCD sells about 400 tons of mango pulp both in India as well as exports.

In the last two decades, business and enterprise have expanded in India. But, the benefits have mostly eluded rural communities who are at the heart of supplying items, raw materials, and semi finished products. CCD wants to change this and reverse the process through fair and sustainable models of business and enterprise.

When asked what would help to make this business expand, "Through reach add value," says Muthu in his inimitable way adding, "The sky is the limit for these products due to heavy demand, but we are constrained on the working capital needs. This is the only bottleneck," he smiles.

For all innovators, entrepreneurs, and rural business start-ups CCD and Muthu is an inspiring and potential partner. For investors who care for sustainable investment—here is a superb opportunity!

—Pushpanath Krishnamurthy



# Conversations with Shri Ramana Maharishi

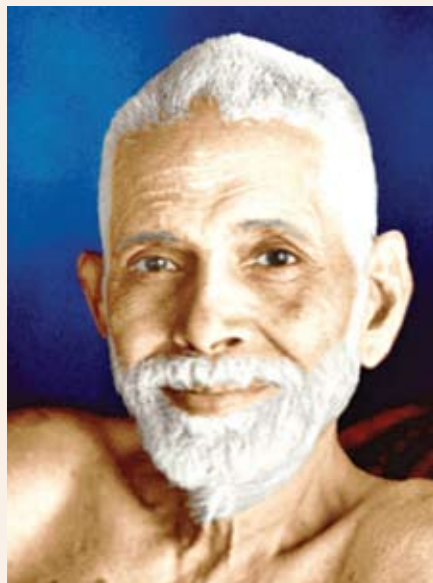
**A**n inspiring conversation with Shri. Ramana Maharishi and his disciples

Dr. Syed, a Muslim Professor, is now here. A sceptic friend of his had confronted him with the question: "What miracle does your Maharishi work?"

He had replied that the ordinary people being no better than animals are made men and that we being only His children are endowed with strength by Maharishi. He desired to know if he was right in replying to him. "Refreshing Peace within is the highest miracle. Maharishi possesses it."

"What is that to us?" the other man asked.

I replied "The same Peace is bestowed on all visitors to be shared by them. Mr.



Paul Brunton has mentioned it in his book. Everyone feels it every day in Maharishi's presence."

The whole conversation was mentioned to Sri Bhagavan with the following addition:

Parasurama has said that he felt some refreshing peace within when he met Samvritta on the way. So he made him out to be a great saint. Is not such peace the sole criterion of a Mahatma's Presence? Is there anything else?

Sri Bhagavan said: A Madhya saint Tatvaroyar had composed a bharani on his master Swarupanand. Pandits objected to the composition, saying that it was reserved to such as have killed more than a thousand elephants in battle, whereas Swarupanand was an idle man sitting somewhere unknown to people and he did not deserve that

panegyric. Tatvaroyar asked them all to assemble before his master so that they might see for themselves if he could slay one thousand elephants at a time. They did so. As soon as they appeared they were struck dumb and remained in beatific peace for a few days without the least movement. When they regained their senses, they saluted both the master and the disciple, saying that they were more than satisfied. Swarupanand excelled the warriors in that he could subdue the egos, which is a much more formidable task than slaying a thousand elephants.

Maharishi said that the moral was clear. Peace is the sole criterion of a Mahatma's Presence.

—Excerpted from talks with  
Shri Ramana Maharishi

## Belongingness Dimensions – Organizational Spirituality and Social Entrepreneurship

**T**he last decade signifies entry into consciousness era, an era that has the generation Y and Z as the members of the organization. This era intends to work on holistic paradigms where relationships and inter connectedness have become important. The gen Y and Z are in the mode of enquiry and balance of work and life. Gen Y have been identified to possess qualities like Confidence, Sociability, Morality, Street smarts, Diversity, Collective action, Heroic spirit, Tenacity, Technological savvy, Lack of skills for dealing with difficult people, Multitasking, Need flexibility and so on. They have been raised by parents who nurtured and structured their lives; they were drawn to their families for safety and security. They were also encouraged to make their own choices and taught to question authority. (Executive Office, Talent Management Team, United Nations). For Gen Y, salary and status were not high on the priority list, according to the study by Talentsmoothie ([www.talentsmoothie.com](http://www.talentsmoothie.com)).

Added to this the world today is dynamic and reeling between paradoxes. Be it political, social, economic, the context is varying at a speed that was never conceived before. The social issues too are growing deeper questioning some of the fundamental institutions connected to life. In this paradoxical environment the gen Y and Z employees looking into social issues emerge from a deepened enquiry mode. Their methodologies connected strongly to technology and digital world would emerge from a different paradigm than what has been so far in the last several decades. No longer are social entrepreneurs in India emerging from social work backgrounds alone or as an alternate career choice. People from all walks of life especially from IT sectors after making a good stint and acquiring



financial security are moving into social sectors with a choice that invokes their social responsibility. This is slowly changing the operation principles and paradigms within the social organization. This also has a deep impact on the culture on which the emerging social organizations stand.

For the futuristic social organizations of consciousness era the sustaining culture emerges from the space of Spirituality. While Intelligence and emotional dimensions have been the forte, the future leans more towards spirituality. Spirituality is the most controversial and misunderstood and misinterpreted word in management. Dr. J.M.Sampath (2012) has explained spirituality as "a process that enables one to live in sync with the universe wherein there is complete surrender in which one experiences total empowerment. It is a state in which one acts with complete awareness within and outside, to align with any given context, to do what one needs to than what one wants to, with a single focus to nurture universal

wellbeing" ... He elaborates that "Spirituality is not religion. It is not an orientation. It is not any cult or group thought that we belong. It is not about the form but the essence of the human being. It is a state of being which is well integrated into personality allowing flow and reflection process" ...

Social entrepreneurship is in reality a chosen profession which stands to benefit society giving a deep self- fulfillment for the individuals. The sustainability lies in its deep connect and alignment with the Universe and the consciousness ways. The nearest to this was a parable I came across in the book Discovery (Sampath.J.M, story 76. Discovery - 3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998)

A woodcarver called Ching had just finished work on a bell-frame. Everyone who saw it marveled at it, for it seemed to be the work of spirits. When the Duke of Lu saw it, he asked, "What sort of a genius is yours that you could make such a thing?"

The woodcarver replied, "Sir, I am only a simple workman. I am no genius. But there is one thing. When I am going to make a bell-frame, I meditate to calm my mind. When I have meditated for three days, I think no more about rewards or emoluments. When I have meditated for five days, I no longer think of praise or blame, skillfulness or awkwardness. When I have meditated for seven days, I suddenly forget my limbs, my body; no, I forget my very self. I lose consciousness of the court and my surroundings. Only my skill remains. In that state, I walk into the forest; stop at the tree which will give me the bell-frame. I see the bell-frame in all its perfection. Then my hands go to the task. Having set myself aside, nature meets nature in the work that is performed through me. This, no doubt, is the reason why everyone sees that the finished

product as the work of spirits."

The HR person in social organization has a significant role to understand the changing paradigm and carefully nurture the following elements in the organizational culture –

- A deep sense of mindfulness in every action of the Leaders and members
- A sense of unshakable trust in the vision and values of the organization and ability to be trustworthy
- The thought that each of them are there to serve the vision rather than the outcome of vision serving their own needs
- Being connected to self at a deep level and having individual evolution as an aim of learning and development
- Being able to set aside ego and respond from conscious rather than react from ego to the changes, feedback and innovation that happens in the organization
- Having a deep sense of gratitude for all resources one has and for the society which is accepting the support and service
- Believe oneself and be able to connect the cause and effect of every action at individual and group level

### Reflections:

1. To what extent do I trust myself and the consciousness around me?
2. To what extent does ego play its part in every transaction in my organization? Is vision larger than self?
3. To what extent are the employees accepting flow and welcome changes in everyday functioning?

— Dr. Kalpana Sampath, PhD



# Piggybacking on performance

*For Shriram Group, building its brand was never a priority, says G S Sundarajan, group director. What was important to the company was to consistently produce results and in doing so, build goodwill for itself*

**S**hriram Group was founded on the basic premise of serving the underserved. While building a brand was never a priority for this group, the Shriram brand automatically got built through the company's sheer performance and word-of-mouth appreciation by its customers. In fact, a Brand Health Study performed two years ago established that the Shriram brand possesses the most exceptional brand equity in the financial space and enjoys high trust among all its stakeholders. It currently employs 45,000 people in over 2,400 branches across India. It has over Rs. 60,000 crore of assets under management, 9.50 million customers and a market capitalisation in excess of Rs. 16,000 crore.

## Building the community

The growth of the Shriram brand started very slowly as its objective was not to build a brand but to build a business which was useful to the community. Efficiency in operations, integrity and a strong focus on catering to the needs of the common man, by offering him high quality and cost-effective products and services, are the values driving the organisation. Its very description - empowering people through prosperity - states its ultimate objective.

While the company's beginning was humble, its vision and philosophy was clear even three decades ago. Rapid growth was not its growth philosophy. While it ensured a slow and steady growth, the group expanded only after creating milestones for itself. Profit was not the end game.

In the year 1970, the group commenced operations with Shriram Chits as the parent company. It later went on to launch Shriram Transport Finance in 1979 and then expanded and currently has around eight companies within it. Despite all the negatives that are associated with chits across the country, Shriram Chits carries a good reputation. In the Commercial Vehicle Finance business, the company finances small truck operators who account for 80 per cent of the

trucks on the roads. In the year 2000, the group partnered with the 90-year-old South African Insurance giant, Sanlam Group, for life and non-life insurance businesses. "Subsequently, we became the first private life insurer in the country to report profits in the first year and for three consecutive years of operations," states Sundarajan.

## Making the difference

Shriram's views on brands and market places are significantly different from the others. "We do not propagate our brand on our own. We believe that brands are a

business's social manifestation," says Sundarajan, attributing the entire growth of the brand to the group's performance.

However, what guides the group is its purpose of serving the underserved, promoting entrepreneurship, frugal management, transparency to customers and empowerment of employees. It believes in treating all partners and investors equally and in creating sustainable roles for employees in the organisation according to their skill sets. It recruits employees from local communities to help build a relationship with customers.

This apart, the group believes in communicating its purpose to all the internal and external audiences. "We are the only large financial conglomerate that does not have a standard operating procedure. And yet, if you talk to 10 different branches you will find them all talking the same language," says Sundarajan. This is because the company has internalised its philosophy and purpose and as its teams are empowered, they are able to see success in what they are doing.

In the last three to four years, the Shriram group has started communicating what it has done in the market place over the last 30 years. "As everyone started talking about financial inclusion, we felt that we need to let people know that serving the aam aadmi has never been a social obligation for us. It is our business strategy," says Sundarajan.

"While profit is not the reason why we are in business, now with 23 PE investors in our various entities, profit also is important for us," declares Sundarajan. But that has come after two decades of laying the foundation. Once the group started having support in the form of capital, it began expanding.

To build a good brand, stand for something - ask yourself if you have an authentic product; build relationships - is your customer satisfied with your product or service; do your employees believe in your brand? Answer these and build a sustainable brand, the Shriram way!

**Company: Shriram Group**  
**Group Director: Shri. G S Sundarajan**

Shriram Group was founded on the basic premise of serving the underserved and building a brand was never a priority for this group. The brand actually got built on its own through the company's sheer performance and word-of-mouth appreciation by its customers. The company does not propagate its brand and believes that brands are a business's social manifestation. However, what guides the group is its purpose of serving the underserved, promoting entrepreneurship, frugal management, transparency to customers and empowerment of employees. It believes in treating all partners and investors equally and believes in creating sustainable roles for employees in the organisation according to their skill sets.

—Poornima Kavlekar

*This article was first published in The Smart CEO Magazine  
(www.thesmartceo.in)*





# “We have made great strides in health, but not reached the millennium development goals.”

**Dr. Benny Benjamin** shares with **Marie Banu** his thoughts about **Childcare in India**

**A** renowned pediatrician, Dr. Benny Benjamin has over 35 years of experience in medical care of infants and children. He has achieved his graduate and post graduate degrees from prestigious universities both in India and abroad. He completed his M.D in Pediatrics from Christian Medical College, Vellore which is the most esteemed medical school in India and further went on to do his M.R.C.P and F.R.C.P from Edinburgh, U.K.

With a passion for medicine and deep compassion for children, Dr. Benjamin stands out as an outstanding pediatrician in the medical field.

*In an exclusive interview, Dr. Benny Benjamin shares with Marie Banu his thoughts about Childcare in India.*

**Being a silent philanthropist, what are the social causes that you support?**

I am not into social pediatrics, and work in the private sector. I do not serve the poor directly, but just contribute to organisations who do so. It is an easy way for me to do something without burning my hands.

I would like to contribute to organisations that I believe are doing a good job and have people whom I know working in it, so that I know that the funds are being utilized properly. I have been contributing to charities that work with children. Well-known organisations may be flush with funds from India and abroad, but if I believe in their work I would still contribute to them as well as to local lesser known groups.

Although my interest lies in the welfare of children, being a senior citizen myself, I do contribute to Helpage as well.

**What are your thoughts about Childcare in India?**

During my undergraduate medical and post-graduate pediatric studies, I grew up in a service-oriented environment. I got my initial pediatric grounding and philosophy from there and these were honed over years and decades of working in various settings and environments around the world. I worked in Mission Hospital situations for a while and then went abroad.

I returned to settle in India some 19 years ago, and I joined the private sector. I view childcare in India from that prism and I have a bit of international perspective also on that. Ideally, the government should provide essentials like nutrition and healthcare for the people. But, due to various constraints, there are lacunae. So there is a private healthcare co-existing and complementing the government sector in providing healthcare facilities for children. Though I am part of it, I am of also a critique of the private health sector as it seems to be becoming ever more expensive



Photo: Marie Banu

and unaffordable for common folk. Parents may seek private medical care for their kids rather than Government health centres, because of the perception that they may be getting better care.

There are also health institutions in the private sector that are doing a great job, such as Mission Hospitals or service oriented community hospitals that offer good childcare at reasonable costs.

**India accounts for 20 percent of child mortality worldwide and a shocking 48 percent of Indian children under the age of 5 are chronically malnourished. What do you think is the major reason?**

I do agree with you. The problems of malnutrition and child mortality are interlinked. It is estimated that almost 50 percent of child mortality (below 5 years) is related to malnutrition. The reasons could be many, but poverty is a major factor. Inequity, lack of access to food are other contributory factors.

We need basic grains, pulses, vegetables and fruits to have a healthy diet. There is the paradox of food rotting in godowns, but not available to people. Although there is public distribution system there is a lot of leakage and corruption. Therefore access to variety of foods by the poorer segments is poor.

**As a leading pediatrician what is your advice to come out of this situation?**

The government should strive to improve its attempts to provide healthcare

services to the poor in a form that is easily accessible, available, and affordable. We have a network of public health centres, integrated child development services, and the National Rural Health Mission that help towards better nutrition and healthcare, leading to reduced childhood mortality.

As far as mortality figures are concerned, the country has made considerable progress in reducing the infant and under 5 mortality rates in health, but have some way to go in reaching the millennium development goals of the WHO. There are regional differences with some of the southern states such as Kerala and Tamilnadu performing better than others.

I think the private sector can also contribute. We should certainly appreciate the efforts of organisations in the private sector, like hospitals, which are helping in this area.

**Has the pre-natal, post-natal and neonatal care services in the government hospitals improved in India?**

The government has done a lot to improve neonatal services over the years. This has helped to bring down the neonatal mortality rate and provide better institutional deliveries. For example, the ‘Janani Suraksha Yojana’ scheme has improved hospital based deliveries. Through this scheme, hospital based services are offered to the mother and child and a sum of 500 rupees is paid to them.

Government Insurance schemes for the

poor enables them access free healthcare at government as well as in private hospitals. The government reimburses the private hospitals directly for the treatment they offer to the poor towards any critical illness.

The National Rural Health Mission has contributed by starting newborn stabilisation units in each district. In Tamil Nadu, there were several efforts initiated about a decade ago to improve neonatal care services. A lot of improvement is there, but we need to go further to reach the MDG figures!

**At what age can a parent identify their child to have lesbian/gay/Bisexual/TG symptoms? Your advice for parents who have children with such symptoms?**

This is an issue which has been hibernating in my subconscious till your question made me sit up and start thinking more about it. The early symptoms of homosexual orientation can be noticed even at the age of 4 or 5 years of age when we look at the way the child behaves, the kind of play activities, and the roles the child like to play. This becomes more set when the child enters older school age. The parents can become aware of this when they notice the child’s behavior during later childhood, around 14 or 15 years of age or may be unnoticed till there is a coming out on the part of the child/adolescent and the parents are made aware.

It is like handedness. A child can be initially left handed or right handed or ambidextrous, but settles down to one pattern. Similarly, sexual orientation may go through various phases before it is set in stone.

In a very religious society like India, the views about sex and sexuality tend to be conservative and ‘old-fashioned’. Heterosexual orientation is accepted as the norm, whereas homosexual orientation is thought of as deviant behavior. Things are changing now, as people are getting exposed to the world through travel, media, and easy access to information.

I am liberal in my outlook. I feel that once a person reaches adult age, we must respect his/her individuality and opinions even though it may be different from one’s own line of thinking. I will advise the parent not to excommunicate the child but to listen to and understand the child or risk losing the child forever.

Spend time discussing the issue and make him/her come around to your point of view. Inform the child of consequences that he or she may face in society in pursuing such a lifestyle. You may need to seek professional help and counseling to resolve conflicts which may arise.