

# Conversations Today

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

RNI No.TNENG/2013/52428 | Volume 2 | Issue 5 | May 2014 | 12 Pages | For Free Circulation Only| [www.msdsrtrust.org](http://www.msdsrtrust.org)



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Published by P.N.Subramanian on behalf of  
Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani,  
391/1, Venkatachalapathi Nagar, Alapakkam,  
Chennai - 600 116 and printed by him at  
Express Press, Express Gardens, No.29, Second  
Main Road, Ambattur Industrial Estate,  
Chennai - 600 058.

Editor : Marie Banu  
Phone : 044-42805365



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# From the Editor

**Dear Friend,**

The idea of social accountability has gained credence all over the world. Business enterprises have to take social needs into account and being socially conscious should be their *raison d'être*. Businesses need a moral compass in addition to its practical reliance on measures of profit and loss. The bottom line is that a good business delivers excellent products and services, but a great business does all that and also strives to make the world a better place. Respecting stakeholders beyond shareholders, contributing to the economic, social and environmental development of the communities in which it operates, conscientious stewardship, respecting human dignity, etc. are a few principles businesses need to adapt and report.

As CSR has become mandatory to larger Corporates, working and reporting on social change ideas will contribute largely to the socio-economic development of India. Let us hope and pray that this attempt would facilitate India in becoming a super power by 2020.

We hope that the stories of changemakers featured in this edition will surely inspire many CSRs to evolve interesting strategies.

—Latha Suresh & Marie Banu

## Inner Abundance – Positive Energy Way

**T**he Positive Energy journey brings various experiences our way. A state of Abundance is one of them. However, we experience this differently from the typical worldly ways.

The dictionary meaning of abundance is 'large/great quantity, plenty, loads, wealth'. All these words are typically understood as 'having or possessing' something of value in plenty. Therefore, people attempt to create abundance in their lives by hoarding wealth. Some people create wealth through hard work and then hoard it for later, others resort to grabbing or stealing wealth to create abundance. This form of wealth creation and hoarding, are actions that arise out of fear and insecurity - fear of the future.

In the Positive Energy path, abundance takes on a different experiential meaning. Abundance ceases to mean 'having or possessing' plenty of wealth. Abundance to the Positive Energy seeker is 'knowing' that whenever s/he needs, whatever s/he needs, as much as s/he needs, s/he shall have access to it. This comes from a strong connection with the universal energy, of which s/he is a part. This experience of connectedness and oneness makes the universe our wealth and all things in it, become shared resources.

Abundance in Positive Energy terms is the awareness that I'm a spiritual being living in a material world. Then, one has access to the pure energy that a spiritual being possesses. In turn, then one becomes less compulsive in daily life as abundance stops being associated with material possessions.

Unlike the abundant wealth of worldly existence, this form of abundance is renewable, fair, nourishing, and fulfilling. It creates contentment in every instant. There are no comparisons, no competitiveness, no jealousy, no hatred, no yearning – it is a state of ultimate freedom and deliverance. It releases the positive energy seeker to live to their fullest, in pursuit of their spiritual path. This state of abundance is liberating - it sets us free to live life in the present moment, in complete mindfulness. Every moment then becomes fulfilling and joyful. There are no regrets from the past, no fears of the future, no guilt, no anxieties, no shackles that bind us to worries.

Abundance, then, is not a physical state, but a state of being, of existence. This is a natural state that becomes us, when in the Positive Energy path. This form of spiritual expansion brings many more experiences,

such as renewal, restfulness, energizing, gratefulness, humility, and learning. Abundance in the four energy dimensions translates into:



Struggle with abundance happens when one's energy is engaged in reinforcing limitations and lack.



### Limiting Beliefs

A powerful ritual that attunes one to abundance and consistently addresses limiting beliefs is writing a gratitude journal—which brings to the conscious mind things that are going well in life. We need to learn to be grateful for the abundance we already have. That is what makes it grow and multiply. When we live in gratitude, we experience abundance and support of the universe, and we actively contribute to the abundance of the universe too.

Here's how you can easily incorporate this practice into your life.

- Cultivate a spirit of gratitude: Be conscious and mindful of the blessings – big and small – that surround you.
- Write down at least three things that you are grateful for everyday: Either at the beginning or end of each day, write down every thing that you're grateful for. These questions are helpful to get you into the habit of experiencing gratitude--What am I thankful for in this moment? What's working for my good right now?

### 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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# JUST for a CHANGE

Most of us have gone through NSS days and some would have also been in scouts and guides teams during school and college days. A sense of social responsibility inculcated during these days may or may not find the direction needed to evolve constructively. But, Siri's engagement in simple activities has helped her identify what she had wanted to do, at just the right age.

Siri is a typical Hyderabad girl, who started visiting orphanages with friends during her school days, as the first Youth Service Captain of her school club. She did her Bachelor's Degree in Commerce (Honours) from Loyola Academy. Her association with orphanages continued during college days too. "Orphanages have managed to raise money to sustain themselves. There was food, infrastructure, medical help, etc. But, they all lacked one thing in common—'man power'. In one of the orphanages I visited, the ratio of caretakers to inhabitants was 1:50. Consequently, the personal touch was missing and the inmates yearned for someone who can spend quality time with them," explains Siri.

She adds saying: "We had no money. All we could offer was human resource. We were 2000 students in our college and one group of students can't do it alone every day. So, we started motivating others to also chip in. The team grew bigger day by day. Each one of us spent an hour at one of the orphanages in our college's neighbourhood every day. This made a world of difference to the children living here. Most of the times, they just wanted to play with us."

Siri and team did not realize that such work would require a formal set up, until they began to seek support on behalf of these orphanages from well-wishers and community members. "When we tried to raise funds, the first question we had to face was if we belonged to a registered organisation. We all belonged to 18 to 20 years of age, and had embarked on this journey with an urge to do something meaningful for the society. We comprehended that development in itself is a huge sector to work for, and that it has got a lot to benefit the needy," she says.

Siri, along with her 6 other friends thus founded 'Just Change' in 2009, and registered it under the Indian Societies Act. The NGO's mission was 'Child empowerment through youth involvement' and the founders utilized this identity to sensitise youth on giving back to the society. Just change grew more active over the days, with many students signing in to visit the orphanages. It was during the same year that Siri learnt about CSIM in Hyderabad and decided to pursue the Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Programme (SEOP). "I came to know about CSIM during my fundraising days. Now that our activities were organized in a formal set up, I thought it was important for us to formalize all the procedures. I



therefore joined the CSIM course to seek professional guidance. At that point in time, I was also working for a start-up company. Therefore, CSIM's weekend course worked best for me. The pattern and structure of the course was very apt for beginners in the social sector. The trainers knew the innards of this sector, and were well informed. That encouraged new comers like me," says Siri, who wishes to credit the year 2009 as the most productive year in her life.

Siri is in touch with all her friends at CSIM. She feels that the interaction with the 30 participants in her batch, each coming from varied backgrounds, was most enriching. Appreciating the continuous hand holding provided by CSIM, she seemingly shares, "Any day, when I feel I have lost direction and need some guidance, CSIM would be the first place I would step into – for both moral support as well as professional guidance."

Siri understands that development sector needs more patience, because one's imagination of development does not often match the reality on ground. "What we witness could be starker than what we all would have ever known. CSIM helps participants understand these perspectives during the training period," she adds.

But, Just Change was becoming less intensive now. After graduation, the founders wanted to pursue different things,

which will add value to the work they can do together at Just Change. "I became more curious about rural India after completing CSIM's course and got qualified for the ICICI fellowship in 2010, which is a two year long experiential learning programme where candidates are placed with organisations in rural areas. I worked with Gram Vikas in Orissa, documenting their water and sanitation projects in the first year of my fellowship. In the second year, I worked with Ajeevika Bureau in Rajasthan where I was engaged in the programme for migrant workers in Kherwara," she says.

She admits that they had started Just Change with no long term plans in mind. The intention was primarily to utilize the time and human resources at hand, which she feels they did justice to. "Just Change was a beginning to the desire of going back in our way. That required no capital. Only time and human resources, which we had in plenty. We are now planning to revive the operations at Just Change this year," she asserts.

Nevertheless, Siri owes those days for inspiring her future discourse. She proudly recollects the Youth Assembly in Hyderabad where Just Change won the Best Project Award. She considers it as their biggest achievement. With new interests in rural India, Siri has no regrets for her decisions.

It is not unknown that 70% of India is still rural. The students were able to identify needs in a distance of just 1 km from the city of Hyderabad. As one goes farther from the comfort of cities, we get to meet the ocean of needs. Although she was able to put her perspectives in place, she wanted to experience first-hand about rural India. She feels that fellowship happened at just the right time.

Siri now works for Pratham NGO in Hyderabad, and heads the programme 'Pratham Open School'. She goes on to elaborate that this programme intends to give a platform for girls and women to complete secondary schooling, also acknowledging that it was way different to educate a regular student and drop out from the same class.

Apparently, Siri's fellowship changed her perspective on development completely. "When you go from a city, you think you are going to give something to rural people. But, I was proven wrong. I learnt a lot. I lived in villages with basic amenities and I was still happy. I have grown humbler and I have grown as a person," she concludes.

Siri is true! Development in India needs more such initiatives to sensitise the general public and many more such youngsters who can carve a new road for all of us to follow.

—Shanmuga Priya.T



# Befriending nature: Dream Network

**Arun Krishnamurthy. Founder, Environmentalist Foundation of India**

If someone were to find a dream job with a dream company when he is aged less than 20, it is natural to expect him to achieve exponential career growth and in his later years, possibly enter the record books for being among the youngest CEOs of a function, domain, or support system in business. Obviously, such opportunities do not knock at everyone's door. Here is the story, which could find a place in a fantasy book, of one such rare person. Arun Krishnamurthy had a fairy-tale start in getting a job at the age of 19 years but quit it in his early 20s. Why Arun sacrificed his high-paying career in an MNC for a social cause would make any one wonder just what his trigger and ambition in life are!

## Early days

Arun Krishnamurthy was born in a suburb called Mudichur near Tambaram on the outskirts of Chennai. His house was located in a serene, scenic area surrounded by lush green and a lake near his home. He used to see lots of frogs and snakes, and used to wonder why the snakes ate the frogs! As a child, however, he did not realize that nature has its own way of organizing the food chain for species' subsistence. He did think that unless nature is nurtured and maintained, future generations might suffer.

His schooling also helped him to develop his interest in environment and science. He studied at Good Earth, an institution supported by the Jiddu Krishnamurthy Trust. He commuted nearly 20 km to school every day. He understood the philosophy of Good Earth. Officials at "The School" were specific that he should do what he enjoyed doing. More important, his father shared that sentiment!

Even in the early days of his life, Arun had learnt two important lessons. The first lesson, in two parts, was about the importance of money and the need for frugality. His father made sure everyone at home understood the need to manage personal finance efficiently and appreciated the income and expenditure aspects of family finance. When he was a student in the fourth grade, Arun clearly understood what it meant to build a home with a loan and how much it mattered to repay the loan on time. This taught him frugality and an appreciation of the value of money.

His second big lesson, in three parts, was about hard work, the application of common sense and the development of survival skills. This lesson again came from the family. His father used to work as a General Insurance Development Officer, which meant the harder he worked the more business he achieved. His mother was a PhD in education. She always spoke of making education reforms purposeful. Their natural traits enabled his parents to earn better income by connecting well with people and incidentally, making a



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social impact.

As he grew to become a youth, Arun imbibed much of his parents' characteristic. His interests in science and nature made him aspire to become a cardiologist. You may consider it the hand of god or a quirk of destiny that Arun landed up at the Madras Christian College, seeking admission to a Bachelor of Science course in microbiology.

This college is located on 360 acres of green lush plants and trees, almost like a forest! The large stretches of greenery gave Arun a lot of inspiration. Further, the

college had a very liberal learning system that impacted hard on its students and groomed their leadership skills. Arun was one of those students who could be nurtured to their fullest potential.

Obviously, things were not entirely without conflict for a middle-class boy, however bright and aspiring he was.

## Leadership grooming:

In his second year at the college, Arun started working on a number of initiatives that helped groom him as a leader. He was pained to see college gutters filled with

dried leaves and other garbage. This led to water stagnation, mosquito breeding and adverse effects on the surroundings. He mobilized the support of 14 boys and 36 girls and conveyed his desire to clean up the college campus to the institute's authorities.

Even for a college that had been through all sorts of experiences over a long history, this approach sounded very encouraging to the administrators. They alerted Arun that he was considering what could be a daunting task, considering the effort required to deal with the ground realities of an abundance of wild brush growth, microorganisms and reptiles. The college followed democratic processes. The Principal (Administrative Head of the college) used to preside over sessions called 'An Evening with Tea' with groups of students to discuss new policies and initiatives. Arun was given an opportunity to present his idea about cleaning up the college, and was permitted to go ahead. This was the first environmental clean-up effort handled by him. It gave him the confidence to conceive of larger initiatives for the cause of environment and society.

While at the college, he also used to volunteer at Vandalur Zoo. Being an animal lover, he used to visit the zoo frequently. He was often annoyed by the insensitivity of visitors who failed to appreciate the pain of restricted animals! On one such trip, he found himself highly disturbed, and desired to plunge into action on a project for educating visitors. For a period of eight weeks from that point in time, he conducted a project at the zoo on Sundays, between 11 am to 3 pm, talking to people about how to befriend animals and derive safe and true enjoyment from their trips to the zoo.

## Trigger:

As he was about to complete his graduation, he got a dream offer from Google India in the area of campaign management.

This gave him huge financial independence at less than 20 years of age. However, he had to move out of Chennai and relocate to Hyderabad. He carried his nature-friendly approach to life to Hyderabad, where he set about exploring his new life.

His love for nature and his experience in handling environmental projects while at college created an urge in Arun to do work that would have a larger impact on social activities. He became interested in restoring lakes while working for Google in Hyderabad. The first lake he initiated a clean-up of in May 2008 was Gurunadham Cheruvu located at Miyapur, Hyderabad.. He lived in the Vengal Rao Nagar of Hyderabad and was pained to see the badly neglected Gurunadham Cheruvu Lake in that same area. During one of his cycling trips saw the lake and decided to clean the lake. He spoke to some of his friends and



colleagues and informed them of what he had done while at college. A few of them responded positively, but it was not adequate for such a huge task. Arun went on a door-to-door campaign requesting people to join the movement for cleaning up the lake. He targeted children in the age group 10–16 years. He felt that they would bring more enthusiasm and energy to such projects. Grown up people do not unlearn their set attitudes fast and thus, are reluctant to take up simple acts for the benefit of society. He got permission and support from the local government to clean the lake. He had very simple principles, like providing tool, equipment and basic sanitation for all volunteers, including children, who participated in the cleaning up of the lake. No other money was spent. Further, no one, except the organizers, could take photographs for publicity. The project worked wonders!

This experience taught him the lesson that resources, mainly manpower, are the key to successful implementation of projects. He understood that the true game changer in community work is appropriate personnel who volunteer to give time, energy and passion for such work. Even children doing voluntary service under able leadership can help to clean up water bodies and release reptiles belonging to those water bodies back, ensuring survival of the environment. Arun strongly believes that every environment has its own species and organisms that have been thriving there for generations. Nurturing them is critical for environmental survival and for balancing of human interests with those of nature.

#### Resolve to pursue passion:

The second project undertaken by Arun was “Lakshmi Pushkaram” in Chennai in 2009. After Gurunatham Cheruvu, Arun decided to give up his job and come back to Chennai. He thought that by staying closer to home, he could contribute better to social causes. However, his friends thought that giving up a fancy job to pursue his passion might not be the right thing, considering his long-term interests. Arun listened to his heart more than to his mind! Arun says, “Quitting Google in 2010 was a tough decision. They were wonderful employers. But I felt I was slipping into a comfort zone. A full-time job left me little free time to follow my true passion”.

He volunteered and ran the Roots & Shoots (R & S), India, program for Dr. Goodall. R & S belongs to the Jane Goodall Institute, under Dr. Jane Goodall, a British primatologist and his mentor. This is more because of a strong emotional attachment he had with Goodall. One of Arun’s most prized possessions is a diary that he has maintained since he was in the fourth grade. At that time, his mentor had written a few words in the diary during a visit to India. Goodall inspired him to become a full-time environmentalist.

The major project that he took on was to restore Kilkattalai Lake. This had to be done in several phases: first, the natural habitat and pollutants had to be mapped; garbage had to be cleared; silt had to be removed; and the lake’s periphery to be strengthened. This last phase involved reintroduction of native aquatic species and plants. Getting all this done by an individual and a team of volunteers was a major challenge then. It is interesting to learn how Arun managed everything.

#### Challenges:

In 2011, he founded his own NGO, the Environmentalist Foundation of India (EFI), in Chennai. While primarily active in three Indian cities, namely Hyderabad, Chennai and Delhi. One of EFI’s most exciting programs is the Lake Biodiversity Restoration Project, which has so far cleaned up 12 lakes across India.

With Kilkattalai Lake, the first challenge was in organizing the required manpower. It was clear that Arun had to use school and college children as his primary manpower resource. The clean-up team consisted of around 900 volunteers, recruited through school programs and street theatre for practical conservation work. Most of them were aged below 20, and had received training from him. He actively mobilized this support direct contact, networking through social media and a number of innovative programs to reach out to students. Many of these students and their parents saw him as a hero. Moreover, these engagements were on holidays and inculcated a sense of social awareness in the children. Hence, parents encouraged their children and often visited the work sites themselves. Arun initiated and experienced this model of engagement, and is now able to use it repeatedly to propel his work in a big way.

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The second challenge was getting government department permissions. The initial task was to strengthen the lake’s embankments with the support of the government’s Public Works Department. Then came removal of the garbage. Generally, Arun found the government departments very friendly and helpful. One needs to work alongside local interest groups to ensure smooth sailing of the projects. This was also the case with the support of government officials.

The third challenge was in funding projects. Initially, Arun used funds he got from Google India. His enthusiasm fetched him the first place in the Google Alumni Impact Awards, which gave him a cash prize of \$15,000. This helped him to boost the activities of the EFI. He does not aggressively solicit funding from sponsors, as he feels that his main resources are the people, who are volunteers, at least for now. To meet the rest of the expenses incurred in each intervention, there were sponsors who provide support on request.

Challenge number four was sparing the time that was needed to be devoted. His work was a continuous engagement. He

works as a consultant in a communications outfit. From his earnings there, he pumps in 40%–50% to his projects. EFI gets his full-time attention along with his professional work. Though managing both is a demanding exercise, Arun has so far been able to handle it without much difficulty.

In spite of the above constraints, Arun has now expanded his activities. There are about 18 conservation projects, such as cleaning lakes, sparrow reintroduction and herbs restoration, which are handled by him through EFI. The Tamil Nadu Forest Department, the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department and the Delhi State Government have supported the organization’s initiatives. Arun taps into the potential of school students and young adults to champion environment causes, and has conducted over 100 school programs in Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Lucknow and Vizag.

#### Family support:

Arun’s parents have encouraged him from childhood to choose to work where his heart is. Their hard work, frugality and humbleness have strongly influenced him. Furthermore, his parents thought of him as a sensitive but at the same time objective person, with a no-nonsense attitude when he pursues his dream. Though a sketchy mention has been made, the role of Arun’s friends in his path towards becoming an environmentalist is important and needs appreciation.

#### Conclusion:

It is not easy to give up an opportunity to grow in the corporate world to becoming part of a high-level management echelon, especially when the opportunity comes with the advantage of an early start to the career. However, a strong desire to do something a person is passionate about, and the willingness to forgo a potentially rewarding corporate career to impact neighborhoods along with like-minded youth makes for rather brave and revolutionary thinking. Just imagine the environmental benefit to the world if only we had more leaders like Arun pursuing their passion.

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

## 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.

#### Contact Persons:

Ms. Marie Banu, Director,  
Chennai @ 9884700029  
Dr. Madhuri. R, Head,  
Coimbatore @ 9840222559  
Mr. K L Srivastava, Director,  
Hyderabad @ 9912656112  
Ms Aruna Subramaniam,  
Director, Bangalore @  
9886833665.  
Please visit: [www.csim.in](http://www.csim.in).

**CSIM also facilitates Social Audit for social enterprises through Social Audit Network, UK and SAN, India.**

For more information, please contact Ms. Latha Suresh, Director @ 92822 05123 or visit [www.san-india.org](http://www.san-india.org).

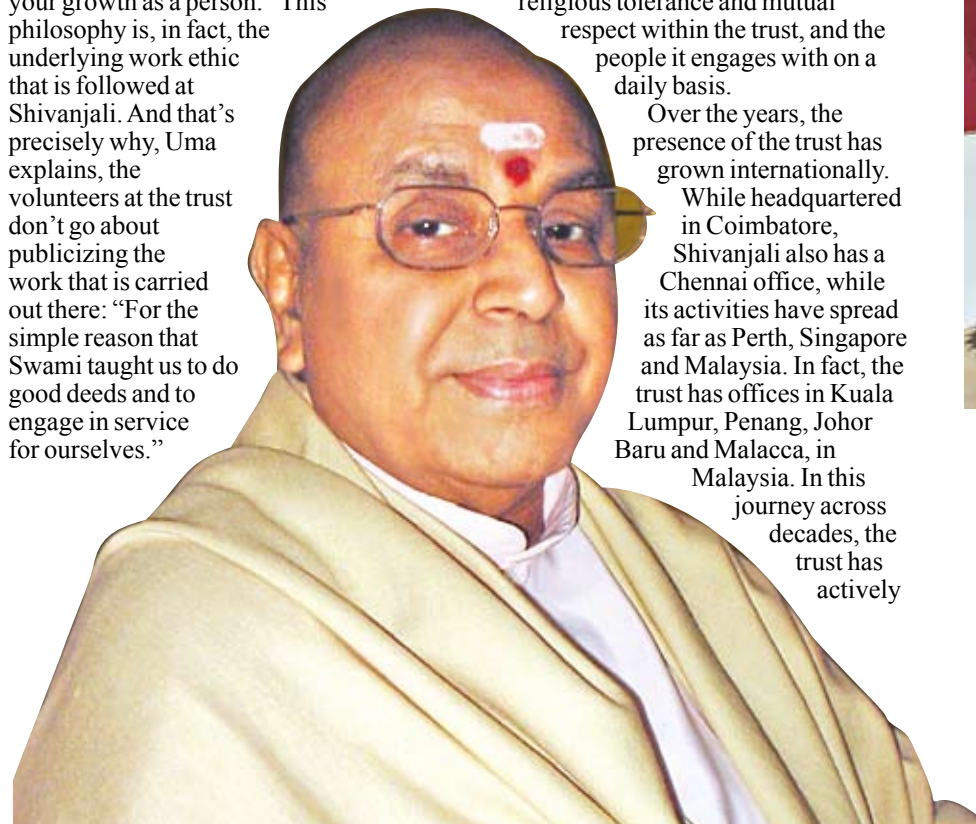


# Service for the soul

*One of the more interesting aspects about Swami Shantanand's spirituality and mission — reflected in the working at Shivanjali — is his love and respect for all religions.*

When he lived a life of spirituality and prayer, Swami Shantanand Saraswathi laid a great deal of emphasis on music and dance as a form of worship. No wonder then, he was frequently referred to as The Singing Sage. Nearly nine years after he attained Mahasamadhi (July, 2005), the legacy of the Swami continues to live on, through the Shivanjali trust. Established in Coimbatore, in the 1980s, Shivanjali's purpose lay in letting Swami Shantanand's ideals live on. "Swami was particularly fond of the performing arts; and that's why one of our premier initiatives was the Temple of Fine Arts, which continues to thrive to this day," says Dr Uma Deavi, a medical officer at Shivanjali. Uma joined the trust in 1995, and has been a veteran volunteer ever since.

In a nutshell, Shivanjali couples service with imparting skill through fine arts, and several other initiatives like the 'Eat as you want and pay as you wish' initiative, pickle-making units and printing services. Through each of these initiatives, the trust does a bit to let Swami Shantanand's ideals live on. "One of the most eye-opening teachings of Swami-ji was how service should benefit both parties," says Uma, "Of course, service benefits its beneficiaries. But more importantly, service is also helps the one who imparts it. And that, in some way, helps contribute to your growth as a person." This philosophy is, in fact, the underlying work ethic that is followed at Shivanjali. And that's precisely why, Uma explains, the volunteers at the trust don't go about publicizing the work that is carried out there: "For the simple reason that Swami taught us to do good deeds and to engage in service for ourselves."



A large part of the work that is carried out at Shivanjali is medical-related. But in her two decades, here, Uma has introduced a new brand of medico-social working where patients who are treated, are also given skill-based responsibilities. "This ensures that they have something to look forward to, from the trust, even after their treatment ends," says Uma. In fact, imparting this medico-social working has been one of the more engaging aspects of Uma's tenure as Shivanjali. The Kuala-Lumpur-based doctor, moved to Coimbatore in 1995, to take up responsibilities at the trust, where she has worked, ever since. The trust itself operates entirely in Coimbatore, with a bulk of its activities based entirely around the city. Through its initiatives and activities, Swami Shantanand's motto of 'Serve, Love, Give' has echoed far and wide.

One of the more interesting aspects about Swami Shantanand's spirituality and mission — reflected in the working at Shivanjali — is his love and respect for all religions. "The trust holds annual Christmas events, and observes festivals celebrated by various religions," says Uma, "And that's because Swami-ji always advised us to be tolerant and respect different faiths." This secularism has ensured a spirit of religious tolerance and mutual respect within the trust, and the people it engages with on a daily basis.

Over the years, the presence of the trust has grown internationally. While headquartered in Coimbatore, Shivanjali also has a Chennai office, while its activities have spread as far as Perth, Singapore and Malaysia. In fact, the trust has offices in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Johor Baru and Malacca, in Malaysia. In this journey across decades, the trust has actively



contributed to the empowerment of women, children and society in general by means of these initiatives that it undertakes. The trust has also been aided by CSR initiatives by Vision2020 Australia and Cognizant Technology Solutions. The trust has also conducted eye camps, free dental check-ups and similar healthcare-related services for children, in its effort to further the service that it renders to society. "We think small, and don't have big

plans; at least not as of now," says Uma while referring to the trust's future plans. However, one plan that Shivanjali is actively considering, is the setting up of a holistic healing centre. This, of course, is in tune with the success and patronage that traditional treatment and healing methods have enjoyed of late. "Ayurvedic treatment has been of great help in the recent past. A lot of people seem to be taking to it as an effective means of treatment," says Uma.

"That's why we have also been actively considering a move towards Ayurveda, and traditional methods of healing. That's why setting up a holistic healing centre has been an active part of our future plans."

The Shivanjali trust has played an active role in making lives a whole lot better. In doing so, they've managed to pay tribute to the man whose mission and principles they help emulate. However, in doing so, Shivanjali has also managed to create a

legacy for Swami Shantanand; one that is expected to last for a long time to come. Through action-based initiatives, Shivanjali has furthered the cause of helping society be a better place to live in. Be it teaching, medical service, impartment of skills or even the smallest service to the lower rungs of society, the NGO has gone a long way in helping further the cause of holistic service. Not just service, but service for the soul.





# The concept seller

*Currently, the overall market size of stem cell services is Rs. 200 crore in India, but is expected to reach Rs. 2,700 crore by 2020, according to a report from Lifecell.*

**A**ishwarya Rai Bachchan, possibly one of India's highest paid brand ambassadors, appears in several TV ads for endorsing many different brands, including ones she probably never uses in real life. But, there is one brand, Lifecell, she endorses from the bottom of her heart. The affinity simply comes from the fact that Aishwarya's daughter, Aaradhya's stem cells are banked with the company. Today, Aishwarya, a patron of Lifecell, is also a goodwill ambassador for stem cell banking in the country.

For Mayur Abhaya, a second-generation entrepreneur whose family owns Chennai-based Shasun Chemicals, leading Lifecell as its founder and CEO was an opportunity he couldn't afford to miss. For starters, it offered him a chance to build a business in a blue ocean space.

While stem cell banking has been around for over 25 years, when Lifecell was founded in 2004, it was India's first stem cell solutions company. So, what really is a stem cell? Stem cells lay the very foundation of our bodies. Our skin, bones, blood and organs are all born out of stem cells. Stem cells have the power to repair and regenerate our body's tissues and organs, and when stored properly, can be used to help people recover from life threatening medical conditions. For Abhaya, it was this kind of basic education that had to be imparted to early adopter-customers to get the business up and running.

Lifecell was founded by establishing a technology partnership with US-based Cryo-Cell International, the world's first stem cell solutions company. Specialising in umbilical cord stem cell banking, life-saving stem cells are collected and stored from the umbilical cord blood and tissue within 10 minutes after a baby is born. These stem cells are stored in a secure environment at minus 196 degrees, and can be used to treat several medical conditions, as the child grows older. Essentially, this also meant that customers needed to believe that the company would still be around, 15-20 years from the time of banking. More over, trust was a crucial element of the customer-company relationship.

"It is crucial to empower our sales force with the right tools to help them sell better. For example, all our feet on street sales people carry an android device with educational videos to show our customers the benefits of stem cell banking."

In addition to technology and people, branding continues to be an important element in the customer acquisition process. Trust in the brand, which often takes decades to build, had to be

established fairly quickly. Today, the company operates more than 100 centers around India and has begun to expand into other GCC countries. It serves over 80,000 customers and has received several accreditations from international organisations for standards, such as American Association of Blood Banks (AABB), College of American

services at Rs. 19,990 (for the first year) and storage fees of Rs. 3,500 per year. The price came down from Rs. 45,000 per year. As is often the case, lower pricing can play a crucial role in disrupting the market and converting non-consumers into consumers. Currently, the overall market size of stem cell services is Rs. 200 crore in India, but is expected to

also offers stem cell asset insurance to its customers. Abhaya believes it is crucial to lead the market by bringing in all these innovations, often being the first stem cell services company to do so.

From a sales force perspective, Abhaya realises the importance of giving the right tools to help his people sell well. The sales folks carry an android device loaded with educational videos to help convince customers better.

The company has also taken the concept of content marketing to the next level. It sponsored the production of a DVD titled "Prenatal yoga with Lara Dutta" and also organised Great Expectations, a fashion show and carnival for expectant women in Bangalore. Both these content marketing efforts, in tandem with the campaign with Bachchan, helped the brand break through the clutter.

With the investment from Helion Venture Partners earlier this year, Lifecell is now looking to retain its position as India's largest stem cell solutions provider and possibly become the world's largest by 2015. That is not all. Abhaya is constantly looking for ways to enhance the technology and service offerings, boost up his marketing and also diversify into bringing in innovative stem cell therapies into India.

## PROFILE

Mayur Abhaya, founder and CEO, Lifecell, India's leading stem cell banking solutions company, has adopted a "total marketing" strategy to clinch early adopter customers for his service. From celebrity endorsements and content marketing to establishing technology partnerships, Abhaya has looked at sales, marketing and branding holistically.

## LIFECCELL'S MARKETING MIX

Lifecell sponsors "Prenatal yoga with Lara Dutta"

Aishwarya, Rai Bachchan, a patron of Lifecell, roped in as goodwill ambassador for stem cell banking in the country

Initial fee lowered to Rs. 19,990 from Rs. 45,000

Global accreditations from American Association of Blood Banks and others to add to its credibility

Technology partnerships with global players including one with the world's oldest company Cryo-Cell

Constantly innovate, adding newer service offerings. Bringing in novel stem-cell therapies into India

S. Prem Kumar

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



Pathologists (CAP), WHO & National Accreditation Board for Testing & Calibration Laboratories (NABL). Earlier this year, the company raised Rs. 35 crore in funding from Helion Venture Partners, primarily to boost up marketing and also enable the development of novel cell-based therapies.

Another crucial element of the marketing mix is the affordability factor. Recently, the company reduced its price to offer customers its stem cell banking

reach Rs. 2,700 crore by 2020, according to a report from Lifecell.

Considering the potential, competition is heating up and there are over 15 stem cell banks (the market is dominated by the top three) in the country. Lifecell differentiates from competition by adding more and more features to its service offering. For example, the company offers dual-storage in Chennai and NCR, has now started offering menstrual blood banking (the first in India to do so) and



# Helping Them Move Independently

**T**he urge to give back to the society and contribute something for the have-nots has been the primary motive behind most of the social initiatives. Mukti, a social organisation based in Chennai, comes as no exception. But, its consistency for almost three decades now is noteworthy and appreciable.

Mukti was founded in 1986 by Mrs. Meena Dadha, who was then a housewife hailing from Rajasthan. Chennai exposed her to many tragedies like accidents and diseases that curtailed people from even moving around independently. "She was alarmed with the number of accidents that shattered families," recalls Ms Stella, Chief Operating Officer of Mukti. Meena soon realised that providing artificial limbs for amputees could make a world of difference. She decided to do this free of cost for the poor. Soon after, Mr Tulsi, her close aid, was sent to Jaipur to learn the art of making artificial limbs.

Mukti started off as a small unit in Meena's garage, with Tulsi and a handyman beginning to manually produce artificial limbs. Her initiative was supported by her parents, who decided to help her in every possible way. In a few years time, they bought a place in Meenambakkam to set up Mukti Centre. Her conviction to make the services accessible for all was clearly reflected in her choice of locality for the centre. Meenambakkam is located close to the railway station and the airport and is easily accessible by road too.

The laborious manual production yielded only 10 artificial foot per day. Was this capacity adequate? "A beneficiary who comes with crutches at 10 am, can actually walk out of my centre by 3 pm with the artificial limb that was exclusively produced for him/her. We have proven this possible, while hospitals take months to deliver the same service," asserts Stella adding that the manufacturing unit now functions with four technicians and three assistants.

In early 2000s, Mukti decided to venture into production of callipers for polio victims. "Our beneficiaries are amputees and polio victims from India, Srilanka, Bangladesh and other developing nations. Mukti also provides callipers for children as young as six months. Providing attention to each and every beneficiary reiterates the happiness and fulfilment of the Mukti team. "These artificial limbs are a big boon to care takers of patients who have to be carried everywhere. Their sense of liberation and relief is so apparent and touching," shares Stella.

Besides providing mobility aids, Mukti also works to mainstream differently abled individuals in the society. Characteristically, we can see physically challenged members working here to prepare the artificial foot. Awareness programmes, camps, sports



and cultural events are organised frequently for the beneficiaries.

Mentally challenged individuals affiliated to SCARF were also employed at Mukti. Mukti spares no effort in acknowledging their talents. Outstanding achievements by physically challenged individuals are recognised through the Lalchand Milapchand Dadha Award instituted by Mukti. In the last 28 years, Mukti's style of producing limbs and callipers has remained manual. "Looking back, more than 200,000 people have benefitted from this effort. How all this is sustained is our next concern," Stella smiles.

She says, "Mukti receives no grants. Friends, family members, clubs and well wishers have contributed to our organisation in several ways. Our visibility comes through word of mouth. Not surprising though, given that Mukti is the only NGO providing artificial limbs and callipers free of cost to the poor. A beneficiary is charged only three hundred rupees and that too to meet the administrative costs.

This is not all! Mukti had its second centre located at Kottakuppam near Pondicherry. This centre came in with additional facilities for the talented and upcoming physically challenged artists. Apart from the regular logistic support, Mukti centre arranged regular interactive workshops with renowned artists in the



field, allowing beneficiaries to observe, learn and be guided by professionals.

Further trying to complement their talent, Mukti had also established an art gallery in this centre. "It is an art gallery that has been set up to promote artists; organise workshops with renowned artists, but with a deep - rooted connection with the physically challenged. Every step was taken considering its usefulness to Mukti's cardinal cause—providing artificial limbs and callipers to amputees free of cost. However, the centre at Kottakuppam had to be shut due to inadequate human resources to manage the centre.

The art work by differently abled is now promoted through Prakrit Art Gallery at Raja Annamalaipuram, owned by Mukti's founder, Mrs Meena Dadha. Prakrit Art Gallery is a commercial venture set up to sustain the activities of Mukti.

With such innate work and presence, Mukti has successfully delivered 700

artificial limbs along with raw materials to provide foot to Sri Lankan war victims. "Mukti is not into bulk production. Every beneficiary is different and it is important for us to produce a suitable limb for them. We make 5 limbs and 5 callipers in a day, along with the repairs ranging from 15 to 20. The procedure for a limb takes about 4 hours. So far, our technical team has been able to successfully meet the

demand," says Stella who oversees the production of 600 limbs, 400 callipers and 6 to 10 hands every month.

Mukti's future, is seemingly driven by the growing demand and the expertise it has accrued over the decades. The centre presently hosts student interns from universities in US and UK, along with students from colleges in Chennai, who have come here to learn the procedure of making artificial limbs and callipers. As Stella explains, Mukti has always been open to exploring opportunities within its limits to best benefit its target beneficiaries. With new grants promising to come in, Mukti is also looking at the option of adopting machinery for its production.

Soon to hit the three decades mark, Mukti has succeeded remarkably in its mission to help amputees and polio victims move independently. It has also gone further in facilitating their integration in mainstream society.

—Shanmuga Priya.T



# Conversations with Shri Ramana Maharishi

**D**r. Emile Gatheir, S. J., Professor of Philosophy at the Sacred Heart College, Shembaganur, Kodaikanal, asked: "Can you kindly give me a summary of your teachings?"  
M.: They are found in small booklets, particularly Who am I?

D.: I shall read them. But may I have the central point of your teachings from your lips?

M.: The central point is the thing.

D.: It is not clear.

M.: Find the Centre.

D.: I am from God. Is not God distinct from me?

M.: Who asks this question? God does not ask it. You ask it. So find who you are and then you may find if God is distinct from you.

D.: But God is Perfect and I am imperfect. How can I ever know Him fully?

M.: God does not say so. The question is for you. After finding who you are you may see what God is.

D.: But you have found your Self. Please let us know if God is distinct from you.

M.: It is a matter of experience. Each one

must experience it himself.

D.: Oh! I see. But God is Infinite and I am finite. I have a personality which can never merge into God. Is it not so?

M.: Infinity and Perfection do not admit of parts. If a finite being comes out of infinity the perfection of infinity is marred. Thus your statement is a contradiction in terms.

D.: No. I see both God and creation.

M.: How are you aware of your personality?

D.: I have a soul. I know it by its activities.

M.: Did you know it in deep sleep?

D.: The activities are suspended in deep sleep.

M.: But you exist in sleep. So do you now too. Which of these two is your real state?

D.: Sleep and waking are mere accidents. I am the substance behind the accidents. (He looked up at the clock and said that it was time for him to catch the train. He left after thanking Sri Bhagavan. So the conversation ended abruptly).

—Excerpted from talks with  
Shri Ramana Maharishi

## Belongingness Dimensions – Marriage of Corporate CSR and Social Organizations

**C**SR – Corporate Social Responsibility, a boon for the social organizations has several impact spaces. This has to be seen both from the perspective of the corporate which have to work on enhancing their social responsibility as well as the social organizations who are the beneficiaries of this movement. The new Bill mandates that every company having a net worth of Rs 500 crore or more, or a turnover of Rs 1,000 crore or more, or a net profit of Rs 5 crore or more during any financial year must constitute a CSR committee consisting of three or more directors, with at least one independent director. This committee will formulate a CSR policy for the company and recommend the expenditure to be incurred on CSR activities. At least 2% of the average net profit of the company made during three previous financial years must be spent on CSR activities.

It is interesting to trace the way society has been taken care of by the largest influencing bodies in history which has been changing over a period of time. Centuries back, the kings played a key role in ensuring that society's needs are met. Then arrival of the religious institutions that played a large part and still continues to play in running institutions and supporting education and healthcare extensively. Followed by this were the governance bodies and today the Corporate have also been made a part of it. The Corporate are the largest bodies influencing a lot of lives currently and can make a difference by joining hands with the social organizations.

The understanding of the intent and the careful planning of the implementation has to happen in the HR of the corporate as well as the social organizations who are the agency to ensure the benefits are properly passed. The act defines CSR as activities that promote poverty reduction, education, health, environmental sustainability, gender equality, and vocational skills development. Companies can choose



which area to invest in, or contribute the amount to central or state government funds earmarked for socio economic development.

This initiative has the potential to reach out to over 3 million NGOs that exist in India. But there is a large perception that most of them are disorganized and lack efficiency in functioning. This calls for social organizations to become strong in their systems and processes; they need to accept and understand the need for accountability in every action, time and effort; they need to learn to evaluate and balance the head and heart (emotions and tasks). Further there are pockets and small scale work that most social organizations are involved in and scalability is a huge issue. They have to be willing to look at large scale interventions and effectively absorb and manage the funds that will become available. The initiative has the power to strengthen the social organizations in terms of scale and sustainability. But will the social organizations accept and learn to function differently is still an unanswered question. To what extent

will they be willing to look at the monetary dimension and connect reach with value for money the way corporate envisages is not yet known.

While we have thousands of years of history where philanthropy and happiness in this world are equated through socio religious learning, Indian corporate are yet to have a holistic view of how they can impact society. The danger is for it to get reduced to a set of activities that will serve the purpose of adhering to the bill rather than seeing it as an inner connect of the people to the larger consciousness and a process of evolution. This will call for their active participation and deep seated vision and planning connected to organizational vision and values. Otherwise it can be reduced to a mere checklist exercise. The corporate have to work on matching the inner beliefs and spaces of vacuum experienced by the employees and connect them to spaces of fulfillment through the experience of joy of giving in person and material. It can also be a deep exercise to connect and bond the employees at heart level. When they get involved the corporate has to do their due diligence to ensure they work with high impact credible organizations.

The social organizations too has for long shun anything that is so called 'corporate' in terms of culture and efficiency. There have been two worlds existing – be it stream of education, people, orientation, philosophy, culture... Now a marriage of these two has to happen for both to support each other and evolve together. The larger idea is to ensure they both accept each other and learn the best practices from each other. It's important that each of them do not end up trying to convert the other becoming judgmental and proving either orientation as wrong. They need to accept each other and appreciate the benefits each can bring to the project on hand and ensure the benefit is reached out to the needy. It no surprise in some ways they are of opposite to each other but the 'Poornam' or whole can happen

only when the opposites merge. No one single person is more important than the other and each are required for fulfillment of purpose of the other.

Therefore there has to be –

- Clear planning from the corporate linked to their organizational vision and values the areas where they can reach out and support society
- Deep connection and mapping to the employees willingness to participate and the social organization's requirement
- Developing systems and framework that will measure impact, reach out and development by the social organizations for the funding, effort and energy invested by the corporate
- Ability of the social organizations to formulate clear and detailed proposals that match the requirements of the corporate in the local areas and approach them building a viable relationship that is mutually beneficial.
- Willing to meet mutual expectations in terms of financial accounting practices and processes of implementation.
- It has to be inclusive inter-dependent relationship build on trust and integrity to ensure the intent and essence of CSR initiative is met completely.

### Reflections:

1. To what extent do the processes in my organization qualify for corporate funding?
2. How can I extend benefit to the CSR that the corporate has to fulfill and also ensure the need of my social organization is met?
3. To what extent are the employees aware and are participative in the CSR initiative?

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath



# Master Class in Social Accounting and Audit



Alan Kay



Mrinalini Shastry

While the Companies Act, 2013 has made Corporate Social Responsibility mandatory for companies, there is a need to look at reporting about CSR activities in a way which measures the impact of the programmes and check it against its intended objectives.

In this regard, CSIM and LIBA organized a Social Accounting and Audit Master Class in Chennai on 5th and 6th of May, 2014 at LIBA Campus in Chennai. This Master Class provided insights on social impact reporting and facilitated individuals to become certified Social Accountants and Social Auditors.

Participants attended an intense training programme on 5th and 6th of May to understand the concepts of Social Accounting and Audit (SAA). The training includes theoretical and practical skills training followed by one to one continuous mentoring

support at various stages over a period of 4 to 6 months. The objective of the programme is to initiate a group of practitioners into the science and art of SAA. The training further ensures that participants are well versed with the principles underpinning the process as well as solutions to the practical challenges that arise out of undertaking SAA in Social enterprises and CSR projects. 27 Participants from corporate houses and NGOs, besides professional Social Workers and management consultants have enrolled in this training and aspire to become certified Social Accountants and Auditors within 6 months.

The resource persons for the Master Class were Mr. Alan Kay, Co-founder of the Social Audit framework from Social Audit Network-UK, Liverpool, Mrs. Mrinalini Shastry and Mrs Latha Suresh, Social Auditors from Social Audit Network, India.



Latha Suresh



Photos: Nelson Naveen



# “There is a strong tradition in India of volunteering and helping others within particular communities.”

**Alan Kay shares with Marie Banu the global scenario of Social Accounting and Audit.**

**A**lan has more than 30 years of experience in community development and social enterprise support in the UK and overseas. His background is in overseas development and he has lived and worked in East Africa and South East Asia attached to a variety of different organisations including HelpAge International, Action Aid and VSO. Since returning to Scotland in 1988 he has mainly worked with community-owned enterprises and social enterprises. He believes in empowering people so that they can get involved in economic activity to create sustainable communities.

Over the years he has developed links with a wide range of social economy organisations and carried out research, planning, training/facilitation and evaluations. Alan is an Associate Lecturer at Glasgow Caledonian University and assisted them to establish a Diploma and MSc in Social Enterprise. He is also a Director of CBS Network, is the Treasurer for the Community Development Journal and is a Member of the Institute for Economic Development.

Alan has worked with social accounting and audit for many years and helped to found the Social Audit Network. He co-authored the 2005 Social Accounting and Audit Manual and more recently wrote the New Guide to Social Accounting and Audit.

*In an exclusive interview Alan Kay shares with Marie Banu the global scenario of Social Accounting and Audit and its need for social work organisations.*

## What inspired you to launch Social Audit Network, UK?

I have been involved in Social Accounting and Audit since 1989. I was working with community businesses. We wanted to get a method where organisations themselves took charge of their own monitoring and evaluation. To make that cost effective, we developed a system for organizations to measure social accountability as well financial accountability. In order to give it integrity, it was important that they had an audit at the end of the social accounts. So, my colleague John Pearce and I developed a system in the 1990s. At that time there was not much of interest in social impact. But, a number of people were interested in it and we started meeting them on regular basis to share ideas. In 2002, we decided to form a company and called it Social Audit Network Limited. It attracted a lot of interest within UK and outside the UK as well. It has a wide membership and our main office is in Liverpool and we have a board of directors who meet on a regular basis.

We try and do a number of things. One

is, we support Social Accounting and Audit and try to promote it with organizations who want to emulate good practice within their own organisations. We try and focus on social enterprises, non-government organisations, and voluntary organisations. We also have had interest from the corporates in using the process to assess their Corporate Social Responsibility.

## Can you share your experiences working with Social Enterprises in the UK?

Since 1988 I have been working with social and community enterprises. My original background is on overseas development, particularly community development. I got involved in community economic development which is where people in local areas not only provide services to benefit the wider community, but also take charge of their own economic activity. They did this by setting up companies and trade and use the surplus to benefit the wider community. This was before the expression social enterprise had really arrived. Since then, there has been a vast increase in social enterprises.

There is no clear definition for Social Enterprises. This is due to political interests wanting to maintain a broad definition which then allows a wider range of organisations to call themselves social enterprises. But, this has its advantages as there are a large number of social enterprises, but the downside of that no one is actually clear what a social enterprise is.

We are pragmatic with whom we work with and we work with a wide range of organizations in UK. Generally speaking, we work with all organisations whose main purpose is to provide some sort of community benefit or social benefit.

## Your thoughts about the way in which social enterprises in India and abroad operate?

In my understanding, India has a long tradition of NGOs, and organisations that are located in the civic society.

There is a strong tradition in India of volunteering and helping others within particular communities. I think that those organisations should move much more into trying to develop a sustainable income. I have seen this with a number of organisations and I think that the idea of social enterprise is really beginning to be taken up in India. It possibly needs more political as well as financial support.

We have been working with CSIM for a number of years in the area of Social Accounting and Audit. Just looking at the work they do, it is very much more geared to assisting individuals and organisations to set up a social enterprise. I think that certainly in Europe that is the way things are heading at the moment, and I suspect that it is heading in that direction in India as well.

## Do you think an NGO or a Social Enterprise writing their social accounts would facilitate them to gain venture capital or obtain funding from donor organisations?

I think donors and people

who want to contribute to benefit the society are always interested in hearing the story about what organisations are doing in order to achieve social or community development. Up until recently the reputation of an organization held sway in funders making decisions on how to allocate their funding.

We think that decisions should be made according to the impact an organisation has. An organization as part of its normal working practice should develop a system where it systematically accounts for its social, environmental, and local economic performance as well as its impact. This would add to the integrity of the decision – especially when there is an audit which gives funders and investors a lot of confidence in the organization receiving the funding. Funders and investors are always interested to see what kind of impact their money is having on the wider community. So I think that inevitably, Social Accounting and Audit, in some form of the other is going to be increasingly important.

## Besides UK and India, which other countries adopt the Social Accounting and Audit?

There has been a lot interest in social accounting and audit from different countries. There is an increasing interest in any kind of system can be used by an organisation to demonstrate social benefit. We have had people who were interested from Middle East, all parts of Europe, India, Nepal, South East Asia, Australia and South Africa.

Turning interest into action has in some ways been quite tricky. Although people are looking into what we are doing, actually putting it into practice has been more difficult. But in

Germany, it has been significant enough to lead to courses, training sessions, workshops and pilot programmes. Also, in Sweden and to a degree in Spain.

In Nepal they are particularly interested in social accounting from the point of view of accountability of government schemes. There has been a number of workshops and trial programmes in Nepal. There is one country which has recently taken it very much to heart and that is South Korea. There has also been interest in South Africa and Australia over the years.



Photo: Marie Banu