

Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

Pollution has reached its peak due to the development and modernization in our lives. With the development of science and technology, there has been a huge growth and people have become prisoners of their own creations. We waste the bounties of our nature without a thought that our actions causes serious problems.

Air pollution is one of the most dangerous forms of pollution. A biological, chemical, and physical alteration of the air occurs when smoke, dust, and any harmful gases enter into the atmosphere and make it difficult for all living beings to survive as the air becomes contaminated.

More than 90% of the world's population lives in regions that break WHO air-quality guideline limits. Choking pollution still smothers major cities in our country.

World Health Organisation warns that air pollution has serious health consequences. It is a killer, more than obesity or passive smoking as it affects us indirectly, through heart attacks, lung infections and cancer.

New Delhi's government shut all primary schools for a second time this month because of pollution in the capital region, which is home to over 46 million people.

With no imminent solutions, some Indians have tried to step in — with solutions like the oxygen bar. Here, customers are strapped tubes to their noses and inhale scents of lavender, lemongrass or spearmint.

Now, do we need to buy fresh air? Well, we have been paying for a bottle of clean drinking water which we did not do some 20 years ago.

Now is not the time to undermine efforts to clean air — it is time to strengthen them. Stop denying the risks of air pollution. Let's protect the water we drink, the air we breathe, and the soil we use to grow our food.

Start acting now!

—Marie Banu

Gap between Intention and Action

“There is always a gap between intention and action..” — Paulo Coelho

“If we want there to be peace in the world, we have to be brave enough to soften what is rigid in our hearts, to find the soft spot and stay with it. We have to have that kind of courage and take that kind of responsibility. That's the true practice of peace.”

— Pema Chödrön, *Practicing Peace in Times of War*

To me this gap emerges from the gap in “applying oneself”. Setting an intention engages the intellectual strength and that is a muscle we all exercise all the time. However, when action needs to emerge, we have to go beyond the mind, learn to regulate our emotions and bring our physical being into the “playground”- which I call as applying oneself. This is a less used muscle for many of us.

Applying oneself— webster's definition is to make oneself work hard in order to complete something successfully. Applying oneself happens through by demonstrating trust in one's intention, staying grounded in courage, developing action as everyday practice and exercising response-ability.

Thinking is an overused faculty and when we think of action, it generates assumptions, perhaps fear or confusion and then the energy to take action reduces. The first step to action our intention is to not to think about action but act. An important

ingredient is trust and faith in the intention so that one can act. Trust is an “inside” emotion and what is seen on the outside is courage.

Everyday practice of one's intention is another important ingredient of taking action. The gap emerges because we reserve action for another day!. When there is an intention, there needs to be action every day. Even if it is a small one, it is action taken.

And another factor for taking action is in exercising the ability to respond-Responsibility. Taking action is not duty, it is not thrust from the outside. Taking action is Response-ability, in other words it is the willingness to cause shift or change connected to the intention. Staying grounded in response-ability makes one take action rather than just think of action.

**5 frogs are sitting on a log.
4 of the frogs decide to jump off. How many frogs are left?
Did you answer 1?
The correct answer is 5. Do you know why?**

Yours Energetically

Ms. Bhuvaneshwari Ravi is trainer, facilitator and coach of the Positive Energy (PE) program. She is a spiritual seeker with a vision of transforming her own energy state from surviving to being. In this journey she has gathered deep insights and is continuously working towards creating a pathway for more seekers. With years of exposure to spiritual practices like yoga, reiki, and personal development interventions like coaching, she is working in the Organization Development and Leadership Development space.

She can be contacted at bhuvaneshwari@teamthink.co.in for arranging Positive Energy training and Coaching sessions.

EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh

Marie Banu

Nutrition for Life



If you are suffering from anaemia, Iron's more precious than gold.

This catchy phrase has caught great attention this year through a famous advertisement on Indian women and anaemia. Roughly half of all women in India suffer from anaemia caused by iron deficiency.

Our country has a high prevalence of anaemia, prevalence is even higher among Indian women with around 50 % of women having low haemoglobin levels. As anaemia can often be the indicator that there are more serious underlying illnesses, it is very important to improve disease awareness and obtain an accurate diagnosis.

Sandhya was always on a quest to find answers to this persisting problem. Having completed her M.Sc Pharmacology from London, she and her team were researching nutraceuticals and their high benefits. During this phase, she felt like certain of these ingredients like Spirulina can create an impact on the nutrition of children, and pregnant women who were suffering from anaemia. She launched Sukrutha Organics, a social enterprise striving to create awareness of Spirulina and its benefits in our country, along with Dr. Vanitha in 2017. Since then, the duo have been striving to raise awareness on anaemia and iron deficiency through campaigns and training sessions.

"The rate of anaemia is an alarming 75% among children under the age of 5 and around 53% among women. There are lots of myths on iron deficiency in India. It is not just about lack of concentration or immunity deficiency. It's more than that! Taking tablets or

supplements is not adequate. It's essentially about what we consume in our daily diet. I have observed in many places how people are ignorant about BMI, calcium and iron deficiency," says Sandhya.

During the initial interventions in local anganwadis, she found out that children wouldn't consume food products which had spirulina due to their odour and taste.

"We had to find a way to make children eat them. They love to eat chikkis or biscuits which did not have maida or sugar, and also sweets made out of ragi, muringa, etc. So, we masked our ingredients in such food items. Children started eating our products and this was a good sign," says Sandhya adding, "For mothers, there was a considerable increase in their lactation after consuming these products."

Sandhya learnt about CSIM from her mentor who told her about the opportunities she will be exposed to in CSIM's Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Programme. This has made a great difference to my organization. Among the many things that CSIM taught me, I count two of them to be special. The first was patience. After listening to various speakers, and understanding their humble beginnings and struggles, I learned that it's alright to be patient. Beginnings are meant to be this way, with several ups and downs, a rollercoaster ride in fact. It taught me patience and an overview of everything."

"Improving on my presentation skills will be my second most important takeaway at CSIM. From 20 percent to 80 percent, I have climbed the ladder on

Sukrutha Organics has 4 to 5 highly nutritious products and are associated with Synergy India Foundation as nutrition partners which work closely with Telangana government.

my presentation skills at CSIM. Inputs given by Dr. KL Srivastava and other speakers helped me craft the impact and the essential parameters in the most presentable manner. Days have come when my audience is impressed by the presentations I showcase and all credits

goes to CSIM," she says.

Currently, Sukrutha Organics has 4 to 5 highly nutritious products and are associated with Synergy India Foundation as nutrition partners which work closely with Telangana government. They have also given their products to Novartis for a blood donation camp.

Sukrutha Organics has also conducted many nutrition awareness camps along with Telangana state residential hostels, Health Supervisors, Assistant Caretakers and Teachers and has impacted over 3.5 lakh students over time. After their training sessions, health officers across these institutes have taken an oath on conducting Healthy Tuesdays and encourage children eat healthy food.

"This month, we are conducting a campaign called Iron for Life in association with Synergy India. Our interventions for the last 8 months, for children under the age of five, have shown a considerable increase in children's appetite, physical activities, and their height and weight has quite a good improvement," she says.

"Sukrutha in Sanskrit means 'good deed'. That is what we strive to achieve every day. If one can give small quantities of micro nutrients to children and pregnant women, we could resolve multiple health problems that are related to nutrition levels. Nutrition is like a switch. If you provide nutrition, every aspect of a child's life – concentration levels, immunity, strength, and productivity increases automatically," says Sandhya with hope.

—Angela Anish

Keeping the ‘social economy’ on the right track



I believe that the proportion of our UK economy intended to make a profit for people other than investors or owners is growing.

The concept of a ‘social economy’ is also gaining traction in public policy – the West Midlands Combined Authority proposes a ‘model of economic growth that impacts positively on all our residents and communities’[1]. The Greater Manchester Local Industrial Strategy sets out an objective to ‘create the conditions in which co-operatives and social enterprises can thrive’[2].

This social economy is made up of a rich diversity of enterprises and organisations, including – co-operatives, mutuals, associations, foundations, social enterprises and charities, sharing many common values and features, such as, for example: trading which prioritises the social objective over financial; voluntary and open membership; democratic forms of governance; and reinvestment of most of the profits to carry out social purpose objectives.

However, at the heart of the social economy, there’s a difficult balance to be achieved for social enterprises – too

much focus on the ‘social value’ can have a negative effect on the ‘enterprise’ which keeps the business financially sustainable.

Too much focus on the money and the ‘social’ benefit gets lost. The economy isn’t ‘social’ at all.

It’s as if you have to follow a train track – one side gets stuck and the train derails.

Keeping financial accounts is mandatory – so looking after the money is easy.

‘Social’ Accounting and Audit can be the way that social economy organisations revolutionise the way that they work and manage their business[3]. Quite a claim from the Social Audit Network (SAN) but what does it really mean?

Social Accounting and Audit is a process that creates a flexible framework for an organisation to:

Prove – report on its performance

Improve – provide the information essential for planning future action and improving performance.

Account – fully for its social, environmental and economic impact.

It enables us to understand the impact

an organisation has on its community, and on those people and other organisations who are directly involved with the organisation or who access its services. At the same time, accountability is promoted and weaved into the process by engaging with the organisation’s key stakeholders.

The main benefit to an organisation is the ability to prove its value and to improve its performance! Proving and Improving has become a popular mantra for social enterprises since the phrase was neatly coined by the Quality and Impact Project of the Social

Enterprise Partnership. However, the ‘Prove and Improve’ mantra can overlook that other essential dimension of the process of social accounting: accountability – being accountable to stakeholders. It enables us to understand the impact an organisation has on its community, and on those people and other organisations who are directly involved with the organisation or who access its services. At the same time, accountability is promoted and weaved into the process by engaging with the organisation’s key stakeholders.

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– Anne Lythgoe
Vice Chair, SAN, UK

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Farmer Producer Organizations

- Why are these failing?

FPOs in India: Introduction

Farmers Producers Organizations (FPOs) are legalized form of farmer owned institutions, which consists of farmer members with common interests and concerns. It is an entity formed by primary producers, like farmers, milk producers, fishermen, weavers, rural artisans, craftsmen, etc. It can be established in the form of Producer Company, a Cooperative Society or any other legal form which provides systems for sharing of profits/benefits among the members.

The idea is conceived to let small farmers leverage the power of aggregation and economies of scale, both at demand and supply sides. This was thought of solving a larger goal of 'Doubling Farmer's Income' and make required correction in open market price of commodities. In past one decade more than 6,000 farmer producer companies were registered in India, under various Government schemes, support from NABARD, NRLM program etc. Recently, our new financial minister Ms. Nirmala Seetharaman announced that government is looking forward to form 10,000 new producer organization and support the old ones.

Support to Existing Producer Organizations

NABARD created Producers Organization Development Fund (PODF) to provide financial/non-financial support to Producers' Organizations for facilitating improved credit access, ensure adequate capacity building, market linkages and need based hand holding services to meet their 'end to end' requirements and thereby ensuring sustainability and economic viability.

Producer organizations are also supported through Small Farmer Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC) for initial capacity building, systems and process management and some machines at later stage. Some other agribusiness companies along with financial institutions are also helping the Producer Organizations through local NGOs for capacity building and help strengthen their governance structure. There are various schemes launched by Government of India for the support of FPOs; these include:

1. Equity Grant Fund Scheme
2. Credit Guarantee Fund Scheme
3. Scheme for Creation of Backward and Forward Linkages
4. National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM)

The union budget 2018-19 was much focused for promoting and strengthening Farmer Producer Organizations. These measures will help promote FPOs towards prosperous and sustainable agriculture sector with



Picture: Hemaant Tiwari

Guru Kripa Producer Company Pvt. Ltd. Location- Sapai, Kanpur Nagar. Promoted by NGO in UP.



increased agriculture productivity through efficient, cost-effective and sustainable resource utilization. Some of the examples were launch of "Operations Green" for onion, potato and tomato crops with an allocation of Rs. 500 crores. The initiative aims to address price fluctuation in vegetables for the benefit of farmers and consumers. Another step taken by the Government was 100% tax deduction for FPOs with annual turnover of up to Rs. 100 crores, this step is expected to encourage enabling environment for aggregation of farmers into FPOs.

Very Few Success Stories - Why?

FPOs being managed and run by farmers, that too small holder farmers are overburdened with expectations from government, private players and even the financial institutions.

Government wants to leverage this collective approach and reach extra mile in its political agenda. Private agribusiness companies are looking at this opportunity to surpass middlemen and help gain more margins, with higher income for farmers and themselves. Banks too want to get into this

ecosystem, but are confused with the treatment of loans given to these producer groups.

Farmer producer organizations as per their design and legal format are treated as companies and hence treated as private sector organization by Financial Institutions, which requires collateral, goodwill, regular cash flows and strong governance for receiving loan. While on the other hand, these are farmers' collective and hence there is a possibility of loan waiver from the government any time; which may disrupt the overall loan portfolio of any bank.

In other way we can deduce that Producer organizations are regularly in need to two parallel support, i.e. Capacity and Capital with Compliance as a cross cutting factor. These organizations need a functional support in Capacity to run producer organization as a private company and funding to help these create a monetary cushion to manage risk in adverse situation and cash dry phase during the year.

Some of the challenges faced by these new generation institutions are linked with its basic design, i.e. farmers' inefficiency to act as managers or CEOs of the organization, understanding of various resource optimization techniques, update with best agri-practices and representation of farmers

as a group in organized market. This calls for a strong handholding and capacity building initiatives, which can be governed by local authorities but delivered through local institutional development civil society organizations or other capable institutions working with farmers. Farmers do face challenges related to customized and affordable financial services, which currently are not provided as per their future cash flows. They also face a problem in selecting the CEO, whether from inside or outside there is always a risk.

FPOs are failing due to various reasons, to summarize most common are mentioned below:

- a) Professional Management
- b) Access to credit
- c) Risk Mitigation strategies
- d) Access to Market
- e) Improper Infrastructure
- f) Technical Skills
- g) Awareness

Our next article will cover some policy level changes and other structural changes, which may bring back these failed FPOs back on growth track and surely help the new ones to perform better and show real impact towards "Doubling Farmers Income".

—Dr Aggya Tripathi & Mr. Dharndeo Shukla

DREAMS COME TRUE

LuLu (Light up Life up) is an aspiring initiative that helps provide alternative energy-based lighting facilities to villages without electricity



When Dreams Alive began in 2008, it had a mission with three ‘S’s in mind. “Our volunteers were working to serve humanity, under the project Smile contribution Campaign - supporting children and the elderly by providing vegetables. “Our volunteers were equally contributing for environment missions — Saving Earth, we have planted around 7K trees till date through our Project November 2 Remember, which was a campaign to remember our soldiers and HiFi – Help in Farmers Interest, to provide a helping hand to farmers and support them to improve agriculture,” says Sankara Mahalingam, Founder, Dreams Alive.

“Karthik was playing dual roles, a student as well as seller to support his family. We first met him while he was

selling pens at Trichy railway station in year the 2010. He has been selling pens to chase his dream of education since class VI and his endurance finally paid him fruits. Dreams Alive supported Karthik to complete his diploma education and it was then we decided to bring in a third S - to support Transformers. This led to the formation of the Education Sponsorship Programme for deserving students,” he adds.

“Our focus is always on the dire need of the society and also the desire of our community members. Every initiative of ours has its own story of a start or a spark. We do gifting during Diwali (Butterfly Smiles - BS) which was actually started to support a group of volunteers who were teaching street children in North Madras and we

thought gifting them will improve their attendance,” says Sankara, “This initiative is now bigger and running successfully for last nine years. This year, we did in Mumbai, Tuticorin, Madurai and Chennai and we also reached out not only to children, but also to corporation workers, security staffs, cancer affected kids and construction workers children and so on.”

The organization’s current major project involves restoring a large number of water bodies in the Delta region, where no other NGOs or institutions were working towards the interests of farmers.

“In our last ten years we have been successful as a team in any project we have taken but most importantly in Educational Sponsorship Program

which enabled us to support most deserving student community who were struggling to complete their education. As of date we have supported 131 students and spent more than 22 lakh rupees approximately towards education support,” s says Sankara, “Many students are placed in jobs and many are now donors for Dreams Alive. We don’t take a goal of supporting specific number of students every year, but focus instead on ensuring all students who have been referred by our community members are supported to a maximum extent. A few students come to us during their last year of graduation as their parents would have passed away.”

The organization’s first initiative was to distribute snacks and packets to children’s homes. Nearly 1,500 people

donated biscuit packets every week, which were distributed to the homeless. Initially, the project was named ‘Snacks Contribution Campaign’, before funds were collected to provide vegetables to these homes. This meant the campaign was now called ‘Smile Contribution Campaign’. As on date, Dreams Alive supports five homes in Chennai and one in Coimbatore where it has been providing vegetables every week for the past eleven years.

“LuLu (Light up Life up) is an aspiring initiative of ours that helps provide alternative energy-based lighting facilities to villages without electricity,” says Sankara, “We have lit up villages in Bihar, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and J&K where we identified and supported deserving villagers with solar lanterns.” This

project remains the most fulfilling one for Dreams Alive as it showed the power of technology and alternative power. “People in these villages never saw a source or light aside of the sun or moon or their kerosene lamps,” says Sankara, “When we provided a 3-Watt solar lantern, it brought energy levels up.”

Dreams Alive’s primary goal, Sankara says, is to be a transparent NGO and venture into uncharted territory. “Our donors have been with us since inception and we don’t have too many corporate donors,” he says, “We want our NGO to be the NGO of masses where our donor is proud of their contribution irrespective of their value of donation. The NGO also wants to be a strong implementing partner for Corporates.

“Our work will continue to make many ‘Dreams Alive’,” says Sankara. With no full time staff for 10 years, without sending regular emails for seeking funds and with very minimal administrative expenses Dreams Alive has pulled off projects valued at 80 lakh rupees. “Thanks to our community and their trust on our work. If you see many of our volunteers, they’re like migratory birds drawn to our cause, which they have been doing since inception,” says Sankara, “Each of our programmes has a unique donor and volunteer base and we feel gifted and blessed to work with such amazing people who we call dreamers.”

Dreams Alive now has its priorities straight. Its immediate plan is to complete Project HiFi in the Delta region. “We have also taken a specific

drought-hit zone, with the intention of restoring water bodies in the area,” says Sankara, “Identifying 40 ponds that need our intervention is the first step.” The NGO has already completed restoring 3 ponds in partnership with farmers association as well as villagers. As part of Battle of Buffet event, the NGO has raised around five lakh rupees and is looking forward to working with corporate entities and their CSR initiatives. “We will then take up greening initiatives and watershed management,” says Sankara while signing off, “We want to achieve our tagline which is to make and create #watersurplusdelta.”

These mothers are sewing a better life with batik

Batik is changing the lives of women in urban poor communities in Malaysia.



It started as a friendship between two women from vastly different backgrounds: — Amy Blair, an expat from the United States, and Kak Ana, a single mother in Malaysia who was teaching her Bahasa Melayu.

After realising that Ana could sew fabric into beautiful clothing and scarves, Amy was inspired to open Batik Boutique in 2013. The social enterprise produces batik clothing, gifts, scarves and pouches. It aims to provide a fair and sustainable income for women living in poor, urban conditions in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. To date, they have trained around 29 seamstresses, 10 of whom are now earning a sustainable income. Most

parents dream of seeing their kids succeed in life. But for many living in poverty, this remains unattainable.

For Kak Noor, a mother of seven, her living standards have improved since working at Batik Boutique. She says, “Now that I have a job, I have my own income...I am able to help the family.”

Despite their cultural differences, the bond between Amy and the seamstresses runs deep. They also share something universal; motherhood. As Amy puts it, “Maybe we don’t wear the same clothes, or eat the same food...but at the end of the day...I want what’s best for my children, and they equally want what’s best for their children.”

It is also this mindset that has made working conditions for the women more family-friendly. The sewing centre, located where the women live, has child care, which allows the women to work without worrying about their children or travel arrangements.

Munirah, a Batik Boutique seamstress and mother of two, had no sewing skills initially. But after training, she is one of the highest earners in the company.

She is also teaching her daughter to sew, and on a deeper level, her daughter is witnessing her success too.

Amy says, “When you impact the life of a mother, you are impacting the life of the next generation.”

ABOUT BATIK BOUTIQUE

Batik Boutique is a social enterprise in Malaysia that hires low-income women to sew apparel and other lifestyle products, made from batik created by artisan families. It currently works with 150 artisans, and it has also trained 29 seamstresses.

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

Committed to Gender Equity

Gender and development is an interesting intersection with different segments that need varied attention from both beneficiaries and influencing stake holders. As new social frames emerge, the discourse on gender has only widened to include every woman marginalised or missed out due to one reason or another. An elaborate analysis of these reasons and their manifestation with changing times continue to prove the relevance of organisations working for gender equity. Women's Organisation for Rural Development (WORD) in Pothanur, Namakkal is a 28-year old organisation that has raised the question of gender equity in every new social frame that has emerged.

"The fight for gender equity consumes a lot of time because in some backward regions and communities our first priority was to convince women to respect their social roles and contribution to family status. Deep rooted in Gandhian principles, we had to try every opportunity to witness the awakening in women," says Mrs. Sivakamavalli Muniyandi, Secretary of WORD.

Founded by her husband Mr. Muniyandi in 1991, WORD endeavoured to empower rural women by improving their education, livelihood, and thus, their standard of lives. "Empowerment is a very personal journey and this understanding formed the basis of WORD's interventions. We started at a time when infanticide and foeticide were both very high in our district. We organised campaigns and street plays from village to village. We counselled women who approached us, both individually and in groups. In a span of three years we began to see the impact of our rigorous field work. But, this success was a stepping stone to next level. Girls, once born had to be protected from oppression and ill treatment within and outside families," she adds.

WORD dreams of a child marriage and child labour free Namakkal district and the success in Thachankadu village where no child marriage has happened since 2018 has been a great motivating force behind this dream.

Adolescent boys and girls groups, along with community support groups comprising of influential individuals from respective villages have been formed in 25 villages to help monitor the prevalence of child labour and child marriages. "These groups give us the key information needed to plan our actions as and when needed," she says.

WORD felt the need for a holistic approach so that women headed families too made their way into education and livelihood opportunities. Education was the first priority and efforts started with the establishment of supplementary education programmes as tuitions were unaffordable. As children, specially girls showed retention in schools, WORD developed focus on educating communities about



women's rights and legislations. Field presence was a big boon to WORD and their eventual liaisoning support to help women access benefits from government schemes helped them reach many more villages. Women's self-help groups and the ensuing micro-credit and income generation programmes gave a new identity to their work. More than 311 self help groups have been formed and over fifty lakh rupees have been enabled as credit through bank linkages for income generation programmes.

"Women can never be empowered unless they earned and managed their resources. It was very important for us to work with women farmers so that they can take a firm call on organic farming, which is the sustainable option in the long run. We organised training and demonstrations on their lands on preparation of organic fertilisers, vermi composting and protection of seeds," explains Sivakamavalli. In doing so,

WORD intended to prepare a new generation of women farmers who advocated for the long term benefits of organic farming. The impact was so strong that even after the project period of 15 years, women continued to practice organic farming and also taught their children. Along side, WORD also helped 405 landless dalit families acquire 132.65 acres of farm land. "Women from marginalised groups faced double discrimination and we wanted to ensure their access to livelihood," she says with commitment.

The thinking behind this led to promote kitchen herbal gardens (500 established so far) so that rural women always had access to basic health care within their reach. "Soon, we saw the revival of traditional medicine and the readiness with which communities took to it only explained how necessary it was for them," says Sivakamavalli, adding that their journey has been very

organic and community oriented, each leading to the other, step by step.

WORD runs an old age home and a day care centre to support women agricultural labourers and seasonal migrants. They also ensured that these institutions reached out to abandoned elders and children in the district. Such an institutional support, they believe, helps in letting women explore as many opportunities as possible.

"When we saw women seeking opportunities we wanted to make sure that their quest was not disturbed by traditional roles in their households. This little space proved to be very beneficial for them and our inmates were provided timely care and attention with all requisite facilities," she says.

Apart from these programmes, WORD also focusses on building household, school and community toilets and bore wells. "Discussion on women is never complete unless their access to water and sanitation is addressed. These are critical initial steps before we look into respectful maternity care under Sustainable Development Goals. WORD took this at a community level so that migrants and abandoned women also benefitted," she adds.

It has been a long journey for WORD since 1991 and the presence of community women in its Executive Committee and General body reiterate their commitment towards gender equity. Sivakamavalli feels that the evolution of WORD was defined not only by changing gender needs, but also by the women who came forward to think ahead of their times. Women and WORD together feel this is a great responsibility and will continue to support each other in this endeavour.

—Shanmuga Priya. T

Conversations with Shri Ramana Maharishi

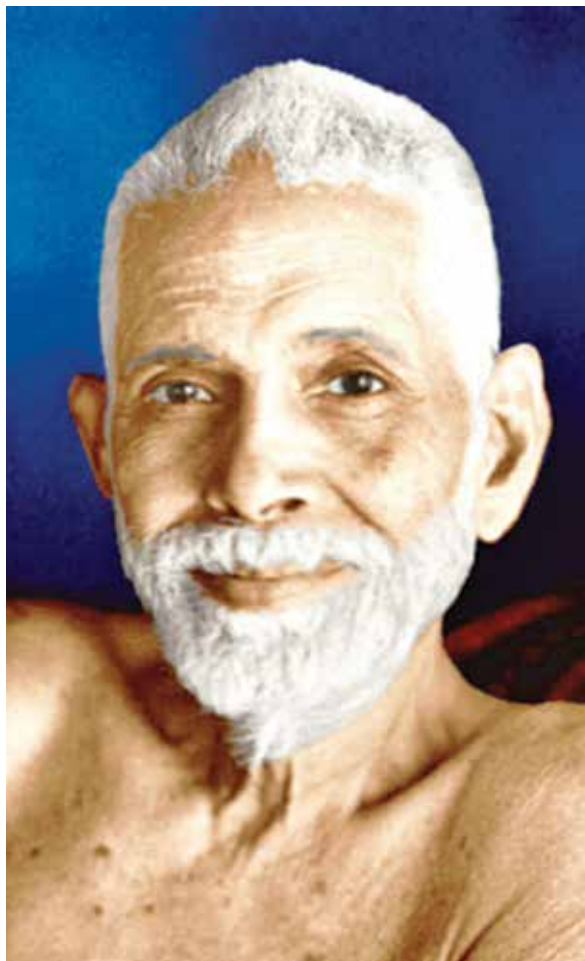
Some men asked the Master questions which ultimately resolved themselves into one, that 'I' is not perceptible however much they might struggle.

The Master's reply was in the usual strain: "Who is it that says that 'I' is not perceptible? Is there an 'I' ignorant, and an 'I' elusive? Are there two 'I's in the same person? Ask yourself these questions. It is the mind which says that 'I' is not perceptible. Where is that mind from? Know the mind. You will find it a myth. King Janaka said, 'I have discovered the thief who had been ruining me so long. I will now deal with him summarily. Then I shall be happy.' Similarly it will be with others."

D.: How to know the 'I'?

M.: The 'I-I' is always there. There is no knowing it. It is not a new knowledge acquired. What is new and not here and now will be evanescent only. The 'I' is always there. There is obstruction to its knowledge and it is called ignorance. Remove the ignorance and knowledge shines forth. In fact this ignorance or even knowledge is not for Atman. They are only overgrowths to be cleared off. That is why Atman is said to be beyond knowledge and ignorance. It remains as it naturally is - that is all.

D.: There is no perceptible progress in spite of our attempts.



M.: Progress can be spoken of in things to be obtained afresh. Whereas here it is the removal of ignorance and not acquisition of knowledge. What kind of progress can be expected in the quest for the Self?

D.: How to remove the ignorance?

M.: While lying in bed in Tiruvannamalai you dream in your sleep that you find yourself in another town. The scene is real to you. Your body remains here on your bed in a room. Can a town enter your room, or could you have left this place and gone elsewhere, leaving the body here? Both are impossible. Therefore your being here and seeing another town are both unreal. They appear real to the mind. The 'I' of the dream soon vanishes, then another 'I' speaks of the dream. This 'I' was not in the dream. Both the 'I's are unreal. There is the substratum of the mind which continues all along, giving rise to so many scenes. An 'I' rises forth with every thought and with its disappearance that 'I' disappears too. Many 'I's are born and die every moment. The subsisting mind is the real trouble. That is the thief according to Janaka. Find him out and you will be happy.

– Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi

Concern



It was time for the monsoon rains to begin, and a very old man was digging pits in his garden.

"What are you doing?" His neighbour asked.

"Planting mango trees," was the reply.

"Do you expect to eat mangoes from those trees?"

"No, I won't live long enough for that. But others will. It occurred to me the other day that all my life I have enjoyed mangoes from trees planted by other people. This is my way of showing them my gratitude."

 Explicit Learning

- A. We derive satisfaction while working for others.
- B. We are in a way responsible for what tomorrow is going to be.
- C. It's our selfishness which prevents us from working for others.

 Introspective Learning

- A. Who is responsible for the tomorrow we are going to leave behind?
- B. Why doesn't it occur to me that I should leave something for tomorrow?
- C. What is it that I am leaving behind for the generations to come?

Design Thinking



Associate Professor Dr Gavin Melles of School of Design (FHAD), Swinburne University and a Social Auditor from SAN India, conducted a session on Design thinking to the current batch of PGDSIM students at CSIM. The Design Thinking process is a method to approach complex problems from a human perspective. The Design Thinking process fosters creativity, innovation, and user-centricity, helping social entrepreneurs to come up with actionable solutions that are Desirable for the beneficiary, Viable for the enterprise and Feasible to implement. The interactions with Dr.Melles helped the aspiring social entrepreneurs of CSIM to evolve a plan to launch their social enterprises. Dr.Melles can converse in Tamil and he interacted with them in Tamil effectively.

—Latha Suresh



Centre for Social Initiative and Management

Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) is a unit of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani (MSDS). It is a learning centre that promotes the concept of social entrepreneurship.

CSIM offers **training and consultancy to social enterprises** – for-profits and non- profits to facilitate them to apply successful business practices and yet

retain their social mission. It also offers training and hand holding support to prospective social entrepreneurs and enable them to launch their social initiatives.

For more information, please visit our website www.csim.in

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CSIM also facilitates **Social Accounting and Audit** for social enterprises, CSR projects, and NGOs through Social Audit Network, India (SAN India).

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“Dance has taught me discipline and focus, Service has taught me the importance of time.”

Kavitha Ramu IAS tells Marie Banu about AbunDance, a video series on social issues.

Selvi. Kavitha Ramu IAS is presently the Director cum Mission Director of Department of Integrated Child Development Services in Tamil Nadu. An University rank holder in M.A. Public Administration, she cleared Indian Administrative services and joined as Deputy Collector of Tiruvallur District, Tamil Nadu in the year 2002.

Kavitha Ramu has held several positions including that of Revenue Divisional Officer, Tirupattur, Vellore District, Joint Commissioner for Relief and Rehabilitation, District Revenue Officer, Tamil Nadu Road Sector Project, and as the General Manager for the Tamilnadu State Tourism Development Corporation.

Kavitha Ramu is a Senior Bharathanatyam Artist who has been performing as a soloist for the past 20 years. She has performed under the auspices of various reputed Sabhas in India and has toured abroad with over 625 performances to her credit. She had the rare opportunity of co-ordinating the cultural events for the opening and closing ceremonies during the SAF games held in Chennai in the year 1995. She is an A grade artist of Doordarshan and an empanelled artist of the ICCR.

In an interview, Selvi. Kavitha Ramu tells Marie Banu about AbunDance, a video series on social issues.

About your childhood and education?

I was born in the temple town of Madurai, and started learning Bharatanatyam at the age of four. My father, Shri. M Ramu, was an IAS officer and my mother, Smt. Manimegalai, worked as a professor of Economics before marriage.

As my father was a civil servant, he was transferred every few years. Thus, I studied in nine different schools and when I was 12, my family finally settled down in Chennai.

At Madurai, I learnt Bharatanatyam from Guru Smt. Neela Krishnamurthy who is the sister and long-time Nattuvanar of the famous doyen of Bharatanatyam Dr. Padma Subramanyam. When I was eight years old, I performed at the fifth World Conference that was held in Madurai. This was my first major performance.

When I moved to Chennai, I met Kalaimamani Smt. K.J. Sarasa, legendary Bharatanatyam Guru

who had developed the Vazhuvoor style of Bharatanatyam and was trained by her for 15 years.

Your journey as an IAS officer and a Bharatanatyam dancer?

To be able to continue with my passion despite the professional requirements has been an incredible journey. Dance has taught me discipline and focus, service has taught me the importance of time.

I have been always dancing since my age of 5, and the only factor that did not change all my life was, dancing. I have never taken breaks during public examinations during schooling, nor in college. That was dance for me and it has always been part of my routine.

Having said that, there are some compromises I have made. I don't take up overseas tours over 15 days, I see to that all my season programmes (Margazhi music and dance festival held in December and January months) are slated only during weekends.

I have been a soloist performer predominantly, and when I have to stage a group performance, I choose my dancers who are flexible with their timings. My orchestra is also very



supportive, and we have rehearsals at 7 am or after 8 pm.

About noon meal for the elderly through the Department of Integrated Child Development Services?

Nutritious Meal to all the children, through the Department of Integrated Child Development Services has provided freedom from hunger and basic foundation for health and education of children without any hindrance.

Likewise, noon meal for Old Age Pension beneficiaries has always been there since 1983. But, many people were not availing the facility, either due to lack of awareness or other factors.

We are now making conscious efforts to take this programme across to the Old Age Pension beneficiaries, so that the spirit of the programme is captured and many people are benefited.

Please tell us about the video series on social issues (AbunDance).

The purpose of any art form is to take a message to people, be it through a religious story or a mythological story or a theme designed to propagate the message. I think

it is the duty of artists to initiate conversations through Art and establish a dialogue with people. In that way, I thought it was about time I did something through dance, a medium I am most comfortable with, to establish a connect with people. That's how and why AbunDance happened.

I would like to reach out to people through a variety of mediums including dance videos, talk shows with prominent faces or even a lecture and convey a wider perspective and give a different meaning to it.

'AbunDance' is a video series through which I aim to explore various social and environmental issues that exist in our society, for instance, dowry, female infanticide, environmental issues, etc. I chose the name 'AbunDance' as dance is part of the word and also because there is an array of topics I would like to cover through this platform.

Your advice for IAS aspirants?

Time management is the key, so that there's no stress. You should lead a normal life while preparing for civil service examination.

Aspirants of any competitive examination for that matter, should not take any pressure unto themselves. Apart from the scheduled time that they have allotted for preparation, they should sleep enough, eat healthy, spend time with their family and friends and also allot time for television and movies apart for fitness.

