

Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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An exclusive interview with Dr. K. Selvaraj

FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

In a world continuously facing complex challenges, the role of social entrepreneurship has become more critical than ever. While traditional philanthropy and charitable endeavours have made significant contributions, the need for innovation in social entrepreneurship has emerged as a pressing demand. Innovation not only sparks creativity but also catalyses sustainable solutions to address societal issues.

Social entrepreneurship, at its core, seeks to address social and environmental challenges through innovative and sustainable business models. The traditional methods, while commendable, often fall short in creating lasting impact due to the dynamic nature of global problems. The need for innovation in social entrepreneurship lies in its power to disrupt conventional approaches, offering novel perspectives and scalable solutions.

One of the primary advantages of innovation in social entrepreneurship is its ability to foster efficiency. Innovations enable organisations to streamline processes, maximise resources, and ultimately enhance their impact on the communities they serve. Whether through technology-driven solutions, novel business models, or collaborative approaches, innovation paves the way for a more effective and responsive social sector.

Moreover, innovation in social entrepreneurship can attract new stakeholders and resources. The evolving landscape of social impact requires engagement from diverse sectors, including the private, public, and non-profit domains. Creative solutions that demonstrate tangible results often garner increased support from investors, philanthropists, and government agencies, leading to a more robust and sustainable social ecosystem.

Innovation also plays a crucial role in adapting to changing circumstances. The world is in a constant state of flux, with new challenges emerging regularly. Social entrepreneurs who embrace innovation are better equipped to navigate uncertainties, pivot when necessary, and address evolving needs. This adaptability ensures that their initiatives remain relevant and impactful in the face of dynamic societal conditions.

CSIM celebrates social entrepreneurs all over the world and recognises their paramount importance in effecting positive change. We are proud to be active participants in this transformative sector, acknowledging the profound impact that innovative thinking can have on creating a better world.

We hope that *Conversations* inspires many to choose the path of social entrepreneurship for meaningful and lasting social change.

Marie Banu Rodriguez

EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu Rodriguez

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS IN INDIA: CRAFTING CHANGE LOCALLY AND GLOBALLY



In the intricate tapestry of India's societal landscape, a new breed of visionaries known as social entrepreneurs is weaving threads of change. These individuals transcend the traditional boundaries of profit-making, wielding business acumen to address the root causes of pressing societal challenges. Their work embodies a fusion of profit-making endeavors with a deep-seated commitment to driving positive impact.

Empowering through Education

Education, viewed as the bedrock of empowerment, stands tall in the initiatives spearheaded by social entrepreneurs in India. Initiatives akin to providing nutritious meals to school children and enhancing the quality of education in underserved areas showcase a profound understanding of the transformative power of education. By addressing basic needs such as hunger, these entrepreneurs ensure that children can focus on their studies, fostering holistic development and breaking the cycle of poverty.

Innovative Healthcare Solutions

Healthcare disparities in India have presented significant challenges, but social entrepreneurs are navigating these complexities with innovative solutions. Whether it's revolutionizing eye care delivery, providing affordable maternity care services, or leveraging technology for healthcare accessibility, these initiatives are reshaping the healthcare landscape. They go beyond treating illnesses, contributing to improved productivity and an enhanced quality of life.

Women's Empowerment and Community Upliftment

Social entrepreneurs are at the forefront of initiatives aimed at empowering women and uplifting marginalized communities. Micro-entrepreneurship programs, advocacy for informal women workers, and projects fostering economic independence highlight the multifaceted efforts. Recognizing that empowering women is not just a moral imperative but a strategic investment in

societal progress, these initiatives create ripple effects that positively impact entire communities.

Environmental Stewardship

As global concerns for environmental sustainability intensify, Indian social entrepreneurs are actively engaging with eco-friendly solutions. Projects empowering individuals, particularly women, to become champions of sustainable energy exemplify this commitment. These initiatives not only address immediate challenges but contribute to the broader goal of transitioning towards more sustainable practices, showcasing the intersection of social and environmental responsibility.

International Social Entrepreneur Week

Against this backdrop of impactful initiatives, the International Social Entrepreneur Week serves as a testament to the global resonance of social entrepreneurship. This dedicated week, marked by a series of events and awareness programs, brings together changemakers from around the world. It provides a platform for knowledge exchange, collaboration, and the celebration of endeavors that transcend borders. The week not only showcases the diversity of approaches but also underscores the shared commitment to creating a positive impact on a global scale.

The landscape of social consciousness in India is undergoing a transformative journey, and social entrepreneurs are the architects of this change. Their innovative solutions and unwavering commitment to societal well-being extend beyond charity; they are crafting systemic changes that address the root causes of social issues.

As India progresses, the resonance of social entrepreneurs underscores the potent fusion of business acumen with a genuine concern for social impact. They serve as beacons of inspiration, demonstrating that a successful business can be a force for positive transformation, contributing to a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable future for the nation.

EMPOWERING CHANGE



Ms. R Jeeva



Ms. B. Senthamizhselvi

From November 13th to 17th, an online awareness program unfolded during the International Entrepreneurship Week 2023, attracting 83 participants from Tamil Nadu passionate about social change. The program, targeting NGO heads, staff, and individuals, explored the transformative potential of entrepreneurship on societal well-being.

The week started with a session on social entrepreneurship, led by **Ms. Latha Suresh, Honorary Director of CSIM**, setting the stage for impactful discussions.

Day 2 featured **Mr. Iyyappan Subramaniyan, Founder of Sri Arunodayam**, who shared profound experiences in working with abandoned children with intellectual disabilities (ID). The audience gained valuable insights into the challenges and rewards of such noble endeavors.

Dlearners took center stage on Day 3, with **Mr. Arun Fernandez, Founder of Blink Foundation**, captivating the virtual audience. His presentation focused on his experiences working with Akshara Vidyaashram Senior Secondary School teachers, shedding light on the complexities of Dyslexia children education.

The momentum continued on Day 4 with a presentation by **Ms. Kavitha Balaji, Senior Project Associate at YRG CARE**, delving into the Eco Kitchen project. This initiative aims to bring economic stability to families facing social, economic, or other challenges, concurrently enhancing food security in the community.

The program concluded on Day 5 with Mr. Arun Fernandez returning to share further insights into Dlearners and their impactful work in Dyslexia children education.

Spreading the Message: Grassroots Impact Across Tamil Nadu

Beyond the core program, CSIM's celebration extended through our alumni to various individuals and organizations across Tamil Nadu, each contributing to the International Social Entrepreneurship Week in unique ways.

1) Ms. B. Senthamizhselvi, Kumaran Special School (Rajammal Trust for Special Children), Ennore, Chennai

On the 16th of November 2023, Ms.

Senthamizhselvi celebrated the International Social Entrepreneurship Week, focusing on skill-based vocational training for women and special children. The event saw the active participation of 25 individuals, including staff members.

2) Ms. S.P Sivagami, Jansi Rani Rural Trust, Nemili Taluk, Ranipet District

On the 19th of November 2023, Ms. Sivagami conducted an awareness program for women, centered around women empowerment and availing Tamil Nadu government's scheme of free tailoring machines. The event saw the enthusiastic participation of 19 individuals.

3) Ms. T Kumari, NEST (National Level Educational & Social Service Trust), Arakkonam, Ranipet District

Ms. Kumari celebrated the International Social Entrepreneurship Week by engaging with small vendors, hotel owners, soft drink makers, industrial growers, small traders, and entrepreneurs. The event, attended by 15 participants, focused on creating models and strategies for business expansion.

4) Mr. M Harinath, Adharshila Educational Charitable Trust, Pazhavanthangal, Chennai

On the 15th of November 2023, Mr. Harinath conducted an awareness program for Government Middle School students in Thirusulam. The program covered education support for persons with disabilities and addressed issues like drug addiction. Nearly 100 students actively participated.

5) Ms. R Jeeva, Transgender Rights Association, Chennai

Ms. Jeeva conducted an awareness program on advocacy for transgender rights. The event, held at the ICSA centre, saw the participation of 30 individuals keen on understanding and supporting the rights of the transgender community.

To be continued...

Marie Banu Rodriguez



Ms. S.P Sivagami



Ms. T Kumari



Mr. M Harinath

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP – INFATUATION(MOHAM)? OR AMOUR (KAADAL)?

The other day, listening to the Krishna vaani series, I came across a powerful thought – To whoever we are connected to in life, are we infatuated, or are we in love? There are distinctive features to classify the connection as moham or kaadal; these in the Tamil language are the best words to express feelings. At the EOD, I applied to social entrepreneurship and the lives we lead. Am I infatuated with the cause I work for, or am I in love with it?

Let me share the differences between the two. Most of us think moham and kaadal are the same or in continuum. They are not. They are different paradigms; we must transcend from one to the other for the relationship to sustain or grow from lifetime to another. There is a passionate attachment when moham occupies the mind in a relationship. We want to own the person. We want to be closest to that person, enjoying complete attention all the time. Our need for associating with that person and all they do is very high. The ego plays a vital role in the illusion of maintaining self-esteem. There is a comparison of how much love is shared by each of us and the measurement of the same dangles through the interactions. There is a high need for approval from others, and recognition of the connection is justified. The mind weighs the benefits of the investment and explains the same. Moham sees the relationship as an accomplishment. Maybe that is why we say blind in love.

It does not recognize and know the uniqueness of each other and, therefore, the efforts to make the other the way we want them to be. The need to encompass the relationship into a name and give it a role is mandatory when moham plays its game. Only the role assures us of ownership over the other person.

Moham fosters jealousy and anger as a result of it. The need to protect oneself, not be taken for granted or be hurt in the process of association builds invisible walls around the relationship, making it exclusive and challenging. Any inclusion is a threat, and deviance is a shake in the association. Moham establishes an unsaid hierarchy that manages the ownership of each other through the timeline of association. Often, moham becomes an obsession, and the other person in the association is reduced to being an object to be achieved.

Kaadal or amour, on the other side, is a complete submission of the souls to the relationship. There is an undying trust and a deep recognition of what



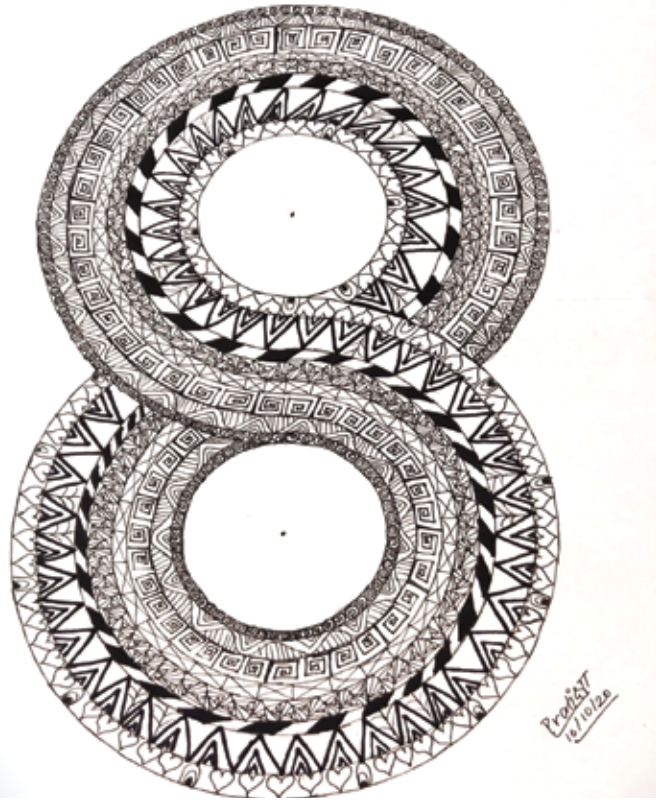
each one brings to the relationship. The association and its ability to achieve a purpose are much more significant than each other in the relationship. The relationship exists on its own and requires no sanction from society or approval of others. Pure love does not need physical endorsements of togetherness or symbols of association. It simply IS, and the heart knows it all. Kaadal fosters acceptance, trust, and peace. The umpteen hurdles in the association are not seen as challenges. Kaadal is a bond that allows each to be inclusive and live life to the fullest while exploring the purpose for which they are born. There is no fear of losing the other. Kaadal requires each to submit to the other completely, exposing their vulnerability with a deep faith that it is respected and

protected rather than misused. There is no hierarchy, and each one enables the other to grow. They are conscious keepers, share perspectives, watch out for the other, and pray for the best to happen to the other.

Imagine the cause a social entrepreneur is associated with and passionately working with in life. Is the association moham or kaadal? If it is moham, the social entrepreneur works to see what benefits are accrued by the time and energy spent on it. The need to shout out on social media, share the ownership of working for the cause with the world, get the approvals from all concerned, and showcase the empathy, sacrifice, and efforts become more important than the impact of the work. There is a high need to protect their name and association with the

cause, and the leadership in such groups is typically hierarchical. Ego runs high with the leadership team wary of outsiders' infiltration. They look for quick benefits and are upset if they do not get the expected recognition. There is an obsession to achieve, and the way to get it does not matter. Over time, the cause begins to serve the social entrepreneur rather than the entrepreneur serving the cause. When moham covers the mind, it is difficult for the social entrepreneur to accept many players in the same space. They need to prove they are the best continually. The cause they work for begins to serve their ego, and when it doesn't yield the expected results, they do not mind shelving it and walking away for the next opportunity. They are focused on ensuring every situation is used to their objective. They do not mind using people to further their cause. Awards, accolades, and recognitions become the core of work, and expectations from efforts rule the decisions. They are worried about the position they hold in society concerning the projects they execute.

While trying to understand Kaadal and social entrepreneurship, I thought of people whose life purpose was the cause they lived for, like Salumarada Timmakka, Jadav Payeng, and many unsung contributors to this world! They had kaadal in their association with the cause. There was an unflinching identification with the cause, and their life's purpose was furthering and living for the cause. They become avatars serving a purpose. In love, they are not bothered about what it gives them but are always thinking about what they can do to further the cause. They are willing to learn constantly from all quarters and consider each hurdle an opportunity to rise above the situation. Their souls are connected to the cause; therefore, they are not bothered about the recognition that comes or doesn't come. More players are seen as more hands to serve the cause. Though they may be seen as an icon championing the cause, they have created many others to sustain the projects. There is no space for fear of losing in this association. Joy and giving allow them to be in the flow of accepting situations and maneuvering the flow in the best possible way. Awards and accolades do not affect them; their focus is not diluted with or without it. They spend significant time allowing the people who work with them to grow and sustain the processes. They are working on long-term goals and not for immediate candies that come quickly. They focus on



identifying talent and effectively balancing the head and heart in the work and people process. Life fulfillment and working on the cause are intertwined and become the same. In pure love, social entrepreneurs do not think twice about sacrificing themselves to ensure the spirit of work lives on!

I know many friends from the social sector who have been working in the same field for over three decades and have the same love and passion for contributing to it. There have been occasions when some friends have asked me if I am still working on values and they are wondering why I haven't moved on!

Be it any relationship, people, or the cause we associate with, it is vital to know where we come from and how it impacts our lives and the others. Are we infatuated with it, or are we in love? The answer will determine the path, decisions, and sustainability.

Dr. Kalpana Sampath

*Illustrations courtesy:
Dr. Prathap B and Pratiksha Prathap*



TALKS WITH SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

An Andhra gentleman read out a verse from the Viveka Chudamani setting forth the sense of the Maitreyi Brahmana of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad and asked the meaning of *atma* which occurred there.

M.: The Self.

D.: Is not *prema* (love) for something else?

M.: The desire for happiness (*sukha prema*) is a proof of the ever-existing happiness of the Self. Otherwise how can desire for it arise in you? If headache was natural to human beings no one would try to get rid of it. But everyone that has a headache tries to get rid of it, because he has known a time when he had no headache. He desires only that which is natural to him. So too he desires happiness because happiness is natural to him. Being natural, it is not acquired. Man's attempts can only be to get rid of misery. If that be done the ever-present bliss is felt. The primal bliss is obscured by the non-self which is synonymous with non-bliss or misery. *Duhkha nasam = sukha prapti*. (Loss of unhappiness amounts to gain of happiness.) Happiness mixed with misery is only misery. When misery is eliminated then the ever-present bliss is said to be gained. Pleasure which ends in pain is misery. Man wants to eschew such pleasure. Pleasures are *priya*, *moda* and *pra-moda*. When a desired object is near at hand there arises *priya*: when it is taken possession of *moda* arises; when it is being enjoyed *pra-moda* prevails. The reason for the pleasureableness of these states is that one thought excludes all others, and then this single thought also merges into the Self. These states are enjoyed in the *Anandamaya kosa* only. As a rule *Vijnanamaya kosa* prevails on waking. In deep sleep all thoughts disappear and the state of obscurity is one of bliss; there the prevailing body is the *Anandamaya*. These are sheaths and not the core, which is interior to all these. It lies beyond waking, dream and deep sleep. That is the



Reality and consists of true bliss (*nijananda*).

D.: Is not *hatha* yoga necessary for the inquiry into the Self?

M.: Each one finds some one method suitable to himself, because of latent tendencies (*purva samskara*).

D.: Can *hatha* yoga be accomplished at my age?

M.: Why do you think of all that? Because you think it

exterior to yourself you desire it and try for it. But do you not exist all along? Why do you leave yourself and go after something external?

D.: It is said in *Aparoksha-anubhuti* that *hatha* yoga is a necessary aid for inquiry into the Self.

M.: The *hatha* yogis claim to keep the body fit so that the enquiry may be effected without obstacles. They also say that life must be prolonged so that the enquiry may be carried to a successful end. Furthermore there are those who use some medicines (*kayakalpa*) with that end in view. Their favourite example is: the screen must be perfect before the painting is begun. Yes, but which is the screen and which the painting? According to them the body is the screen and the inquiry into the Self is the painting. But is not the body itself a picture on the screen, the Self?

D.: But *hatha* yoga is so much spoken of as an aid.

M.: Yes. Even great *pandits* well versed in the Vedanta continue the practice of it. Otherwise their minds will not subside. So you may say it is useful for those who cannot otherwise still the mind.

D.: *Saguna upasana* (worship of the personal God) is said to be imperfect. It is also said that *nirguna upasana* (devotion to the impersonal) is hard and risky. I am fit for the former only. What is to be done?

M.: The *Saguna* merges into the *nirguna* in the long run. The *saguna* purifies the mind and takes one to the final goal. The afflicted one, the seeker of knowledge, and the seeker of gains are all dear to God. But the *Jnani* is the Self of God.

Source: Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi

CLICK TO PLANT

Planting trees has been a part of our evolution story, focusing on the supply of a service or product like timber for shipbuilding. However, planting trees on scale for ecological restoration and climate change mitigation has taken off fairly recently in the second half of the 20th century. Trees form a significant part of nature as a whole. Yet, they too are delicate and nurture varied relationships with all living creatures in their ecosystems. "Our plantation efforts look forward to enriching ecosystems, sustaining biodiversity and enhance the green cover, all of this while individuals, families try to celebrate memorable occasions," begins Mr Apurva Bhandari, Founder of Sankalptaru Foundation in Uttarakhand.

Having grown in the lap of nature amidst lakes, forests and mountain ranges in Uttarakhand, Apurva did not find the experience in information technology, oil and gas

sectors endearing. He was increasingly concerned about nature losing its original form due to mankind's unscrupulous extraction of resources and unmindful damage to every relationship in nature. "My seven years in the corporate sector which also included a brief stint in the United States made me feel a strong disconnect from nature. I was not only missing it around me, rather I missed being part of it," he introspects.

Back in India, he founded the Sankalptaru Foundation in 2012 to help many more people like him realize the opportunity to reconnect and feel one with nature. The idea of online plantation and real time tracking of the planted trees was thoroughly studied, discussed and then launched. The model reached six states within two years of establishment and this momentum reiterated the need for such an initiative that not only allowed plantation but also informed contributors about the growth of the trees

they had contributed for.

"It is important that somebody takes the responsibility to ensure that every tree planted actually survives in its environment. This is where technology came in handy and the geo tagging process also brought in the aspect of transparency. As a donor I can learn the stage of growth, plant's height, its species family and position in the local eco system," he reassures.

Apurva and team planted fruit and fodder trees on the lands of rural farmers, setting in place a symbiotic relationship between farmers and the trees. While farmers took the responsibility of nurturing the trees, they were allowed to use the produce from those trees. Known as the Rural Livelihood Support program, its execution was planned in such detail that operational excellence was inevitable. With almost forty percent women farmer beneficiaries, this program has

impacted livelihood, poverty alleviation and women empowerment in the project areas. In the urban areas, plantations are aimed at checking pollution levels while also encouraging urban residents to build green habitats and reduce their carbon footprints. With growing sensitivity about carbon footprint, community members only need an avenue to realize how they can make a difference within their limits. "We showed it is possible and the reception is incredible. We are also part of events where organizers choose to plant a tree for every participant, in a pledge to offset the carbon footprint that results from that event. Green values are prioritized and Sankalptaru has done every bit to utilize such momentum," adds Apurva.

Sankalptaru also works with gram panchayats and urban civic bodies to develop a green canopy in barren community land blocks or places that overflow with garbage. After a successful execution in Nagapattinam, Apurva and team are now preparing themselves to demonstrate the impact in Coimbatore as well. In Nagapattinam trees were planted for the purpose of disaster mitigation, to arrest the intensity of hurricanes/winds, while in Coimbatore the task is to grow a forest on garbage land. In the country's capital city, Delhi, plantation focused on creating a green lung for the city suffering from dangerous levels of air pollution. In the Himalayan region, trees have been planted to facilitate ground water recharge, check land-slides and rejuvenate lakes/streams. Their Barren Land Transformation Program has introduced a lush green forest in the middle of the inhospitable Thar Desert in Rajasthan. Orchards of pomegranate and other fruit bearing trees were planted not just for poor farmers' livelihood but also ensure fodder for all the pastoral animals in the neighboring communities.

Planting trees for a wide variety of causes with geography based or zodiac based choices, Sankalptaru made the whole idea of tree plantation so convenient, appealing and easily doable. In the process, they also managed to cover most of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and reached across 27 states and union territories in India.

"We have planted and survived over six million trees in the last ten years. All that is required from donors end is a simple registration and contribution. Sankalptaru handles the rest," assures Apurva.

Shanmuga Priya.T



RISING FROM THE ASHES: REKINDLING THE PHILIPPINES FOREST



The word “classroom” conjures up visuals of four walls, neat rows of desks facing the front of the room, and words scrawled on the whiteboard. But for the indigenous people of Bukidnon, Philippines, their reality is far more imaginative.

Imagine a grand painting - mountain peaks and plateaus, vast rolling hills, lush forests, cascading waterfalls and rivers. That is where the seven tribes of Bukidnon learn at and call home. It is also referred to as the “Food Basket of Mindanao”, as it is the leading producer and supplier of fresh fruits and vegetables in the region.

“We regard the forest as a learning space,” shares Datu Vic, chief of the Talaandig tribe. He is in a privileged position - acting as both connector and link between the tribe and its cultural practices. His role includes collecting information about his people and their cultures. He knows it’s an onerous task since the forest is the centrepiece of the tribal people’s lives. When asked about how important the forest is to them, he says, “If the forest is gone, we lose a learning space.”

“It is the source of our knowledge and livelihoods.” The forest has served the tribes of Bukidnon in wondrous ways - they have been living off the land; collecting medicine, and foraging and hunting for food all their lives.

The indigenous people have a spiritual relationship with the land - to them she is sacred - a source of life. Datu Vic shares that the people are the “caretakers and custodians of God’s creation [the forest]” and that they have to “ask permission before doing anything different with the forest’s natural state”.

Every year, the tribes will make a trek to the top of the mountain to conduct

rituals as a mark of respect. In exchange for these offerings, the people believe they are provided with the abundance of the forest.

But over the years, Bukidnon’s natural forests have suffered tremendously. According to the Environmental Science for Social Change (ESSC), 70 per cent of the Philippines was covered with forests. But due to the massive logging that continued until 1970, it dropped to just 34 per cent. Today, the country has less than 2 per cent of its primary forests remaining. Something had to be done, and that’s where Hineleban Foundation stepped in.

Born in Bukidnon in 1949, John Perrine, founder of Hineleban Foundation, left to work and study in Manila, and returned in 1975, inspired and challenged to do something about his home.

The beginning was rocky - John and his team would distribute seedlings

across Bukidnon, but only to return and find that they didn’t survive as there was no one taking care of the seedlings. He realised that partnership with the indigenous people wasn’t just a formality, it was a necessity.

This was lesson number one for John. “You can plant, but you can’t establish a sustainable forest that survives without

the community itself.” John realised that ownership is extremely important, and that the foundation had to “restore the people to becoming the custodians of the forest because that was actually culturally what they were”.

Thus, the sacred customary compact was borne.

It was a promise, not just between the foundation and the seven tribes, but also, with nature - the land and its people will be respected in the work that they do. And the people have been seeing the fruits of their labour. Over a decade, close to three million trees have been planted, and at the same time, farmers have been trained and livelihoods have been supported.

John hopes that this collaboration will continue beyond him and to the next generations. Over the next five years, the foundation hopes to plant between 5 to 10 million trees.

“What we’ve seen is that people who come here get inspired and ask, “How can we do this?” It was apparent to John - the future lay in the hands of the young people.

“Young people have the idealism in life and are not yet beaten down,” John adds, “when they see a better world, you know that they want to go do it. They just need a little bit of help on how to do it. So, what we hope is to inspire them and teach them how to do it.”

About Hineleban Foundation

Hineleban Foundation is a non-profit organisation that aims to reforest areas in Bukidnon, Philippines and to create sustainable livelihoods for the indigenous people in Mindanao.

A story by Our Better World - the digital storytelling initiative of the Singapore International Foundation

(www.ourbetterworld.org)



NO MOUNTAIN TOO STEEP, NO STONE LEFT UNTURNED

This is the story of how tiny, incremental changes in long held belief systems can bring about monumental transformation of an entire community. Dr. Ashish Satav started MAHAN Trust in 1998. Named for the five pillars of this institution—Meditation, Addiction, Health, AIDS and Nutrition, MAHAN Trust has focused its work within the remote village of Melghat in Amravati district in Maharashtra.

“Early in life I was inspired by my grandfather, Shri Vasanttrao Bombatkar, who was a Sarvodaya leader, working alongside the likes of Mahatma Gandhi, Acharya Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan. As I grew into my young adulthood, I studied the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda and Vinoba Bhave, and felt inspired to not just serve but build my whole career in the rural regions of the country”, says Dr. Satav. As a medical student, Dr. Satav visited tribal health projects run by Dr. Prakash Amte and Dr. Abhay Bang.

He noted how the tribal regions severely lacked in medical facilities and even more so, the simplicity of their lifestyle made it difficult for most urbanized individuals to adapt to those living conditions. He felt the need to build some resilience within to be able to handle the stress of working in remote regions. Therefore, he started practicing yoga and meditation, learned to live without basic electrical facilities such as fans during summers and hot water during winters.

He gradually built the physical and mental stamina he needed to pursue a life of living and serving in a tribal hamlet of Melghat. His wife, ophthalmologist Dr. Kavita Satav joined him in Melghat after completing her advanced degree in Ophthalmology in the year 2001.

Melghat is home to 3,00,000 people, mostly identifying as Scheduled Tribe communities. Over 90% of them are engaged in agriculture or other labor intensive vocations. Until recently this area had scarcity of electricity. Initial studies conducted in 1997 show that this region had very high child-mortality rates (about 140 deaths /1000 live births) and over 80% of children were malnourished. There was also a very high mortality rate in the “productive” age-group of 16-60 years (greater than 450/1,00,000 population). There was an addiction to tobacco, alcohol and the drug “ganja”.

With INR 1,00,000 of his own savings, Dr. Satav used a hut to serve as hospital, where he started conducting critical care for severely ill patients. When Dr. Kavita Satav joined her husband in Melghat, she found that the villagers refused medical care due to



superstitions and taboos. She resolved to herself that if patients refused to come to her, she would set out in search of them. Carrying her then infant son, she visited hamlet to hamlet, trying to convince the locals to get to the hospital and have themselves checked out for diseases. Realizing that nutrition was a major health risk in this region, Dr. Kavita Satav would take it upon herself to prepare meals for her patients, in addition to diagnosing and treating them. A few months into this, the couple figured that if they could train one or two of the locals, then that might help communicate the benefits of medical attention to the rest of the population.

Over the years, MAHAN Trust’s hospital has grown from having a single attendant in a rudimentary facility to a much larger hospital with a team of doctors, nurses, midwives and attendants. The infrastructure has improved to include an ambulance, a cardiac monitor, an operation theatre, a defibrillator, ventilators, and sophisticated eye-surgery equipment. So far over 1,25,000 patients have been treated and 2500 eye-surgeries have been performed at no cost. Due to a high incidence of burn victims, mauling by animals and other cosmetic injuries, 1020 plastic surgeries have been conducted free of cost. With over 450 hamlets covered during door-to-door eye check ups, gynaecology camps and

other special camps such as deaddiction camps, HIV and AIDS camps, Tuberculosis detection camps, the MAHAN Trust makes sure to conduct their outreach with no one left behind among the 3,00,000 people calling this region their home.

While focusing on treatment, the organization is also looking into lifestyle and environmental factors that have been affecting the health of people of Melghat. So, apart from the physical health programs such as blindness control, adult mortality reduction and hospice programs, they have

also developed child care support for labourers, introduced

nutritional farming practices to improve access to food, participated in Gramsabha meetings to facilitate the setting up of basic infrastructure in these hamlets, and created community-building programs that target socialization,

sensitization and support groups for various mental health issues. MAHAN Trust also conducts studies in collaboration with leading global health and humanitarian agencies such as the Gates foundation, UNICEF, etc. Because of its research, advocacy and public interest litigation in state high-courts, the state government has developed over 27 health and nutrition policies benefitting more than one

million people of Maharashtra state.

Documentation is one of the great strengths of MAHAN Trust’s work. Innumerable lived experiences of the people living in Melghat have been recorded and presented as case studies to present just how severe the conditions of people have been, in these past 25 or so years. Today, the results are there for everyone to see. Over 5,00,000 people have directly benefitted from this work. There has been a 68% reduction in child mortality rate, a 68% reduction in malnutrition and 50% reduction in the adult death rate.

In recent years, the organization has been developing alternative livelihood options for the locals. 35 sewing machines were received in donation. In 2016, MAHAN Trust received the Public Health Champion Award from World Health Organization along with 73 other international, national and state awards in recognition of their outstanding work in improving the living and health conditions of the tribal communities.

When asked about the future of MAHAN Trust, Dr. Satav says that his highest ambition is to set up a tribal medical college and replication of successful programs of MAHAN in other tribal areas of India. Reflecting upon what he did as a youth, he wishes for every trainee doctor to have the opportunity to visit the remotest reaches of India- to the regions that are practically cut off from modern world- so as to bring current medical care to the doorsteps of people who need it the most.

Archanaa Ramesh

With INR 1,00,000 of his own savings, Dr. Satav used a hut to serve as hospital, where he started conducting critical care for severely ill patients.

BACK TO OUR FRUITS



In my school days, we used to visit mom's home-town every summer. We used to make the long journey from Calcutta to Narsapuram by train to Rajamundry, followed by a bus ride and then a cycle-rickshaw ride. My grandparents' place had a blue wooden gate in those days, and a whole lot of bright pink bougainvillea flowers overhanging the arch on top of the gate. It used to come into view when we turned a corner, and every single time we turned that corner, my heart would do a happy flipflop at the thought of a whole month there!

As soon as we entered, but after the familiar and cheerful greetings had been exchanged, we would all be sent off to have showers, as we'd just traveled for so many hours in rather dusty and sooty second-class compartments. The showers were associated with some memorable sights and sounds - the huge pot in which the bath water was being heated, the tendrils of steam disappearing upwards off the top of it and then reappearing above the palm-leaf roof of the shed, the breaking of the soap-nut shells by Papamma, the old-timer household help who always seemed to be around, and the squabbling over which hibiscus leaf should go into whose boiling bowl of soap-nut juice. The soap-nut juice was our cleanser - our shampoo if you will, and the hibiscus leaves were our conditioner.

These showers were also associated with the absolute minimum harm to the environment - there was no sodium laureth sulphate, no cocamidopropyl betaine, no guar hydroxypropyltrimonium chloride, no packaging at all, no transporting, no chemical fragrances, no microplastics, no propanediol, no added lye... the list goes on. The bathroom was rather big too, and it had a step in the middle of it. The hot water you used had to run several feet, then flow down the step, and then run several feet more to reach the drain. So by the time it exited, it wasn't hot to the touch at all, just about tepid. And then it passed through a small length of pipe and emerged into the open garden again. So no heat toxicity, no eutrophication, no ecotoxicity.

Our hair did get a little tangled perhaps, but not

unduly so. (Even this can be avoided by taking care while washing). And we would all sit in the afternoon, post a very sumptuous lunch, and untangle our hair, or each other's, with our fingers, and chat. [The fights between cousins would start a little later, on the day we arrived, it would always be all sweetness and light :-)]



Soapnut and soapnut trees are still around, luckily, and so are many other natural alternatives to artificial and harmful processes and products. Here are some such all-natural gifts from nature:

- **Citrus Cleaners:** Citrus juice and peels can be soaked in vinegar and made into citrus cleaners for household applications like cleaning

bathrooms and toilets, kitchen surfaces, utensils, etc. You will find multiple resources on the net telling you how to go about making one, step by step. But even without going through this process, just the outer surface of fresh orange peel, or lemon peel or sweet lime peel, rubbed over a surface and then wiped down with a damp cloth gives you a very thorough and fragrant cleaning... Try it to believe it!

- **Tooth Care:** Tender shoots of neem, with the outer bark removed, make for a very superior tooth brush, with a built-in toothpaste! Yes, they have a bitter and astringent taste, but if you choose the ones which are tender but not totally new and reddish, the taste is quite tolerable. In fact, we would tend to rinse out the mouth multiple times when we use raw neem, and that by itself is a very good way of cleansing.
- **Hair Colour:** Henna leaves left overnight in an iron bowl make for an all-natural hair coloring agent. No ammonia, nor any of the other deleterious chemicals either, that you find in packaged hair dyes. The color you get isn't jet black, but a pleasing brownish black, which takes on a red-gold hue if you stand in the sun. Henna leaves ground and applied to the palms and feet are an age-old antifungal and antibacterial. Particularly in the rains, you will see plenty of people in rural areas with it on. It prevents foot fungal issues that could arise because of working with the feet damp all day.
- **Teas:** Camellia sinensis is the plant from which conventional tea is made, but hibiscus tea and tea made from clitoria ternatea is very tasty too. You just have to pluck 3-4 medium sized tender hibiscus leaves, steep them in hot water, add a little honey, mix and then strain the mixture to enjoy a soothing cup of hibiscus tea. With 'shankha pushpam' (clitoria ternatea), its the same process except that you would pluck 1-2



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mature flowers to steep, for the best flavour. The blue or violet clitoria ternatea flowers have known anti-diabetic properties, (which I can personally vouch for incidentally) in addition to many other positive impacts on health.

- **Hair Conditioners:** Steeping Indian gooseberry (amla) leaves and hibiscus leaves in hot water, and using the strained water as a last rinse subtly conditions your hair without the use of chemicals. Amla water also darkens the hair and adds a sheen to it. Amla powder is available freely, but in fact even just fresh amla fruit slices and leaves steeped in water work well as a hair nourishing and darkening solution.
- **Skincare:** Plant life is full of skin salves. Ground

fresh turmeric root, ground fresh cucumber paste, papaya fruit paste, neem leaf paste, bilva fruit pulp, diluted aloe vera stem pulp are some of the face and skin salves that plants offer. Ground sandalwood leaves also offer a fragrant facepack - this is a way in which the powers of sandalwood can be enjoyed without killing the tree for its trunk.

- **Loofah:** Gourd fibre makes for a wonderful bath sponge, it is the exact texture that will give you a nice massage without hurting the skin at all. Of course, if its your cow you want to bathe, then coconut fibre is the better material.

This is just a very cursory list of all the ways in which plants can provide us with everything we need without

messing with the environment and the climate and the soil and the groundwater. On a multicropping farm, all these plants are there all around you, and as a multicropping farmer, you can use any or all of them to dramatically increase the variety and attractiveness of the basket of produce you offer to the end consumer. And you can also simultaneously create a truly inclusive, sustainable and memorable household for your children, and their children...

Ramashree Paranandi



Centre for Social Initiative and Management

Contact Persons:

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. www.csim.in

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"Children learn by observing, so the behavior and actions of adults significantly influence them."

Dr. K. Selvarajan shares with Marie Banu his commitment to provide education and motivation to children

Dr. K. Selvarajan is a distinguished Paediatric Laparoscopic Surgeon with extensive qualifications and training. With over a decade of experience as an Assistant Professor and Surgeon at Coimbatore Medical College & Hospital, Dr. Selvarajan is currently a consultant for several hospitals in Coimbatore, India. Renowned for his groundbreaking contributions to Paediatric Laparoscopy, he was among the earliest in India to pioneer this field.

Beyond his medical expertise, Dr. Selvarajan is a visionary leader, actively involved in various initiatives. From educational and village projects to career guidance and free healthcare for the underprivileged, he has left an indelible mark on the community. His dedication has earned him numerous awards, including the Ethicon Teachers Award and Leadership Excellence Award from the Indian Medical Association.

Dr. Selvarajan's commitment extends to empowering teachers, parents, and students. He has spearheaded social welfare projects, organized motivational lectures, and played a pivotal role in the development of Kethanur, his birthplace, turning it into a model village. As a managing trustee of charitable trusts, Dr. Selvarajan continues to make significant contributions to education, healthcare, and overall community well-being.

What are the current health-related issues faced by children, and how do you address them?

In my capacity as a surgeon, I encounter various health issues, some of which are beyond the control of children. However, when it comes to broader health and fitness challenges, the focus is on promoting a healthy lifestyle.

Through a project centered around lifestyle medicine, which includes pillars like diet, physical activity, sleep, stress management, and social well-being, we aim to prevent issues such as obesity, heart attacks, and strokes. By addressing these lifestyle factors, we work towards creating a sustainable and preventive approach to healthcare.

What inspired you to initiate and sustain your volunteering program for over 25 years?

My motivation to initiate the volunteering program originates from an inherent drive to solve societal problems positively. This commitment has been a consistent thread in my journey, extending from my formative years in school to my current role in the

medical profession.

I have dedicated myself to addressing diverse issues spanning education, health, and infrastructure.

Our volunteer team, comprising professionals from various fields, is united in the mission to empower individuals with crucial life skills every Saturday. These skills encompass study techniques, memory enhancement, writing, and effective spoken communication. What began as a program at my home in Coimbatore has grown expansively, now reaching communities across Tamil Nadu.

Recognizing education as a fundamental pillar for personal and societal growth, I have directed my attention towards bridging gaps in the learning process. While educators excel in teaching subjects like physics, chemistry, and history, a noticeable void exists in imparting study techniques, memory enhancement, and other essential skills.

My objective is to equip individuals not only with subject knowledge but also with the essential tools for effective learning. The inclusion of career guidance, facilitated by our diverse team of professionals, further ensures that individuals are not just academically proficient but also prepared for their future careers.

Could you share more about your commitment to providing education and motivation to children?

My personal experiences with educational challenges, combined with a strong desire to prevent others from facing similar struggles, motivated me to provide education and motivation to children.

I aspiring to ensure that others do not endure the difficulties I faced during childhood. This sense of empathy and commitment to making a positive impact has driven me throughout my life.

Tell us about your family and how it has shaped your journey, especially considering the large family you grew up in?

I hail from a large family, where my father was one of seven siblings. Despite the constraints of a joint family with 21 children and limited educational resources, we lived together harmoniously.

The agricultural background of my family further instilled values of hard work and resilience. Even today, my 13 sisters and I engage in community activities, maintaining a strong bond with our roots. This supportive family



environment has been a crucial factor in my ability to pursue my endeavors.

You mentioned being a first-generation doctor. How did you navigate the challenges of being the first in your family to enter the medical profession?

Being the first in my family to enter the medical profession presented challenges, primarily due to the lack of a support system. However, my attitude of obedience and a willingness to take on challenges propelled me forward.

I stress the importance of decision-making and enjoying every task undertaken, emphasizing that challenges should be viewed as opportunities. I attribute my success to this approach and consider myself fortunate to have maintained a positive outlook throughout my journey.

How do you manage the balance between your medical profession and the volunteer work?

Balancing my medical profession with volunteering involves effective time management and a deep-seated enjoyment of every task. I have developed a fast decision-making approach, allowing me to organize my schedule efficiently.

For instance, I dedicate Saturday mornings to volunteering and extend my work hours in the medical field in the evenings. My enjoyment and positive outlook on all tasks, whether medical or volunteer-related, have been crucial in maintaining this balance.

Can you elaborate on your family's involvement and the impact it has had on your journey as a volunteer?

My family has been an integral part of my volunteer work. Their understanding and encouragement have allowed me to transform routine activities, such as going to my relatives' house, into opportunities for socialization and community engagement.

I've also involved them in various aspects of my volunteer work, changing the perception of these activities from burdensome to enjoyable. Their support has been a cornerstone in managing the extensive network of people and activities associated with my volunteering efforts.

How do you believe values can be instilled in children, and what role do you think adults, especially parents, play in this process?

Instilling values in children requires a two-pronged approach. Firstly, adults, especially parents and teachers, must embody these values as role models. Children learn by observing, so the behavior and actions of adults significantly influence them.

Secondly, adults should actively engage in teaching values to children through discussions and practical examples. The key is to focus on the adults, as they are the ones shaping the environment in which children grow. By creating a positive and value-driven atmosphere, adults can ensure that children naturally absorb and internalize these values.