

Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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About Bhagavatula Charitable Trust and its activities



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**"There is no such thing as failure:
we learn by doing and so achieve
social change incrementally."**

An exclusive interview with
Nickala Torkington,
Director, UnLtd, UK



From the Editor

Dear Friend,

One of our country's most anticipated festivals, Diwali, the festival of lights, symbolises the triumph of good over evil and light over darkness, and the regeneration of life. It's that time of year when lights will illuminate homes and hearts in every corner of India. Apart from lighting lamps, the occasion is typically celebrated by bursting firecrackers and by distributing sweets among family and friends.

We need to look beyond our differences. It is time we remember those who are not privileged to celebrate festivals such as Diwali and reach out to them as much as we can.

The changemakers featured in Conversations Today are all those who have gone the extra mile to serve the needy. It is your turn now!

Take care of your health and safety, and at the same time, care for others so that everyone celebrates this Diwali happily, healthily and safely!

Wish you A Happy Diwali!

Marie Banu

Speech is Silver, Silence is Golden

We have often heard this adage and most times people interpret it as - keeping silent is good. However, silence does not mean not talking; silence cannot be imposed from outside. Silence is an outcome, not a process. Silence descends on us when we are intensely engaged in searching, and then deep within us, we realize that many things that we are searching for in the world outside us, does not really exist there, but can only be found within us; then silence descends on the person.

Silence also occurs on occasions when words are not necessary - a mother who sits by the bedside of her sick child, does not have to go on speaking reassuring words to her child, and yet something warm and comforting spills out of her heart, and that is experienced by the child.

What does Silence mean?

- Silence refers to silence of the mind, and not silence in speech. When the mind is silent, even speech becomes silent. There is a pause in the thought process. Such a shift happens only when we experience deep trust in the universe
- Silence means communicating with the universe to understand the deeper meaning of life
- Silence means silencing the intellect and opening the 'heart'
- Silence provides an opportunity to identify the qualities within ourselves that have the capacity to transform us
- Similar to how we 'slow down' to experience vitality in the physical body, silence is the 'slowing down' of the mental body so we can reach the source of our energy

Silence is a discipline, not of 'doing', but of 'being'

We often use the phrase, 'listen, don't just hear'. If listening is a deeper participation than hearing, silence is the next 'deeper' step to listening. It is a movement from the surface to our core - silence is a step towards very deep listening; listening that goes



beyond our five senses, where we begin to listen to the vibrations of our existence.

Speech that comes from such a deep experience of silence naturally impacts people in many positive ways.

How Silence serves us

- Silence helps us get in touch with our body; we 'experience' our body in entirely new ways - it enables us appreciate the work of nature that is working through us and is the source of our physical processes
- Silence helps us hear our thoughts, it reveals patterns in our thought process; patterns that may or may not be serving

- us
- Silence helps us experience emotions with an open heart and not a prejudiced mind
- During conflict, when one has a strong view point, deep silence helps sift through superficial thoughts and takes us to the truth
- In suffering, physical or emotional, silence helps one reflect deeply about patterns that have led to physical and emotional disturbances
- Above all, Silence brings us to our breath, to the present moment and enables us savor and live it to the fullest - the state of 'being-ness' in all its glory!

Yours Energetically

Dr. Bhulakshmi V and Ms. Bhuvaneshwari Ravi are trainers and facilitators of the Positive Energy (PE) program. They are spiritual seekers with a vision of transforming their own energy state from surviving to being. In this journey they have gathered deep insights and are continuously working towards creating a pathway for more seekers. With years of exposure to spiritual practices like yoga, reiki, and personal development interventions like coaching, the authors are working in the Organization Development and Leadership Development space.

This intervention is offered by GapSkills Learning Solutions Pvt. Ltd is being offered to corporates and schools. You can contact them at info@gapskills.com to design a customized intervention for your organization or join the PE open program - www.gapskills.com.

In The Name Of His Mother

Research and observation helped Sethuraman realise that in developed countries, screening of new born babies for hearing defects was mandatory, while it was not so in India.

Disability is a sector that is not able to see consistent and large scale interventions that integrated preventive and curative approaches. The challenges are all the more daunting when we have to address concerns pertaining to every type of disability. Given this, initiatives by many non profit organisations have managed to pay attention to one of the types and have also grown to be pioneers in their field. The scale of their reach and impact does have lessons for their contemporaries.

Among the different types of disability, hearing impairment is something that had received less attention and there is less awareness about the same when compared to others. Mr Sethuraman, Co-founder of Meenakshi Venkatraman Foundation has tried to reverse this tide.

Sethuraman is a Chemical Engineer by profession who also co-founded a company and headed it for 35 years. 9 years back, he got associated with Deaf Enabled Foundation that managed a vocational school for children with partial and full hearing impairment. "I grew intimate with their cause because my mother lost her hearing after her delivery. I began to research about the issue and the possible ways in which this can be mitigated at an early stage. Every time I travelled abroad, I spent time to observe the scenario there," shares Sethuraman. The one and only University for the Deaf in Washington inspired him, also raising a volley of questions about the situation in his home country.

Research and observation helped Sethuraman realise that in developed countries, screening of new born babies for hearing defects was mandatory, while it was not so in India. If the screening indicated impairment, suitable interventions were taken at a very early stage. This was overlooked in India, where 6 out of every 1000 children are born with hearing impairment, both partial and full. As there was no screening done in the first few days of birth, detection is also pushed to be late. Unfortunately, late detection results in late treatment and this is when children are ready to go to school. With no further hope, these kids are sent to special schools.

Hearing loss can be conductive or due to sensory neural loss. While the former requires a minor surgery the latter can be addressed with hearing aids or implants. Complete loss of hearing in both the ears can also be treated with cochlear implants. The earlier this is done, the better. Sethuraman insists that these implants must be done by the age of 1 which means the diagnosis must be done at the time of birth. As the surgery gets delayed, children will have to juggle with post-surgery effects, making it very strenuous for them



to learn speech and language.

Sethuraman was deeply disturbed by the scheme of affairs that the children with hearing impairment faced. "It all requires just 7 to 8 seconds per ear to complete the Oto Acoustic Emission Test which is carried out within 48 hours of birth. If a child fails the test, it is repeated after a month. Failure again leads to an elaborate diagnostic procedure called the DERA test that reveals the extent and type of hearing loss."

As these tests were administered only in select private hospitals, it was out of reach for the vast majority who had no options but to access the government hospitals which were not equipped with this screening facility. Sethuraman, thus decided to import machines from abroad and began working on making this test mandatory to all new born babies in the Government Hospital at Secunderabad. He also employed a full time audiologist and a speech pathologist to oversee the processes. College interns were engaged in carrying out the tests while part time audiologists were hired to do the screening in villages around the hospital. Slowly, he scaled the activities to run hearing test for all age groups to create awareness and advocate for these tests in all hospitals.

Andhra Pradesh has 8,000 children taking to hearing aids every year, which could be thwarted if the children were subjected to early detection.

Children who acquire jaundice after birth, born pre-term, incubated for more than 3 days, whose mothers had infections during pregnancy, and also children in ICU are susceptible to loss of hearing.

make screening mandatory at birth itself. Partial loss of hearing amongst school children made them less attentive or withdrawn and senior citizens suffered hearing loss as they reached 70 years of age. The success of these camps has encouraged the foundation to plan more such camps targeting those who are affected by noise induced pollution, like the traffic policemen, auto rickshaw drivers, industry workers, etc.

Lamenting on the lack of awareness even among officials in the Health Department, Sethuraman recounts that the course on audiology and speech pathology is not very popular. Lack of popularity on this course is also one reason why doctors are not adequately equipped to handle

audio or speech pathology or select the right hearing aid for a child or adult.

About a year and a half old, the foundation recently made an awareness movie that has been screened to around 6000 families. Drawn to the cause, Sethuraman gave up his full-time business and is now completely engaged in spreading the work of Meenakshi Venkatraman Foundation, named after his mother.

Learning about CSIM in Hyderabad

from his son-in-law and

inspired by the stories in Conversations Today, he decided to do the SEOP programme last year. "The CSIM course happened at just the right time for me. NGO management became comprehensible. On completion, I felt more obliged to recommend many more like-minded individuals to take this course," recalls Sethuraman who was inspired by the Aravind Eye Care's case study. He also gifted books on such inspiring case studies to friends like him who wanted to make a mark in this field.

Sethuraman is now more articulate about his dream. "CSIM has helped me realise the potential of my idea." He wishes to establish a campus exclusively for the treatment of people with all kinds of hearing related problems and also manufacture cheaper hearing aids with abreast technology. Drawing his strength from his mother, whose lip reading never allowed onlookers realise her disability and empathy towards other differently abled people, he hopes to see Meenakshi Venkatraman Foundation pioneering the efforts in treating hearing impairment on a large scale.

—Shanmuga Priya. T



"The CSIM course happened at just the right time for me. NGO management became comprehensible."

Unfortunately, a child's response to movements and actions is mistaken for hearing. Sethuraman also informs us that in joint families, elders were constantly observing the children and were able to detect hearing loss much quickly. He remarks that nuclear families are actually losing out on this precious hand holding from the elders.

The camps organised also revealed facts that laid further emphasis on the need to

Inspiring and connecting peers for a social cause – *Prabhakar J*

For the average man when he is young and energetic, social work as a way of life is the last choice. It is probably not on the list of choices at all. It is all the more difficult for a young man endowed with extraordinary talent. Normally, one would expect society to recognize such talent. It is natural to expect that opportunities would pour in for nurturing such talent and highlighting them to the world in ways that would make a material difference. However, there are instances we have come across of such gifted or endowed people staying unrecognized. This could arise because of many reasons; most commonly, it is for want of the right mentors. Some talented people may show the tenacity to fight it out and build on their talents. Others may divert their abilities to some other good cause and still prove themselves as being immensely valuable to society. In some rare instances, talented people have managed both to work for money and to get actively involved in social service.

When you get to know about the impact they have on society, you cannot but be amazed by their achievements. You would love to emulate them. One such person is Prabhakar, who has consistently raised the bar for humility while pursuing laudable work aimed at uplifting the deprived sections of society.

Early days: Prabhakar was born in Seetharamapetta, a village in Andhra Pradesh that is about 60 kms from Chennai. From childhood, he showed great talent for line drawing, and all signs were that he would become an artist in that domain. Even as a boy, his gifted pencil art won him accolades.

Prabhakar was very outgoing and service-minded at school. He was disciplined, and showed bravery in reaching out to social causes. He enrolled in the NCC and was an outstanding cadet.

These two facets of his young life, namely, his inborn talent for line drawing and his outstanding performance as a cadet in the NCC had him thinking of pursuing a life path aligned with either facet or possibly both. This author considers his life as a cadet outstanding, as he led his school in NCC activities and impacted his fellow cadets in all their exertions.

After passing his SSLC (Secondary School Leaving Certificate) exams in 1972, Prabhakar sought admission in colleges to specialize in fine arts (drawing) and then take up a career in that field. You may call it destiny or bad luck, but Prabhakar was not admitted to any college, and his family circumstances compelled him to forgo his passion and pursue gainful employment to ease those circumstances.

In 1973, Prabhakar joined the Ashok Leyland Ltd (ALL) factory at Ennore as a



fitter. He resolved not to languish over spilt milk; he would rekindle his interest in social service. He thought his excellent performance in the training as a NCC cadet at school would help him.

Here was an opportunity at hand at ALL factory, where there was a movement called “Nallor Vattam” (well-intended member circle). This movement was functioning under the guidance of Sivaram, its president.

Leveraging work environment: This forum leveraged the work environment and brought together a number of like-minded workers who could be associates on social work. Prabhakar used to take some socially relevant topics for discussion every week, and the group would arrive at plans for some action to initiate. These would be as simple as spreading awareness on issues like the ills of alcoholism, the benefits of a clean environment, safety, respect and established privileges and rights for women and the importance of maintaining good health.

Prabhakar asserts that “The best way to engage with workers and their families is to go to their own dwellings and discuss the importance of leading a good and healthy life. This is quite basic in social work, something that I had to pursue meticulously. Initially, workers will not

buy into such a movement, as they would be more preoccupied with day-to-day problems. Further, they lack the ability to visualize long-term needs. It is crucial to engage with them regularly and patiently on the virtues of uniting for a common purpose. One would face the challenges of abuse and resistance to such pep talks. But success comes in only when we increase manifold the group by voluntary associations”.

The key lesson Prabhakar talk about here is the need to sustain interest in mobilizing all interested members with similar grit and enthusiasm for serving society.

Plans for a village: During this period of service, Prabhakar found a village that was about five kms from Manali and not far from the ALL Ennore factory. This village required urgent attention. The village was afflicted with the severe problems of illicit liquor preparation and consumption. As we know, liquor consumption, especially by the poor, is not healthy, as it eats into their essentials budget and drains their energy. Hence, laborers who drink are not likely to be engaged gainfully or to earn a normal income. Their lack of income and indiscipline arising from addiction to liquor would have a downward spiralling effect affecting the well-being of their families, the education of the children and their

social goodwill.

Prabhakar was deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi’s philosophy regarding social service. Prabhakar believed that the consumption of liquor was a serious impediment to a family’s economic well-being. Hence, he continued to work to make his target audience give up liquor consumption. In the village Prabhakar found, the problem had more to do with illicit liquor. Alcohol is made in industrial units by the distillation process using molasses. Fermentation in breweries is an important process to make the alcohol potable. Industrial alcohol is sold as ethanol and methanol is mixed to make industrial methyl alcohol, used for making downstream products.

Poor people who cannot access branded potable alcohol for reasons like lack of purchasing power resort to brewing illicit liquor. This was a rampant activity in the days of prohibition; unfortunately, illicit alcohol brewers have survived in many parts of India. They use low cost chemicals of poor quality and undesirable methyl alcohol to lure consumers. Illicit alcohol can lead to blindness and death, as evidenced by the many instances reported in the media.

Prabhakar and his team fought this trend as far back as the mid 1980s with dharnas and sathyagraha, forcing people to give up alcoholism. Nallor Vattam took the initiative by inviting Anna Hazare in 1989 to this village for an event spread over a day. This step impressed the villagers by introducing them to respected seniors who followed Gandhian thoughts. Anna Hazare duly emphasized the need to stay away from alcoholism.

In today’s context, alcoholism is not considered that much of a taboo, since most Indian states have lifted prohibition. However, the ill effects of alcoholism are visibly prevalent, especially in communities of poor people. The problem is magnified when poor people consume illicit liquor to save on cost. When we consider this background, Prabhakar’s effort is visionary. It was a Herculean task to start a drive against alcoholism in one small village and slowly spread it across many more villages through his network of social workers. He achieved a positive impact with exemplary courage, leadership and commitment, qualities that were later highly respected by the communities he served.

Serving through education: To get his intervention going in 1989, Prabhakar had to prepare well in advance by getting involved in a long association with the village community. He initiated his service by organizing a number of camps. These camps focused on issues like health, eye

donation and blood donation. Prabhakar's efforts started paying dividends when villagers started understanding wellness as a concept.

Village service became a routine activity for Nallor Vattam members. At this point, Prabhakar convinced forum members of the need to adopt the village for a major intervention. They started village visits and moved on to healthcare and education. In 1985, Prabhakar first organized educational support measures for students in the village. Ever since that first initiative, students have started to perform much better.

About 17 members of the forum under the leadership of Prabhakar decided to contribute one per cent of their monthly salary to a corpus for setting up a school there. In three years, they saved Rs. 20,000 and launched the school at Manali. Now Prabhakar and his core team have set up about five schools across Chennai.

Prabhakar believed education is the key factor in the development of individuals and society as a whole. Hence, he and his forum members focused their networking activities on the provision and improvement of access to educational opportunities.

Changing orientation and moving along times: As the forum was sponsoring education, healthcare and environmental activities, Prabhakar wanted to participate in his own way in the celebrations of 50 years of Indian independence in 1997.

He used his natural skills to organize an exhibition of pictures drawn by him of 50 national leaders, to commemorate the occasion. The portraits were well received. Viewers included Dr. Abdul J Kalam, even before he became the President of India.

Prabhakar later arranged to hold the exhibition in different places. Encouraged by the response, he organized more concept-based exhibitions like "My Village" and "Clean Environment".

Looking at his artistic skills and his interest in socially relevant drawings, Ananda Vikadan, a leading publishing house in Chennai with several weekly magazines, offered to employ him full time. Prabhakar took up this offer, as it helped him travel to different parts of the country, mainly within South India. The publishing house wanted him to launch a new series based on the Purana Ashram series. This assignment took him to spots of

interest such as the Bellurmath, Ramakrishna Pramahansa's birthplace and Vivekanda's house.

This assignment proved again to be a turning point for Prabhakar, and spurred him to pursue something different. He remembers that he asked himself, "Instead of limiting my art to line drawings for social awareness, what else I can do based on the inspiration provided by traveling, visiting places of heritage and learning about the great Indian philosophers and social activists?"

Networking service organizations: In 2005, Prabhakar launched an organization called "Networking and Development Centre for Service Organisations" (NDSO). The objective of NDSO is to gather a number of individuals and small outfits that are doing great service to humanity through their dedication and commitment to social well-being. Most of these outfits are micro-focused in terms of geographical coverage. However, they carry exceptional learning potential, and demonstrate leadership that can be highly instructive for different types of outfits in the same region, in more diverse areas. Dr. Azhagar Ramanujam, a well-known social activist who belongs to the school of Vedathri Maharishi, is the President of NDSO.

Prabhakar has visited a number of villages and people who serve society. His vision was clear. He found it a challenge to unite these social entrepreneurs and bring them together in a forum where they could share their experiences. He started travelling to various project sites and visited the individuals who were the key providers of these services. This could be any individual engaged in constructive social work. Examples are individuals who go to village homes where someone has just died and convinces the relatives to donate the deceased's eyes. By 2013, he had arranged the donation of 396 pairs of eyes. This was a great service to humanity, and other organizations engaged in social work can learn from him how to make such projects a reality.

This is the driving force behind Prabhakar's endeavour for "Ennangalin Sangamam" (Unification of Thoughts). This idea connects people in social work in such a way as to exponentially increase their collective strength and enable them to serve common causes better.

Recognizing youth on social work:

Prabhakar deeply believed that youth who are pursuing social work must be inspired. He set up the Vivekananda Award in commemorate Vivekananda's 150th birth anniversary. He selected 120 people to receive the award. The criteria for awardee selection are that the candidate must be young, below 40 years of age, and must have achieved significant positive impact on society. The point was that Prabhakar felt the need to connect, recognize and inspire social workers and entrepreneurs. His efforts brought about a congregation of social workers who shared their experiences. He has also been conducting annual meets to which NDSO invites people for a day to share and celebrate their activities and success stories. This event has been held for the last eight years. The NDSO group has also started to clean up lakes in different places facing water problems. They cleaned up five lakes in Trichy, and have also done work at Dharmapuri and Chennai—areas where water problems were sometimes acute. These activities clearly show Prabhakar's carving to do something significant by mobilizing likeminded persons for a social cause.

In 2013, Prabhakar visited a village in Dharmapuri district, bordering Karnataka, as part of his idea for camps to identify and motivate 100 youths to revolutionize their villages. After hearing him speak, about 40 youths came forward and pledged that they would not drink liquor in future. As the matter got coverage in the media, the village elders also joined the youth and declared that the village would henceforth shun liquor consumption. Prabhakar and his wife Nirmala have resolved to celebrate Deepavali with the inhabitants of this village.

Ensuring family support: What is amazing about Prabhakar is his ability to win over people totally to any cause he is championing. This is a process that has to start at home. You may be curious to know how it went at Prabhakar's home when he took up a meagerly paid job at a factory and at the same time, started devoting his time to social work. After a while, he was married and later, blessed with two sons: Ravi Varma and Narendar. Interestingly, the names of his sons reflect his passion. This author was curious to know how he managed something that is not easy for the

average man.

One can understand the drive that makes a worker take up unionism. Here in this case, however, Prabhakar had chosen a path of harmony in an aggressive labor-dominated industrial environment with tremendous success. The path he had taken was no flower bed.

His wife, Nirmala, initially objected to what he was doing. However, he kept informing and involving her in all of his activities. Once a student from the village mentioned earlier, with the alcoholism and illicit liquor trade issues, came to his house to thank him profusely for enabling that student's success. This event moved his wife. She truly saw verifiable results of his hard work in transforming lives. She also became selfless and caring. In this way, if one can bring about positive changes in the lives of people, it one is doing invaluable work. Now, Prabhakar's wife is with him on all his social work and stands strongly behind his NDSO activities. Whenever she can, she travels with him to observe and understand the social work done by many others.

Conclusion: Here is a man who could not fuel his dreams and ambitions to exploit his innate skills for a gainful career, but used the opportunity and environment for a larger purpose. Prabhakar uses his strength to network and his platform to convince people that the power of togetherness brings about exponential results in the social service sector if the objectives are meaningful and well-intended. He uses his personality to augment resources and at the same time, is humble enough to stay firmly planted in the ground. In a world where workers may be hijacked by diversified ideological groups, Prabhakar sensed that harmony through concentrated group effort could bring peace and satisfaction to society. Prabhakar's story could make for a new model to handle industrial relations in factories, especially considering the necessity that today's organizations need to be "caring corporations" and to find harmony with their local environments. We could go a long way toward social-corporate unity if we had more Prabhakars!

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

Editorial

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu

CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INITIATIVE AND MANAGEMENT



Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) is a unit of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani. It is a learning centre that promotes the concept of social entrepreneurship. **CSIM offers training and consultancy to social enterprises – for-profits and non-profits – to facilitate**

them to apply successful business practices and yet retain their social mission. It also offers training and hand holding support to prospective social entrepreneurs and enable them to launch their social initiatives. CSIM operates in Chennai, Coimbatore, Hyderabad and Bangalore.

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CSIM also facilitates Social Audit for social enterprises through Social Audit Network, UK and SAN, India.
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Rural Re-Inventions

Call it a bias of sorts, but the fact remains that poverty in an urban tapestry receives a great deal of attention. The rural poor are many a time, forgotten and ignored. That could simply be because of the greater amount of media focus on cities, when compared to villages. The same reason why academic disciplines like developmental studies, rural development and skill-development have become the need of the hour, in the continuing attempt to ensure holistic development of the country. It is here, that an NGO like the Bhagavatula Charitable Trust (BCT) comes in. The nearly four-decade-old trust has, for the greater part of its existence, made its mission synonymous with the progress of rural Vishakapatnam.

“When I’m asked ‘why villages’, I often ask, ‘why not?’” says Sri Ram Murty, Secretary, BCT, taking us through BCT’s journey since 1976. That was the year his father, Dr B V Parameswara Rao, founded the trust, paving the way for rural development of the rural hamlets around Vizag. Continuing his father’s mission, Sri Ram is today, secretary of BCT — a responsibility he has assumed only since 2009. “There are several challenges that our villages are faced with, today. A number of these challenges have to do with agriculture,” he says, speaking at length about how crucial awareness and education of proper agricultural practices are, in rural development. In fact, it is in this area that a large chunk of BCT’s work comes to the fore, as Sri Ram himself believes, that existing agricultural practices — existing subsidies included — are far from ideal. “A farmer isn’t aware of what kind of soil is suited to a certain kind of fertilizer. We tend to assume they know. But the fact still remains, that they don’t,” he says.

Speaking of BCT’s current mission towards better awareness in agricultural practices, Sri Ram says that subsidies in agriculture are also out of sync with what farmers really need. “There’s a large subsidy for urea, but nothing for Potash,” he explains, “Farmers tend to thus use more urea and less potash and that leads to the growth of tender leaves, which in turn become an ideal target for pests.” And scenarios like these are just one of many reasons why he believes agriculture today, requires a major

makeover in the overall effort towards holistic rural development. However, it’s not merely agriculture that BCT has involved itself with. Healthcare, education and skill-development are three other areas of a four-pronged approach towards the accomplishment of BCT’s mission.



“A number of children in the villages hadn’t completed their education. The boys were made to work and the girls stopped going to school when they attained puberty.”

“A number of children in the villages hadn’t completed their education. The boys were made to work and the girls stopped going to school when they attained puberty,” Sri Ram explains. Changing this, required innovation. And innovation

came in the form of BCT’s first-of-its-kind Residential Model High School. Through this system, children in villages were encouraged to continue education by way of non-conventional methods of academic instruction. All this, in the attempt to get over the passive blackboard-styled teaching, which slowly began giving way to interactive teaching, distribution of notes at the school and creation of subject-specific classrooms — teaching methodology that had not been heard of in villages.

Another area that BCT has made rapid strides in is women empowerment. A number of opportunities have been extended to women in villages, in employment-generating areas like screen printing, papad-making and animal husbandry, to name a few. In fact, Sri Ram believes that women empowerment alongside skill-development, agriculture and education continue to remain the key focus areas for BCT. However, he believes that agriculture and the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) systems in this field could be a potential game-changer. “Today, as far as agriculture is concerned, there’s a helpline for farmers to call in case they need help or assistance,” he explains, “But that’s just not enough. The government has to be pro-active enough to reach out to these farmers, instead of expecting the farmers to reach out to them.” This, he feels can be achieved only through media that allows for awareness, education and communication to reach the farmer, and thereby help in the development of their trade.

As far as the future is concerned, Sri Ram feels that BCT can achieve a whole lot more, but on a macro-level. “As we stand today, we are doing good work, but at a grass-root level. The challenge for tomorrow lies in getting all this on a macro level and a larger platform.” Perhaps in doing so, the trust itself will be able to finally achieve its vision of creating change in Vishakapatnam’s villages, in addition to bringing about holistic development in the quality of life within each of these villages. However, for now, a bottom-up approach keeps BCT’s work in good stead, even as its four-pronged approach to improving agriculture, education, women empowerment and skill-development could well make it a real agent of change.



Photos: Marie Banu



Vocational training for the deaf and mute



Student trainers mentoring BCT teachers



BCT Students at a cultural programme



Residential Model High School, Haripuram

THE ECO-ENTREPRENEURS

“When we started out, we always thought our target customers would be ardent environmentalists, but that’s not the case now. We also get clients who want a safe product for their clothes.”

The founders of Krya believe in building a consumer goods company that is not only profitable but also promotes an ecosystem of sustainable urban living, starting with its first product – an organic clothes detergent.

Both Preethi Sukumaran (33) and Srinivas Krishnaswamy (34) prefer to walk to their office or use the public transport. As a matter of fact, they do not even own a car. As founders and chief executive officers of Chennai-based Krya Consumer Products LLP (Krya) that creates environmentally sustainable consumer products, their company is but an extension of their way of living. Formed in May 2010, Krya (Sanskrit for conscious action) launched its first organic product, a plant-based clothes detergent, this September. And as vegans themselves, they make sure their products also adhere to their ethical standards of not using animal-derived ingredients or testing on them. The husband-wife duo does not like outlining roles for each other but prefers doing everything from scratch. From designing their own logo to packaging their products, they’ve also done a bit of web designing and for awhile, printed their own eco-friendly business cards. “There is a lot more exposure and learning involved when you do things yourself than outsourcing it to others,” says Sukumaran.

It is this joint responsibility on all matters that leads the couple on constant discussions and coming up with fresher ideas, even on their morning walks. “It is often hard for us to distinguish our personal and professional lives because how we live our lives plays a major role in how Krya is run and the products that we make. Our focus has always been sustainable urban living,” says Krishnaswamy. Their day begins quite early with a morning walk, when they’re not doing yoga three times a week. They also often visualise how they would like the day to unfold before the daily grind starts to help stay positive. “We’ve consciously stopped reading newspapers since it starts the day with a lot of negative or sad news,” adds Sukumaran. Since they do not take any processed foods, breakfasts do not include cereals but staples like Idli or Pongal. “We make our own cakes, biscuits and breads. In fact, Preethi’s chocolate peanut butter is amazing,” reveals Krishnaswamy. Since dairy is not part of their diet, Sukumaran adds that organic food and whole grains constitute their food source.

However, Sukumaran and Krishnaswamy didn’t always lead such a lifestyle rather it evolved over the past three to four years. “The interest developed much before Krya happened. We got interested in organic food while living in Mumbai,” they say. Now, they



spend most of their free time trying to meet other people, who are also passionate about the green way of life. During weekends, they often spend time volunteering at an organic store from where they buy their groceries. They also actively try to reach out to green communities to expand their knowledge, be it organic farming or composting.

A fresh start

As alumni of Indian Institute of Management, both have led the high-flying corporate life. Krishnaswamy had worked with Johnson & Johnson, where they met, and Sukumaran went onto work in other companies like Henkel and Marico as brand manager in developing products. Their considerable experience in the consumer goods space

helped establish Krya, with an initial investment of about Rs. 5 – 6 lakh. “One of the biggest challenges was making the shift from an employee to entrepreneur mindset,” says Sukumaran. Also, keeping their eyes fixed on the larger goal was not always easy when things did not work out

as expected. “It took us awhile to get our logistics in place. Many of the people we wrote to did not respond. It is times like that you learn not to lose your focus,” adds Krishnaswamy. The duo also relied on their network of people to help with certain aspects of the company’s process.

After doing substantial research, they

decided their first product would be detergent due to its importance in the market. “Detergents are a Rs. 12,000 crore market in India,” shares Krishnaswamy. They decided to use soapberry since it’s natural and plant-based. “Our ancient texts have long written about the cleansing properties of soapberries. We tied up with an organic farmer in Andhra Pradesh to source them and experimented to obtain the correct grade of grinding as they easily absorb water,” adds

Sukumaran. The manufacturing facility is present near the farm from where the detergent is packaged and sent, thus ensuring its carbon footprint is less. Even the package is recyclable, including the plain black printed ink on it thus, making it eco-friendly. Priced at Rs. 290 for 400gm,

the product is costlier than most other detergents available in the market but the quantity required per wash is lesser. Also, the by-products from the wash – the soap shells and water – can be used for plants.

The duo takes measured steps in marketing the product. They mostly rely on offering support in green livelihood through their blog, giving downloadable guides and through their Facebook page, besides word of mouth. “Communicating with our customers takes up a large chunk of our time. Many of them keep us updated about the product. We also try to meet one customer a week at their house when they use the detergent,” he says. They also send samples to other bloggers and let them review it. Though most of their orders are online, in the future they would like to target 30 per cent of sales through retail stores and they’ve already tied up with a Gangtok-based retailer. “We only want to tie-up with those who are a part of this ecosystem, mostly organic stores. We ask them to use it and retail it if they’re happy with it,” says Sukumaran. They’ve already got requests from such stores in Pune, Indore, Mumbai and Chennai. They also work with fabric experts, who evaluate the product and pass on the feedback.

Staying organic

Though on an operational basis, Krya is already profitable, they hope to completely break even at the company level in a year’s time. “We would like to grow organically. As of now, we are not looking for outside investment,” says Krishnaswamy. They also plan to work with students to make campuses like their alma mater more sustainable and are working on bringing a smaller student pack for the detergent. “When we started out, we always thought our target customers would be ardent environmentalists, but that’s not the case now. We also get clients who want a safe product for their clothes,” adds Sukumaran. With about 200 customers, the company is yet to establish its cash-on-delivery process, besides its online payment method and hopes to bring in SMS-based ordering for its repeat customers. They are now experimenting with more number of household cleaners, the next in line being a dishwasher detergent. For the long haul, the team is not fazed about competing with much bigger players, as they believe their product is not a niche one. “These days, everyone is concerned about the environment. It is only a matter of time before such eco-friendly products are also accepted on a larger level,” they conclude.

—Mahathi R. Arjun

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“It is often hard for us to distinguish our personal and professional lives because how we live our lives plays a major role in how Krya is run and the products that we make. Our focus has always been sustainable urban living.”

Giving through 'YouSee'

These days, we come across quite a number of people who contribute to the development sector either through donations or by volunteering. The trend revealed the need and potential of organising 'giving' in such a manner that individuals on both sides (giving and receiving) are able to realise their roles effectively. YouSee is one such platform that began to streamline 'giving' in Hyderabad through its website www.yousee.in.

Founded in 2009, YouSee was construed as an online platform to enable giving in four different ways – Shramadhan, Vasthudhan, Kachradhan and Dhandhan. "The website plays a key role in our work. By managing this multifaceted work through the website, we are also able to maintain the administrative expenses under control," shares Mr Gunaranjan, Founder of YouSee.

Gunaranjan's experience in the development sector through Basix (a micro-finance institution in Hyderabad) got him grappled with apprehensions of outcomes by not only individual donors, but also the corporate and government sector. The idea of post-pay philanthropy helped him solve this apprehension, simultaneously paving way for deeper engagement which allowed him to venture into other forms of giving. YouSee thus evolved to be a low cost platform facilitating multiple forms of giving.

In Shramadhan, YouSee facilitates structured volunteering where volunteers can choose to work for a non-profit organisation onsite or offsite, in three different sectors—education, health and environment. In addition, the website also allows volunteers to choose a city of operation— from the options available. The website has been designed to provide all the granular details, and enables the volunteer to decide on his or her commitment. Be it skill requirement, time commitment, number of volunteers, or the domain of interest—the site has it all. "Once a volunteer commits online, the volunteer and the concerned non-profit organisation are connected," he says.

An interesting case is that of Gandhi Hospital in Hyderabad, which is a tertiary care government hospital, with a capacity of 1,200 beds. The hospital was in need of IT management to manage the data on influx of patients every day and maintain the patient records in a systematic manner. A group of volunteers from the IT sector (through YouSee) developed the Hospital



Information System which has now been in use for more than two years. This free and open

software was also made available for others to adopt. Three blood banks of Indian Red Cross Society in Telangana have adopted the software, making space for donors to know through email when their blood was being used for a particular surgery.

Noting these developments, the Andhra Pradesh Medical Service Infrastructure Development Corporation adopted the modules developed for this software and adapted it to streamline sanitation services across hospitals.

In Vasthudhan, YouSee facilitates contributions in kind. The website allows non-profits to register their requirements and also the donors to register the kind and number of items they are willing to offer. With requests coming from both sides, YouSee conveys the same to the non-profits in the said geography. Vasthudhan is now operational in many cities across India. Transportation of the items (books, furniture, clothes, etc.) are also committed online either by the donor or by the recipient non-profit organisation. Interestingly, YouSee also intervenes with the help of a volunteer to check the genuine need of the organisations. Furthermore, YouSee actually encourages donors to be part of the need analysis so that they get to learn ways in which their contributions can make a difference.

Kachradhan, in simple words is donation of waste. The way this is being executed is sure an instance to be

explored. YouSee works with residential communities, offices by promoting segregation of waste. Every month, a camp is organised wherein the waste from a community is handed over to the local 'radhiwala' (rag picker) who weighs and hands over the appropriate cash value. While some communities used this money themselves to further promote segregation of waste or purchase of organic manure for their gardens, others used it for charity. Most intriguingly, some of the residential communities had established decentralised compost units, and some others organised waste segregation in such a way that kitchen waste was directly led to the compost.

Admitting that this kind of a behavioural change takes time, Gunaranjan is equally excited about the increasing participation that YouSee's Kachradhan has seen over the years. "It has to be convenient to be good. Today, there are residential volunteers who themselves take the role of convincing other members and Hyderabad has demonstration points in some parts of the city to encourage and facilitate such residential volunteers," he says.

Gunaranjan felt sure of YouSee's concept when he came across individuals who started with one kind of 'giving' and eventually moved into the other types. Reiterating the strength of consistent and focused volunteerism, he says that YouSee is an example of such volunteering. "This kind of a deeper engagement has allowed us to retain our volunteer base across the cities. At any point, there is not more than two individuals who draw salary under YouSee," he says.

Dhandhan is where donors are engaged in financial 'post pay

philanthropy'. Contrary to the prevailing model where projects or development interventions are implemented after a donor brings in resources, YouSee introduced the post pay philosophy where it worked with the concerned NGO partner through their programmes and documented the resultant outcome (for which they lacked the knowhow). All the nitty-gritties of the said intervention and its impact on the targeted beneficiaries are listed on the website. Donors who wish to contribute pay for the work that has been accomplished. This leaves them with no apprehension about the use of their money. Funds raised are then set aside for the respective project for which it has been mobilised.

Recently, YouSee organised a Sevamela at the Joy of Giving week in Hyderabad. In about 5.5 years since its establishment, YouSee was able to garner participation of 114 NGOs. With the open interactions making information easily available, Sevamela was able to pool in 6 tonnes of rice over two days. Facilitating more collaboration between the participant NGOs, YouSee not only gave visibility to their work, but also ensured accountability and transparency.

Gunaranjan strongly believes in the spirit of giving and his YouSee has been able to allow socially concerned individuals to be able to contribute in different ways possible, thus spreading the message of 'giving'.

Next time you want to 'give', please click www.yousee.in and learn what all you can give and the pertinent answers to questions that arises in your mind.

—Shanmuga Priya.T

Conversations with Shri Ramana Maharishi



Multiplicity of individuals is a moot point with most persons. A jiva is only the light reflected on the ego. The person identifies himself with the ego and argues that there must be more like him. He is not easily convinced of the absurdity of his position. Does a man who sees many individuals in his dream persist in believing them to be real and enquire after them when he wakes up?

This argument does not convince the disputant.

Again, there is the moon. Let anyone look at her from any place at any time; she is the same moon. Everyone knows it. Now suppose that there are several receptacles of water reflecting the moon. The images are all different from one another and from the moon herself. If one of the receptacles falls to pieces, that reflection disappears. Its disappearance does not affect the real

moon or the other reflections. It is similar with an individual attaining Liberation. He alone is liberated.

The sectarian of multiplicity makes this his argument against non-duality.

"If the Self is single, if one man is liberated, that means that all souls are liberated. In practice it is not so. Therefore *Advaita* is not correct."

The weakness in the argument is that the reflected light of the Self is mistaken for the original Light of the Self. The ego, the world and the individuals are all due to the person's *vasanas*. When they perish, that person's hallucinations disappear, that is to say one pitcher is broken and the relative reflection is at an end.

The fact is that the Self is never bound. There can therefore be no Release for It. All the troubles are for the ego only.

—Excerpted from talks with
Shri Ramana Maharishi

Belongingness Dimensions –Inclusive culture

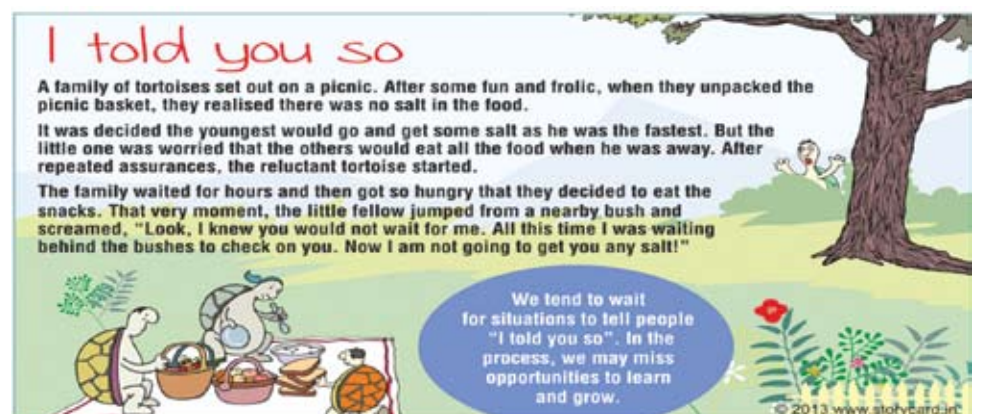
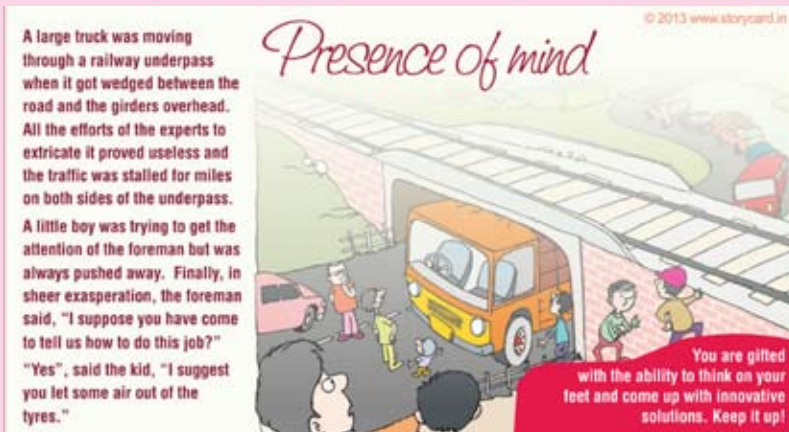
This article is in continuation to the stories published in September 2014 issue and deals with some significant dimensions:

Underestimation Vs listening and respecting competence

When the culture thrives on inclusiveness, all employees are accepted as important for the organizational functioning. Divisions based on hierarchy, tenure, gender, age, region, education and so on will not come in the way of listening to what others have to say and contribute. What is said will be more important than who is saying it. That way, employees discuss solutions much faster and there are lesser human issues intertwined with technical issues. This builds high level of team work and team spirit.

Comparison Vs Conviction

In an inclusive culture employees are not affected by the virus called comparison. They employees feel they are unique and have the space and freedom to be themselves and are respected for who they are. The amount of pseudo behaviour is cut down, masks are off and therefore there is less stress in work culture. Diversity is appreciated and the best of every person is seen as a resource. There is a learning opportunity when people are not afraid of difference of opinion and viewpoints. They are not afraid to be different and learn from others. Along with the inclusive culture if efforts can be put to align employees to organizational vision and values, the sustenance will go a long way.



Person Vs process based culture – Proving Vs Problem solving

When the culture is inclusive, it is process based. They do not get into proving anyone right or wrong. There is deeper level of support and everyone sees what needs to be done to get the job completed. But many a time employees unknowingly contribute to the failure of a person or a project just to prove their judgments. 'I told you so' seem to be the best four words of power. The person becomes more important than the process. There is a higher need to maintain the image of self and the growth of the organization becomes secondary.

Employees need to get out of that and move to Vision larger than self – do what is appropriate and further the vision to have a nurturing inclusive culture.

Social organizations with constraints of resources on all accords cannot afford to be infected with internal battles. The culture has to be carefully watched and moved to be more inclusive. This will be a continual effort with higher level of awareness and reflection. *Stories source: www.storycard.in ©2013.*

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath, PhD.



Supporting Social Entrepreneurs To Start Well & Thrive!



A talk by Nickala Torkington, UnLtd, UK on “Supporting Social Entrepreneurs To Start Well & Thrive!” was organised by CSIM, LIBA, and British Council on 23rd September, 2014 at LIBA Auditorium. Around 240 students from LIBA, CSIM, and IIT participated in this programme.

Dr. R. Maria Saleth, Director, LIBA delivered the welcome address and lauded Ms. Nickala for her efforts in promoting social entrepreneurship.

Ms Mei-kwei Barker, Director, British Council South India gave an overview of the British Council programmes and the Social Entrepreneurship training programmes which is being done in collaboration with CSIM.

Ms Nickala Torkington shared her insights on: what is social entrepreneurship, the approach of UnLtd, UK, the awards offered to social entrepreneurs, and the support offered for social ventures. She shared interesting examples of social enterprises and also answered queries raised by participants on social entrepreneurship.

Ms, Marie Banu, Director, CSIM Chennai, appreciated Ms. Nickala for her inspiring talk and thanked her on behalf of the organisers and the audience for visiting India to spread the concept of social entrepreneurship.



Photos: Arvinda Bharathi

“There is no such thing as failure: we learn by doing and so achieve social change incrementally.”

Nickala Torkington shares with Marie Banu her views on social entrepreneurship.

Nickala Torkington has spent the last 12 years developing infrastructure, organisations and enterprises where Social Entrepreneurs can thrive. A Social Entrepreneur herself, she has designed, resourced and operationally delivered a range of enterprises in North West England, including the first social enterprise health spa and a wellbeing centre, as part of the pioneering Blackburne Housing Group.

Nickala has coached, trained and supported over 500 social entrepreneurs and change makers across a broad range of sectors from idea generation through to resourcing start up, as well as developing established social enterprises to scale up and replicate.

Her current role as Partnership Support Manager at UnLtd, involves engaging with both the Higher Education and Further Education sectors in the UK and internationally, to capacity build institutions, unlock potential and build ecosystems of support and resources for social entrepreneurs. The groundbreaking programme delivering this is called ‘SEE Change’ – Social Entrepreneurship in Education. UnLtd are the leading provider of support to social entrepreneurs in the UK and offers the largest such network in the world.

UnLtd resources over 1,000 people each year, through its core work and partnership programmes. By way of example: UnLtd supports a diverse network of delivery partners alongside their core work, spanning universities, colleges, housing associations, corporates, healthcare specialists and community infrastructure agencies.

In an exclusive interview, Nickala Torkington shares with Marie Banu her views on social entrepreneurship.

You have more than two decades of experience in social entrepreneurship. Who according to you is a social entrepreneur?

The passion of a person who wants to change the world for the better creates a social entrepreneur; also one who has an entrepreneurial solution to a social issue. It could also be somebody who is from the philanthropic spectrum. What binds them together are the values and ethics, the passion, and the ability to act and build a network to effect social change to happen.

There are many social change agents across the globe. Any inspiring social change ideas that you have come across?

There are loads of them! Once, there was a man, David Hines, whose daughter was murdered. It was an inspiring and

harrowing experience which he shared with me.

After the incident, he was shocked by the way he was treated by the police; the way in which his family was trying to manage with their lives as they did not get support that they needed; the way in which his daughter was characterized; and by the memory of his lost child. He started an agency ‘North East Victims Association’ that would support victims of murder and manslaughter. He was very much a campaigner and an activist at heart.

He launched numerous ventures to create and deliver a social mission. He organizes annual conferences and brings together families to vent, relax and feel warm amidst people who have gone through similar tragedy.

There was also a policy change element which he wanted to achieve. As a result of the work he has done, he has now created a new layer of policing called ‘Family Liaison Officer’ which now exists.

That is what social entrepreneurs do! They start with one project, and expand further. The North East Victims Association was the first starting point.

There was a lady called Gill Green, a health professional, who established Storm Training Community Interest Community (CIC). She was once a nurse and developed research into suicide prevention. She delivers various training programs for the public sector, health professionals, police, for people who may misunderstand issues of health, and on suicide prevention.

With a range of services and five to six staff, she has been delivering trainings during the last four years in seven different countries and her annual turnover has grown to around £125,000.00 this year.

What was your trigger to engage in social entrepreneurship?

I did my degree in product and furniture design and manufacture and went to work as a designer. After some years of work I got bored. I wanted to do something different! Wanting to earn a good living is important to me and having a meaningful job to bring social change is much more important.

I was 22 years old then. I started as an administrator at UnLtd. There was a Director for the North of England and myself when it first developed in 2002, now there are over 70 staff. I later got posted as a direct deliverer of services and now have a more strategic role as a Partnership Support Manager building our ecosystem of support for Social Entrepreneurs in the UK and overseas.

I always had an interest in getting things done and not taking a ‘No’ for an answer;

or seeing a need and sorting it out. Whether it was for a group of university students or for people in a community—I fell into it like most social entrepreneurs do.

A proudest moment in your career?

One of my proudest moments was bringing together a group of 12 social entrepreneurs from UK on a learning journey to India. Eight years ago we came to learn from the good practices in India.

Social entrepreneurship, certainly, isn’t a new phenomenon in this country as there are outstanding social entrepreneurs and change makers here. We brought 12 of our fledgling social entrepreneurs to learn from the likes of Pratham, Child Line India, and Barefoot College in Rajasthan.

That first journey with Michael Norton, the Founding Trustee of UnLtd UK, along with the Indira Gandhi Foundation, British Council led to a consultation. Out of it, UnLtd India was born and I had great experiences.

Can you tell us some key points to be a successful social entrepreneur?

- Don’t be put off if you are not having the impact as you expected.
- Achieving a social goal takes many routes and takes many years. So, try and be patient with yourself.
- Build fantastic networks to help you learn how the rest are doing.
- Don’t give up! Think it through and find a way.

- There is no such thing as failure: we learn by doing and so achieve social change incrementally.

What are your views about social enterprises in India and abroad?

From what I have seen in India, it has been mostly on the philanthropic model. I have not seen enough of them though. In UK, people look for inspiration and practice. People take some time to understand the business model.

Examples in Thailand of large scale social enterprises being set up by large institutions seeking to make a profit, ethically. Strong social missions exhibited but less of a focus on the agency of drive of ‘the person’, which UnLtd has a significant focus on. Inevitably these are less entrepreneurial as they become larger scale.

Your experience mentoring social entrepreneurs in the UK?

Social entrepreneurs come from all walks of life. Someone new to this sector could find it confusing and hard to gain a clear understanding of concepts and / or practice.. We provide our own personal experience mixed with a range of coaching and mentoring techniques. Most of all, helping people understand themselves and their own motivations and believe in themselves is always at the heart of what we do.



Photo credit: Arvinda Bharathi