

Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

RNI No.TNENG/2013/52428 | Volume 3 | Issue 10 | October 2015 | 12 Pages | For Free Circulation Only| www.msdstrust.org



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About Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani National Fellowship Awards



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

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From the Editor

Dear Friend,

Social work has a leading role in the community in terms of determining change to occur. On one hand, it creates the premises for solving the social problems and the premises for development on the other hand. In the current context, we are faced with an avalanche of socio-economic changes responsible for the emergence of certain situations involving professional social intervention. Thus, social work services and the related human resource must be able to provide intervention for those people who become vulnerable or who are facing risks.

Social work is unlike working in a shop or an office. If a social worker makes a mistake, people's lives can be at stake. Social workers have to be consistently good at whatever they do. It is a difficult job at any point in time, but even more when dealing with sensitive issues such as child care or women.

Social workers are deeply committed altruists and do not wait for appreciation or recognition. But, we need to make them realise their worth.

Since 2000, Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani Trust has been recognising social workers across India and have been awarding fellowships to young social entrepreneurs. Like us, there are many organisations who have been recognising the yeomen service of social change agents. Bringing them to limelight will encourage them to serve better and will inspire many.

Let us read the stories of the changemakers featured in this issue and be inspired!

Marie Banu

What are you fixed about?

We are designed boundaryless and limitless in what we can achieve. Unfortunately, we are also skillful in building boundaries and limits... ”
 — Assegid Habtewold, *The 9 Cardinal Building Blocks: For Continued Success in Leadership*



Aren't we fixed about becoming someone? Isn't the entire effort of life about arriving at one sure way of living?

Recently I was talking to a friend and she shared about some of her behaviors at work which were not bringing results. She is on a path of slowing down at work and was mentioning how slowing down, not pushing for deadlines has resulted in one of the projects getting delayed. However, she said "I'm not going back to my old ways of being—pushy, dominating, using the management's support to get things done and so on". Surely, she had moved the needle in terms of her behaviors of becoming less oppressive on herself and others. She felt that it brought her peace of mind, but I observed this new way of being was becoming a fixed way. At that moment,

the metaphor that struck me—she was earlier on a bench, hard, painful and fixed and now with her 'transformed ways' she is on a sofa, soft, comfortable, yet fixed.

As I ruminated on what she said, what emerged for me was that even in the path of personal transformation often one can get stuck to the changed state as a way of being and once again get entangled with it.

The lesson I learnt and share here is that of fluidity. So in the path of transformation one must start realizing the limitedness of anything that one creates as a virtue.

It is about being in the now, feeling what is emerging and play our part of bringing alive what is emerging from the limitlessness of the moment.

So as we live our day-to-day, let us keep asking ourselves:

1. Am I fixed?
2. What am I fixed to?
3. How many times I act out from fixed ways (even if it is considered virtuous in the society we live)?
4. What is the moment calling out to me?

Fluidity allows us to tap into grace. Let it come. Get out of your own way. Let fluidity precede fixedness. And fluidity emerges when we are empty. When we stop carrying ourselves as a personality but as a possibility that the moment bestows us.

"Life can be found only in the present moment. The past is gone, the future is not yet here, and if we do not go back to ourselves in the present moment, we cannot be in touch with life."

—Thich Nhat Hanh

Yours Energetically

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

In the Pursuit of Identity

Our mission is to embrace identities and celebrate our differences

The Blink Foundation turns one, this month. For the NGO's founder Arun Fernandez, though, nearly a decade has gone into the making of his organisation that in his own words, aims to "celebrate differences". It all began of course, when Arun began taking a paper for Loyola College's Foundation Courses Department, where he mooted the formation of the Peace Rangers, an organisation whose sole aim was to sell the concept, idea and practice of peace in society at large. The CSIM alumnus left no stone unturned in developing and culturing his new organisation, so much so that it slowly became part of his DNA. "After my short teaching career at Loyola College, I even considered working at a private firm," he admits, "The salary was good, and it was a great opportunity. But despite all that, I knew that my calling lay elsewhere." Arun was right. What he really wanted to do, by his own admission, was make a difference. His passion lay in teaching, leadership, thinking and working with the youth. What Arun really wanted to do was continue his mission of celebrating differences and embracing identities. In many ways, it was this that led to the formation of the Blink Foundation.

Blink was established only a year ago, in October 2014. But in the last year, under Arun's leadership, the organisation has successfully carved a niche for itself in society and academic circles. "Our mission is to embrace identities and celebrate our differences," he reiterates, before going on to elaborate: "When we're born, we're all just a sheet of white paper. We don't have an identity attached to ourselves. But as we grow up, our identity is what makes us who we are. At Blink, we want to celebrate the diversity that exists in these identities, and emphasize on the peaceful coexistence of these many identities." And that was when the idea of the Blink Foundation was born within Loyola's walls. "It was the Institute of Dialogue with Cultures and Religions (IDCR) that helped with us our initial funding," recounts Arun, "The institute helped us with a handy sum of 12,400 Euros that we used to get started." But that wasn't all; support for Blink came from near and far. The Jesuit Provincial in Madurai parted with a few lakh rupees to support the organisation, while Arun's father, a businessman, also helped him with the loan. "The IDCR funding was used to develop our web presence and set up our office," Arun says.

In the last 12 months, Blink has made its presence felt in elementary schooling. The organisation has reached out to 5 schools and 1,200 students through a team of 120 volunteers. "Our volunteers are called



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change agents, and engage with school students on a very personal level," Arun says. "The five schools include a rural school as well. "Our network of schools is divided into three categories: private schools, government schools and rural camps," he explains, "Two of our volunteers are trained to reach out to as many as 210 students, across urban and rural schools." Behind the legwork however, is a dedicated nine-member core team, headed by Arun himself. Out of the five schools that Blink engages with, two private schools have roped in the organisation to provide services on a regular basis. As part of its five-year plan, Blink hopes to engage with 5 more schools on a regular basis.

For an organisation so evidently young, ambitious planning is the hallmark of its work. Arun says that Blink will continue to impart its message of cultural identity, peace and peaceful coexistence for the years to come. "Our aim is to promote the concept that differences exist, and teach children that it's okay to be different from each other," he explains, "A simple example is how fish is considered non-vegetarian in some places, while some countries and even North Eastern Indian States, it's looked at as not necessarily non-vegetarian." He continues, "Who's to say what's right or what's wrong? The key is to accept and acknowledge both points of view. That's exactly what we at Blink aim to achieve." Peace, peaceful living and religious coexistence are some of the areas that Blink will continue to focus on, in



pursuit of these goals. The organisation plans on bringing nearly 7,000 school children under its fold by the end of next year. "That's a very practical goal," Arun explains, "If we manage to extend our services to a school like Velammal, for instance, that immediately means nearly

35,000 students in one go. So, 7,000 students isn't much of a challenge." Through its team of 120 change agents, Blink will now set its sights on the future in the hope that it can well and truly bring about change in the minds and lives of several thousand students.

Death equals all and deserves dignity: Fr. Thomas

It is not death itself, but the passage of time being terminally ill and waiting for death—that could be days, weeks or even months long—that is so cruel to these patients!

Life is precious and beautiful things happen when one distances oneself from negative things” is a quote you might have heard. However, not many of us are lucky enough to live life accordingly. There are many people whose near and dear stopped caring and left them to their fate as they approach life’s ultimate departure. These victims do not have a choice. The ordeal of going through both life and death is tough for destitute. However, many of us as fellow humans fail to recognize the pains that they undergo in this process. For some of them, death comes soon; for others, it takes weeks, months and why, even years at times!

Fr. Thomas is a man who shares abundant love and compassion for dying destitute in Tamil Nadu by running a couple of hospice centers. We will discuss here the trigger, challenges and opportunities faced by Fr. Thomas in extending this service.

Early days:

Born to a Catholic family of nine children, Fr. Thomas Rathappillil lived in Kochi with his family until he was 12 years old. He then moved to Trichy and joined Montfort Brothers of St. Gabriel, a religious society of men established in the year 1716 in France. This society draws inspiration and drive from the vision and audacity of St. Louis Marie de Montfort and Gabriel Dehseyes. It has been working on the task of transforming society through education and empowerment of men, women, youth and children for over two centuries. It renders services in almost 34 countries of the world, including health care; primary, secondary and collegiate education; and education of differently abled persons. The Brothers go beyond religion, language, caste and other man-made boundaries and serve all people of God, enabling them to live as good human persons. Fr. Thomas had his education in Loyola College, Chennai, where he completed his Master in English Literature



Photo courtesy: The Hindu

degree. He then taught for 23 years in different institutions run by the Montfort Brothers. He went to France for higher studies and stayed there for two years, during which time he also learnt French.

Fr. Thomas served in Zaire, a French colony that reverted to its original name, Congo, in 1997. Fr. Thomas learnt Lingala, a language widely spoken in Congo. He was serving the people with dedication; however, challenges came up after the outbreak of communal violence and there was a real threat to his life.

Fr. Thomas moved to Rome and served there for some time. During his time in Europe, he observed how poor homeless people benefitted from “soup kitchens”. A soup kitchen offers food free or at below market prices for those who are hungry and cannot afford much or even anything at all. Many of the European countries had social welfare schemes that offered financial support to soup kitchens, enabling the poor to eat in them. The concept became popular and many voluntary societies and religious organizations helped in establishing more of these kitchens. These organizations had a strong impact on Fr. Thomas. He felt that the poor were receiving assistance that helped them maintain their dignity.

Fr. Thomas moved on to serve as a parish priest at Headingley, Leeds, United Kingdom. He was there for six years.

Trigger:

During his service in a church in Leeds, Fr. Thomas suffered a severe heart attack. He underwent a quadruple bypass surgery. The severe cold of England’s weather did not help him in matters of health! Doctors advised him that he might live for another decade, but it would be a good idea to return to India where the climate could be more favorable to him. Fr. Thomas took permission from his Bishop and decided to move to Dindugal, near Madurai, to serve in the region.

He joined hands with the famous Aravind Eye Hospitals to work on the “Prevention of Blindness among Rural Poor” project. Fr. Thomas employed about 25 people. He traveled to the most remote of villages and arranged for medical attention for people with eye ailments. At one stage, he was instrumental in arranging 400 eye operations in a month. Fr. Thomas credits this achievement to the success of Aravind Eye Hospital in adopting appropriate technology and enabling outreach service in which he and his team could participate. This project became popular, and once government support started pouring in, he decided to focus on other activities.

It was about a decade ago that an incident touched him deeply and set him into introspection. Fr. Thomas and his friend Myrtle Watkins, an English woman

who was more like his mother and mentor, were coming out of a restaurant after a meal. To quote Fr. Thomas, “We were shocked to find a man, an apology of a human being, with an arm and leg missing. He was battered, with worms coming out of his body. He was scavenging for scrap from a huge broken plastic bin, battling with stray cows, street dogs and filthy pigs. The sight was terribly disturbing.”

He recalled his experience watching people who lived in tents and under bridges in developed nations with cold climates. These people could battle life out with the financial support of their government support and because they had “soup kitchens” to go to. All of these people had an identity and a social security cover to protect them. Unfortunately, it will take time in India for such social security cover to be available to all, including destitute. Until such a time arises, these deprived souls will continue to suffer unaided!

Watkins, who had known Fr. Thomas since he was 27 years old, decided to support his idea of starting a hospice. She wrote out a check for forty thousand pounds. It took five years from that point in time to launch the hospice.

Opportunities and Challenges:

The hospice is located in the Sirumalai Hills in Dindigul District. It is an amazing environment with a refreshing breeze and strong natural light. The area is full of natural vegetation, which is ideally suited for relaxing and soothing sick patients.

Fr. Thomas says, “The first patient I found was lying outside the Government Hospital, Madurai. His brain was affected by septicemia, sores covered his body and gangrene had eaten off his forearm. He lived for only two days, but we cleaned him, fed him well and showered him with all love and respect.”

Most of the times, his patients are far from normal human conditions. Often, they are people who were ignored or disowned by their families because of poverty. Hospitals they were admitted to were not in a position to carry their treatment forward, as they did not respond. Though the hospitals did their best to maintain support, physical frailties were a limiting factor.

It is not death itself, but the passage of time being terminally ill and waiting for death—that could be days, weeks or even months long—that is so cruel to these patients!

Fr. Thomas continuously gets calls and alerts from hospitals and other well-wishers about destitute folk who need attention. He picks them up in an ambulance and brings them to his hospice.

He generally takes patients who are not affected by infectious diseases, as he has inmates who are already sick and susceptible. In case he comes across such patients, he refers them to other centers that are equipped to handle them.

Challenges include finding and training appropriate staff to run the center. It may be noted that Fr. Thomas has identified and appointed dedicated staff who support him in all his endeavors. To quote him, “Earlier, we used to go around looking for diseased and abandoned people on the streets and bring them in. Now, shopkeepers, autowallahs, bus-drivers and passers-by inform us and we rush to the spot. Once they are brought to the hospice, their wounds are bandaged, they are given the appropriate medication and they are washed thoroughly, shaved, dressed afresh and fed a wholesome meal. Their ragged clothes are burnt. Every individual’s specific needs are taken care of. Some cannot see, others cannot walk, and a few are too feeble to rise from their beds. We nurse the sick with all love and devotion. We use wheelchairs and Zimmer frames to take the infirm out to the lawns. Our aim is to restore their self-respect in their final days.”

He does not have a long roster of staff. He has trained nursing staff who multi-task. He introduced this author to one of his staff, who functions like professional managers in carrying out her responsibilities for managing the hospice accounts, running the administration and providing other guidance needed for smooth functioning. Over and above, she also takes care of the children there. Though the hospice is not chartered to administer to children, there are a few inmates with families, and their children need to be taken care of. Another staff member he introduced is a trained nurse. She also works as a caretaker and further, is capable of driving the ambulance in emergencies. She has the required license to do so. Such is the dedication of the staff Fr. Thomas employs.

Fr. Thomas is proud to point out that he works along with all of them as just another staff member. There is no

hierarchy of power. In fact, he is also responsible for delivering tasks and accounts to the administration incharge. The system is so well maintained that whenever he travels on a mission, his staff members take up his responsibilities without a glitch.

There is much opportunity for improvement, but Fr. Thomas needs generous support from volunteers to set about it. There are about 325 inmates at the Dindigul hospice and more than 120 inmates in Uthramerrur, Chengalpet District. All of them are served meals three times a day, besides a mid-day snack. Since Fr. Thomas uses traditional cooking methods, he could use help in setting up a modern, improvised kitchen. Though he is aware of this need, limitations in his current staffing situation hinder adoption of new technologies.

He himself is highly oriented towards adoption of modern technology. He has erected a concrete burial system where dead bodies are inserted in a vault. The vault system has multiple slots, and bodies are inserted in sequence. Each filled slot is closed and cemented airtight. This system is completely environment-friendly. There is no impact on the earth or on water in the environment. After some years, when the bodies have decayed, the bones are extracted and burnt. He has seen this system gaining popularity elsewhere in India and around the world. It is important to understand this, as he handles at least six deaths a week in Dindigul and about four deaths a week in Chengalpet.

It is mindboggling to see how he and his staff handle the emotional needs of the inmates under all circumstances. Most of them are pathetic and weak, and some are mentally unstable. They are showered with love. The challenge to the staff is humongous, to say the least. About 35% of the inmates have no control over their urinary and bowel movements. They keep the staff busy cleaning up the place; over and above these physical issues, the staff must attend to the inmates’ emotional demands as well.

The other challenge we observed lies in satisfying financial needs. It requires a lot

of money to run centers of this size. Until about two years ago, Fr. Thomas used to get donations from Europe. With the economic slowdown, the hospices’ funds position is strained. He mentioned the fact that now a number of Indians are contributing to his operations, which are agnostic in terms of religion. Funding is a key challenge in keeping the hospices running.

One other aspect worth noting is that some of the inmates recover and live longer than initially expected. They do not have any relatives or friends to fall back on, and thus, cannot rejoin the mainstream. They do not have official or social identification. They stay on at the center,

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rendering support activities. There are some moving instances, like the case of Santhanam, a meat shop owner, who ran into his wife Radha again after they were separated by ill luck. Both had developed physical and mental challenges and had problems in identifying each other, though Santhanam, in spite of being blind, identified his wife!

This author experienced great courtesy at the hospice. After we were done with the tour, an attendant insisted that we must dine there. What was touching was her humility when she expressed the pleasure she would derive if we ate there!

Fr. Thomas bought the land for building the Dindigul hospice. The land on which

the Chengalpat hospice is situated was a donation from a good-hearted person. He intends to build one more hospice near Tambaram, as there are many more patients in Chennai.

Learning: Asked about the challenges faced in ensuring professionalization at the hospices, Fr. Thomas is humble. He says he thinks and acts for the moment. For him, service is of paramount importance! He mentions that he leaves the future in the hands of God. He has another two Jesuit priests as his trustees, both past 80 years of age. The cardiac intervention Fr. Thomas went through was not going to stop him from his good work. When this author asked about the future plans for a resident two-year-old boy, Jobin, Fr. Thomas stated that Jobin is a part of their family, and has been adopted by one of his staff members. He wonders if it is God’s design could be that one day in the future, Jobin may take over the management of these hospices. The positive aggression and optimism he shows are what drive the spirit of these places.

Conclusion:

Fr. Thomas mentioned that when we look at death, life becomes meaningless. He has subdued death by ensuring that destitute who are kissing death are able to do so with peace and dignity. He is philosophical when he says that death equates all souls, whether rich or poor, men, women or child, healthy or diseased! It is important to facilitate people to take their final rest in peace. According to him, we cannot know the destiny of a soul after it departs. What we can do is ensure that it departs in peace. Noble is the thinking of Fr. Thomas, noble is the service rendered by him and his staff, and noble is his commitment and kindness towards neglected people! This world would a far better place for the aged, the infirm and the neglected to live in if only there were more benefactors like Fr. Thomas around us!

— 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. For more information, please contact Ms. **Latha Suresh**, Director @ 92822 05123 or visit www.san-india.org.

Celebrating Social Entrepreneurs

Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani instituted an award in the name of one of the great sages of our time, Sadguru Gnanananda Giri Swamigal of Thappovanam near Thiruvannamalai, to salute individuals for their indefatigable will, for daring to dream and for caring for others.

Celebration is a kind of food we all need in our lives, and each individual brings a special recipe or offering, so that together we will make a great feast. Celebration is a human need that we must not, and cannot, deny. It is richer and fuller when many work and then celebrate together. The Sadguru Gnanananda Awards celebrates social change and transformation. It celebrates development and prosperity. It celebrates the Social Entrepreneurs who made it happen.

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When social service is rendered in the spirit of love and joy and dedicated to the Divine, we find the signature of God in such acts. In fact, it is the grace and compassion of spiritual masters which inspire people to take up such social causes. The sage of Tapovanam says in his inimitable style, "when we bring light, darkness will dissolve on its own."

Sadguru Gnanananda awards are not just a recognition but a celebration of the great efforts of the change makers who are the bearers of the light that dispels darkness, they usher in hope and courage where there is despair. They are, indeed, entrepreneurs of spirit.

From the year 2000–2012, the Sadguru Gnanananda Awards were given to women social change agents who have been silently working in many remote areas of India. The mission of MSDS is to promote social consciousness and social citizenry, hence these award functions are audience centric. They are held in a grand manner on Saturdays only, so as to attract a diverse set of audience.

The award functions have been held 10 times in Chennai, 5 times in Hyderabad, 4 times in Bangalore and twice in Mumbai.

The award comprises of, A citation elaborating the services and commending the work of the Awardees

- A purse of Rs.75, 000 (Rs. 50,000 till 2008)

- A Silver plaque
 - A Shawl
- The 115 awardees include
- 95 women
 - 9 husband & wife team
 - 2 Socially responsible Corporate

The awardees hail from 20 states of India and do commendable work.

From 2011, the Sadguru Gnanananda Fellowship programme was introduced and young budding social entrepreneurs are offered a monthly stipend of Rs.10,000 for three years. This helps them to launch their new initiatives with great vigour and zeal and help them replicate their social change ideas also.

Sadguru Gnanananda Fellows – 2011

1. **Ms. Rubina Mazhar, SAFA, Hyderabad** works for the empowerment of the disadvantaged women by enterprise creation and education of the girl children in the slums of Hyderabad.

Sadguru Gnanananda Fellows – 2012

1. **Ms Akhila Ramesh, Nivasa, Bangalore**, an architect who has designed a cheap and affordable prototype for rural housing in rural Karnataka and has implemented them in a few villages.
2. **Ms Khusboo Kantharia, Disha, Mumbai**, offers counselling services for the youth who are mainstreamed from orphanages and other shelter homes
3. **Mr. Kamalakannan, Vizhuthugal, Punjampuliyampatti** district near Coimbatore, provides learning centres for children in 14 villages which focus on value education, sports, creative arts and General Knowledge.

Sadguru Gnanananda Fellows – 2013

1. **K. Rajamanickam, Action for Rural Upliftment and Leadership (ARUL) Foundation,**

Soorankottai, Ramanathapuram, works for the welfare of the manual scavengers and their children by inspiring them to live a life of dignity.

2. **Sornalatha, Adivasi Social Service Educational Trust, Sembakkam, Kancheepuram**, hailing from the Irula tribes (snake catchers) in Tamilnadu, works on education of the tribal children and encourages women to start alternate livelihoods.
3. **S.Chezian, Mercy Charitable Trust, Kadaladi village, Tiruvannamalai** district, offers vocational training to the women and disabled of the district and enables them to start small businesses.

Sadguru Gnanananda Fellows – 2014

1. **Mr. Akshai Abraham, Project KHEL, Lucknow** uses sports as a platform to impart Life Skills Education to children from disadvantaged backgrounds in Lucknow and the nearby villages.
2. **Mr. Dilip Patro, Founder, The Ability People, Visakhapatnam**, is an accident victim, working for the rehabilitation and empowerment of Spinal Cord injured persons and the disabled community.
3. **Ms. Shoba Gosa, Founder, Young People for Life India, Hyderabad**, offers counselling services and skill building for the underprivileged youth and school children in and around Hyderabad.

Come join us in our celebrations this year. Let us applaud the work done by Arun Fernandez, Sandeep Mehto and Ashish Arora and spread the message of the great work done by them

The event will be held at Narada Gana Sabha, Alwarpet, Chennai on 10th October 2015 at 11 am.

—Latha Suresh



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Mainstreaming traditional knowledge

By now, most of us agree that the education system in India needs a major revamp. While the system and its eminences work on it, there are others who are experimenting on new approaches towards teaching and are attempting to scale their reach based on the success of initial phase. Among these players, there are sub groups. While some advocate for changes in the syllabus, there are others who promote new approaches to teach the present syllabus. *Samacheer Kalvi* in Tamil Nadu and *Nalikai, Kalikayatna* in Karnataka are a few examples.

Given the magnitude of the system's responsibility in this context, as Mr Ashish, Co Founder of Sahaj Foundation in Bir, Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh argues, the attention on traditional knowledge has been lost. While there are other controversies around gender perspectives and historical contexts described in text books, Ashish opines that it is important to preserve our traditional knowledge and the best way to do that is to build them in during schooling itself.

Hailing from Solan District of Himachal Pradesh, Ashish moved to Chandigarh to continue his studies post class 10. He then pursued Electrical Engineering from IIT Roorkee, which landed him a corporate job with a Consultancy Firm on Climate Change in Ahmedabad. While working, Ashish also volunteered with an NGO that was working in the field of inclusive education, in a village 20 kilometers from Ahmedabad. "The present generation is very lucky in that it has good access to opportunities that can expose them to the challenges that India is facing and build sustainable solutions that do not compromise ESC (Economic, Social and Cultural) rights of the people. Tata Jagruti Yatra was one," explains Ashish, who participated in the 2010 Yatra along with his wife, Ms Divya.

Ashish and Divya were intrigued about people not following their heart, in spite of knowing that it is right and why they resorted to behave like the crowd. They were uncomfortable with this homogeneity imposed by globalisation and feared that this could distance indigenous populations from their traditional knowledge. They decided not to do so. "We decided to work with people in a peaceful environment and settle down in a Himalayan village," says Ashish who also gained work experience in rural development from IIT in Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh. Soon after marriage, they established Sahaj Foundation in November 2013 to work in Bir in the field of education.

Sahaj Foundation's central objective is to connect children with their roots. Lamenting that the modern system of education takes them away from their tradition, encouraging them to migrate to the cities, the couple resolved to establish simple mechanisms and structures to



facilitate children learn about their own traditions from the community members. "We wanted to promote inquisitiveness. We wanted to see the process inculcate an inquiry building attitude and the value of cooperation in executing multi stake holder decisions," explains Ashish.

Before establishing the activities with children, the couple realized that there were more teachers in private schools than in government schools. So, instead of going through the schools, they decided to start a community centre where children can come in after school hours. With the help of the local Gram Panchayat they established the centre, in the place given by a Ward member who also helped in bringing children together for this programme. Initially, they used the regular teaching methods to assess the learning levels among the children, who were a mixed group from different classes. Soon after, they introduced activities like storytelling, writing, math puzzles, games, word puzzles, etc. that the children were

free to choose from.

Through the activities were chosen by the children, specific themes were taught and children were engaged in evolving the whole discussion around the theme during those activities. "Provoking their curiosity always worked for us," he adds.

As the group came to a good shape, Ashish and Divya introduced a simple questionnaire and taught the children how to conduct surveys. These surveys were intended to help children learn traditional knowledge from their communities on various topics – flora, fauna, food, ayurveda, traditional remedies/medicines, etc. Ashish and Divya were convinced that surveys were the best way to introduce children to the rich traditional knowledge, as the whole process was driven by curiosity and inquiry building attitude.

Of late, they have introduced the Prashn Vikas Ka (Meaning – Question of Development) programme in a local school (not a government school) under which children are introduced to concepts

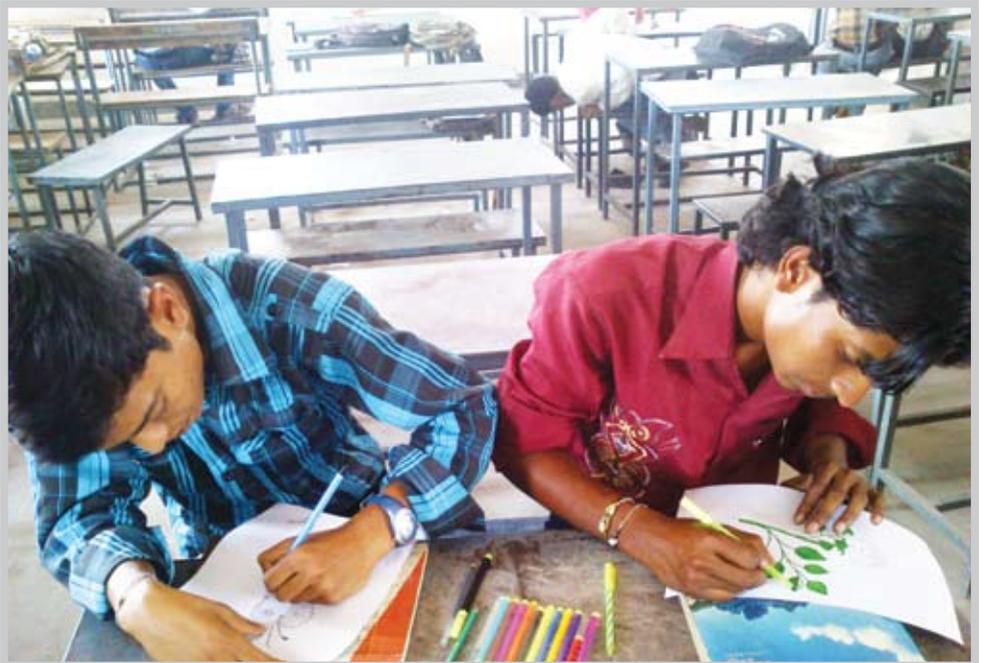
like agriculture, housing, health care, etc and the continuum of methods used in each, as they had evolved from the beginning to modern times. In housing for example, children are facilitated to learn the evolution from mud houses to concrete buildings and the reason behind these developments. As they proceed, the whole discussion comes around the relevance of these in the present context. So, they not only know what happened, but also know why the changes came up and how their communities took to them. In the case of building roads, which we all think is a sign of development in the villages, there have been undesired consequences in many cases. "So, inquiry building will lead them to understand the whole picture," he says.

Taking children through all that is not seen in their text books, Ashish feels that the process has actually caused changes in their lives too. "When we serve, we get to know more of ourselves," says Ashish,

who wants to create a cadre of young minds who can challenge the tide of mainstreaming, whose force is very strong and imposing. For, they know that these minds will be able to critically reflect on the community decisions. "Sustenance and survival of the fittest seems to govern most of the decision making at household and community level. Although many youngsters want to do something else, which they know is the right thing to do, they do not go for it. Gandhiji said that in order to be happy there must be harmony between what we think, what we feel and what we do, otherwise there is no integration of multilevel decisions. This is why we believe in inculcating values, inquiry building and life skills – all of which can make our children happy about what they want to/are doing. This, only this happiness at heart can drive them to think for their communities," asserts Ashish.

—Shanmuga Priya. T

Back to communities for a new beginning



Do studies define the intelligence of an individual? Is social work really perceived to be an option for those who cannot excel in professional fields? Why isn't the inner drive to work for the 'people of my community' not valued as much as any job with an assured monthly income? With the number of students accessing higher education growing each year, why hasn't a strong voice been raised against the inequity in the system? These are the questions many have had to ponder with.

Mr Sandeep Mehto, Co Founder of Bharat Calling, a Youth Initiative under Shri Ramesh Prakash Samajik Sansthan, in Pathrota village, Itarsi district in Madhya Pradesh also went through this phase. Soon, he was able to figure out how to contribute in addressing this lacuna in the system, helping students, at least, who were from his village.

Having hailed from this very place and being the youngest among three brothers, Sandeep was able to clearly observe his upbringing. "We were a big family. My parents had eight siblings each. While all their families migrated to urban areas after education and sought employment in the organized sector, my father was particular that we stayed back in the village itself. As we lived here, our relatives had very low social expectations from us," recounts Sandeep. Very much observant of the 'relay race' attitude in middle class families to educate their children one after another so each could settle down with a good job near the city, Sandeep was inspired by his father's words – "Education must not be commodified."

Sandeep had the privilege of studying in an elite boarding school after class V. "The way my father spent on our education was always criticised. As if

all the negative vibes began to concentrate, the financial situation in our family worsened and my father had to take loans to meet my school expenses. People who kept commenting on our way of life continued to do so when I scored less in my high school.

We are in a country where one has to pursue medicine or engineering to prove his/her intelligence. I also wanted to prove myself," shares Sandeep who then took up Bachelors in Electrical Engineering. Even before the course concluded, Sandeep was clear that Engineering was not his calling.

Sandeep always imagined his parents chatting over a cup of tea peacefully and wanted to see this happening, for they have struggled all along in helping their children access good opportunities. However, his father's demise during his final year came in as a big shock to him. "In spite of being a college topper, I did not want to become an engineer. Everything that my father had used seemed to be all around, along with the good wishes from all those he had helped. This thought, which once frustrated me so much, suddenly took me into introspection. I decided to follow my father's footsteps. I wanted to train myself professionally to work with the communities," says a reminiscent Sandeep who joined the Masters programme in Social Entrepreneurship with the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai.

The first day at TISS answered a lot of questions in Sandeep's mind and the course he had taken answered many more. Besides exposing him to the stark reality of inequity in access to educational opportunities, the course encouraged him to do something for



those who could not pursue higher education. "Higher education can bring generations out of poverty," and so in 2009, Sandeep and his friend John decided to visit tribal schools near his village. Although discouraged by the teachers in those schools, they managed to organize an interaction with the children.

Sandeep is surprised even now of what he learnt there. He says: "Children were so sharp, they had scored well in their examinations. They were creative too. But, they did not know how to go ahead in planning their career. They did not even know how to apply for colleges that taught subjects of their interest." Deeply disturbed, John and

Sandeep promised the children that they would come back to help them find good colleges. While in TISS, Mumbai, they filled the college application forms for these children.

In the very following year, they organized a camp for two months to facilitate this process in midst of students and 30 of them secured admissions in reputed national educational institutions. Sandeep is reminded of a boy who failed class 12 twice, but is now a sports teacher in an international school after completing Bachelor of Physical Education. "Nobody thought we would come back. We know this is a small step, but it is a necessary step to break the stereotypes. Why should incomes decide children's choice of courses?" he quips.

Named after Sandeep's parents, the society took this initiative to 142 schools in Hoshangabad district. Starting with one school they have now reached out to every high/higher secondary school in Hoshangabad district. The two friends, from the beginning, were very determined not to run this as a parallel system. They engaged volunteers through internships and summer fellowships and trained them to conduct the exposure programmes in the villages. "We just want to show the way. Inspired by these efforts, many of the volunteers have started their own initiatives back in their communities," says a contented Sandeep.

On the other hand, Sandeep's family has different thoughts. "My family struggles to explain what I am doing. So, I am taking them to Chennai for the MSDS National Awards Event. May be then, they will realise why I came back to my village," he smiles.

—Shanmuga Priya. T

Quality – A Way of Life (Part 2)

In the last month's article we spoke about the importance and need for Quality as a way of life, as a part of the culture. In this part we move to take a look at the means and methods which can be explored in embracing Quality. It is popularly seen that we look for certification of quality in the products that we buy – example ISI mark on salt packs, helmets; BS 4/5 and Euro standard marks for cars; radiation and other quality standards assurance on mobiles and so on.

The Social organizations being service sector are no farther away in instituting quality processes and ensuring quality in their deliverables. There are registered bodies that certify and accredit products and services with global benchmarkable standards. The certification process and the bodies to certify exist to -

- Ensure consistency
- Standardize processes
- Standardize functionalities
- Enable cross cultural integration
- Make the global connect
- Ensure best and benchmarked practice
- Ensure being niche in the industry
- Develop a reference framework
- Abide by controls and taste success
- To be world class and recognised in the field
- To enhance and expand business and reach out
- To ensure Quality and Satisfaction

Some of the popular and accepted bodies are

- ISO- International Organization for Standardization - Generally and most commonly used Standard for both Quality Management and Environmental Management
- COPC- Customer Operations Performance Center - One of the toughest and best standard for Services oriented organizations. Most of the BPO, KPO, back office, Hospitality, and other service organizations look to attain this standard.
- SAS -Statement on Auditing Standards (No. 70: Service Organizations) – One of the most commonly used standard in the America, Europe, and in the last 2 decades; many Eastern companies are looking to get this standard. This standard is to ensure that any financial transactions are of utmost level of services, safety, secure, reliable and globally accepted practices.
- SOX -Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 a.k.a Public Company Accounting Reform and Investor Protection Act of 2002 - One of the toughest acts passed to ensure auditing standards and financial safety.
- CMMi – Software Engineering Institute – Capability Maturity Model - Most of the Information Technology companies would look forward for this



certification which is identified for CMMi Level 1 to 5. This standard enables all stakeholders to have a higher level of assurance with respect to the deliverables.

- PCMM – People Capability Maturity Model- Mostly used in IT firms to enable a high standard for managing and working on human capital/ people related standard.
- Malcolm Baldrige - Famously known for the Deming Award, this is one of the most sought after standard and certification for Manufacturing setups.
- BS-British Standards - Like ISO, BS standard is also used for both services & product oriented organizations. There are many standards in BS, e.g. BS7799 for Information security and so on..

There are many more bodies which work on quality assurance and quality certification specific to different fields. The challenge for social organizations lie in selecting carefully the certification required as well as the right framework and methodology. There are some commonly used framework and methodology that are available. Some of the most popular and well established efficient methodologies are -

- TQM - Total Quality Management is a management approach describing the culture, attitude and functioning of a company and that strives to provide customers with products and services that satisfy their needs.
- QMS - Quality Management System is a collection of business processes focused on achieving quality policy and quality objectives to meet customer requirements.
- Lean Methodology - Lean manufacturing or lean production or Lean Organization, within a system. Lean also takes into account waste created through overburden (“Muri”) and waste created through unevenness in work loads (“Mura”).
- JIT - Just in Time- JIT is an inventory strategy organisations employ to increase efficiency and decrease waste



- by receiving goods only as they are needed in the production process, thereby reducing inventory costs. This method requires that producers are able to accurately forecast demand.
- Lean Six Sigma- PDCA, DFSS, DMAIC, DMADV, BPMS, etc- Six Sigma is a disciplined, data-driven approach and methodology for eliminating defects (driving toward six standard deviations between the mean and the nearest specification limit) in any process – from manufacturing to transactional and from product to service.
- SPC - Statistical process control- (SPC) is a method of quality control, which uses statistical methods. SPC is applied to monitor and control a process to ensure that it operates at its full potential. Hospitals and medical industry has the highest usage of SPC. Eg:ECG-electro cardiogram which is an important diagnostic
- FMEA - Failure Mode Effect Analysis- one of the first systematic techniques for failure analysis.
- QFD - Quality Function Deployment- (QFD) is a structured approach to defining customer needs or requirements and translating them into specific plans to produce products to meet those needs. The “voice of the customer” is the term to describe these stated and unstated customer needs or requirements.
- TOC - Theory of Constraints- (TOC) is a management paradigm that views any manageable system as being limited in achieving more of its goals by a very small number of constraints.

To elaborate on Lean SixSigma a bit more, in the recent times, organizations use Lean SixSigma to build the culture of problem solving using a structured project management and data driven approach. This approach has shown significant impact and improvement in the way people do what they do. This methodology involves structure, terminology, common language understanding, data, statistics, training, project management, change

management and holistic solution creation and sustenance which makes this popular and most commonly used.

To explain the meaning of Six Sigma level, Sigma is the unit of Standard Deviation (Deviation from the mean or target). When we measure this deviation, we find that there many defects that causes this deviation and more the variation, more the defects. This is statistically measured and the units are defined as given in the table. At the level of 6th Sigma, for every 1 million opportunities, there can be 3.4 defects possible or in % terms it will be 99.9997% accurate in meeting the required standard.

As this entails a very stringent and methodical approach, the results are very evident and exponential. The SixSigma approach involves training people to build the required competence and understanding about the Lean SixSigma methodology. Typically the training starts at Yellow Belt - or Basic Orientation level, then Green Belt- Detailed 5-6 days of training giving higher exposure of the methodology to identify and solve smaller or less complex problems. Then is the Black Belt level to lead and manage larger problems with high complexity and many variables to address. The highest level is Master Black Belt primarily focused in training Black Belts and Green Belts in selecting the right projects, guiding and mentoring projects and enabling the management to take right decisions. Lean SixSigma is a methodology and not a standard that organizations can claim that they are LSS certified. They can say, that some of their process are functioning at the level of Six Sigma. The idea if LSS is Can I do with less; Can I have less problems and Still have people happy with what is done.

Any method and approach chosen for a social organization should be based on the need, complexity, competency and kind of service/ product mix of the organization.

Some of the key questions to explore would be -

- What is Quality as per my organization and team?
- What is the expectation and requirement from my customer / stakeholder / investor / donor?
- What is my level of Quality that I am currently performing - Do I know about it, if yes, how am I measuring and reporting it?
- How is my team's competency to measure, manage and improve quality on their own?
- What are the standards / certifications that are relevant and applicable to me and my enterprise?
- What are the spaces I look for Quality and How do I improve the standards?

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath and Prathaap B

CSIM Convocation

CSIM Chennai organised its 14th Annual Convocation on 30th September 2015 at MOP Vaishnav College for Women, Chennai. 15 Prospective Social Entrepreneurs who have completed their Post Graduate Diploma in Social Initiative and Management (PGDSIM) and 42 participants who have completed the Social Entrepreneurship Outlook programme (SEOP) received their diplomas and certificates. The PGDSIM course is jointly certified by CSIM and M.O.P Vaishnav College for women, Chennai since 2008.

Mr. Manoj Kumar Sonthalia, Chairman and Managing Director, Express Publications (Madurai), was the Chief Guest. He delivered the Convocation

address and conferred the Post Graduate Diplomas upon the Social Entrepreneurs.

Mr. M. Mahadevan, Chairman, Oriental Cuisines Pvt. Limited, Chennai was the Guest of Honor for the event. He awarded the Certificates to the participants of the Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Programme.

Dr. Lalitha Balakrishnan, Principal, MOP Vaishnav College for Women, Chennai delivered the welcome address and released the CSIM newsletter.

Mr. PN Subramanian, Managing Trustee of MSDS (parent body of CSIM) presented CSIM Chennai report for the year 2014-2015.

Around 200 Students from MOP Vaishnav College for women and CSIM participated in the event.



Sadguru Gnanananda

A few conversations with his disciples

About five decades ago, Sadguru Gnanananda Giri Maharaj, a Himalayan sage chose a quiet spot on the northern bank of the river, South Pennar near Thirkoilur in Tamil Nadu in South India to be his Abode in 1951. Not much is known about the earlier life of the sage Gnanananda. He travelled all over India and had met many spiritual luminaries of the last two centuries. His teachings were pure Vedantha, the timeless message of the Upanishads. We share with you a few conversations he had with his disciples on a few topics.

About Gnana or wisdom

It is not possible to separate the shell, flesh and the seed of an unripe tamarind. But when it is ripe, the flesh can be easily separated from the shell and the seed from the flesh. This phenomenon underscores an essential truth in that to those who are afflicted by *agnana*, the body and the *atma* appear to be one; but when they gain true knowledge or *gnana* they would realize that they are not the body but the Self within and thereby live in eternal bliss.

Take a coconut. This is covered by dense coir strands and a hard shell. If you remove the coir strands and break the shell you witness a white limitless space. The enjoyment you feel in the limitless is akin to breaking a coconut. If you remove the dense coir which may be likened to *Maya* and intuit the Reality enclosed by the shell (the body), you will witness the *Atma Swarupa* (the Reality) and rejoice in it. Camphor when lighted casts a radiance all around but is itself consumed completely leaving no trace of it behind. Even so, is the nature of the mind which witnesses the effulgence spreading before it. To actualise the effulgence is *gnana*.

Worship

The rose is beautiful, fragrant and very soft to the touch. Everyone is fond of a rose because of the qualities it possesses. But the rose itself is surrounded by thorns. Even as one plucks the rose by carefully removing the thorns, one must learn to meet the trials and tribulations of the earthly existence with patience, and worship God with unflinching faith and conviction. One who wants to see God must be patient, loving, tender of heart, practise charity, think lofty thoughts, and cease making disparaging remarks about others.

It is only the sweetness of the sugar lump that matters and not its shape. Even so, the form in which we worship God is of no consequence but only the eternal principle of sweetness of the Lord permeating the form, which we ought to recognise. A log of



wood conjures up different things to different people. To a housewife it is firewood, to a carpenter it is an article of furniture, to a sculptor a beautiful image. It is the principle of the wood that permeates the mind's eye in all these cases.

Attaining Peace within

The feeling of contentment is a very valuable possession. In keeping with a Tamil saying which conveys the idea one should feel over-joyed, by considering even the little one has, as an endowment of immense fortune, one must free oneself of all desires. It will be useful to recall continually to the mind the Tirumantiram verse which says that even if one is with God (who is the bestower of all riches), one should be without desire.

By practicing right food habits, by undertaking fasts and *vratas*, one will be able to control desire even if it is, only for a time. These practices will not only endure to one's good physically, but also to the good of the heart; thus gradually leading one to conquer desire. In the state of desirelessness one will experience that one has transcended the feeling of *Jiva-bheda*, *Jada-bheda* and *Iswara-bheda*. One will then reach a stage of realization of oneness

with all sentient beings, and be able to see God within oneself and in all God's creations. The *sadhaka's* inner vision will then open and he will reside in *Shanti*. Those who come in contact with such a *sadhaka* will also be benefitted by the peace emanating from his presence. It is the quality of *Shantam* that attracts like a magnet, the Divine.

Controlling your mind

Suppose I ask you to go round the temple holding a cup brimming with oil and hand the same over to me on return, and I adjure you that you will be victorious if you do not spill the oil, you will find that your thoughts are all directed to seeing that the oil does not spill. Think that the cup is your mind and the oil it holds are the thoughts. Just as you ensure that the oil does not spill, you must see to it that your thoughts do not wander. After ensuring this you must engage yourself in *dhyana*. If you do this you will succeed. You must not abandon your *dhyana* in the middle even to attend to an important work.

A milkmaid comes along the road carrying on her head the milkpot brimming and frothing with milk. She walks with laughter in her eyes, without a care in the

world and a passerby stands stupefied to see her walking along with a pot full of milk with such easy abandon and lilted gait as if she did not carry the precious burden on her head. The truth is that the milkmaid's attention is riveted on her milk pot and she would not by any chance, let it slip. Even so, a *Gnani* who is immersed in *Sahaja Samadhi*, lives in God though outwardly he lives in the tantalising world.

Impurities

A man caught in a great flood would either like to reach the banks or swim along with the swift current. If he tries to stand still in the midst of the flood, people will think he is out of his mind. Even so, one must have a goal in life to the attainment of which one must strive. There are three impurities attaching to a man's life. These have their source in the body, world and the life principle. That which attaches to the body is '*Kama*', while that which attaches to the world is '*Maya*' and the third which attaches to the life principle is '*Ahankara*'. One must cleanse oneself of these impurities. This is the chief merit in human life.