

# Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

RNI No.TNENG/2013/52428 | Volume 9 | Issue 10 | October 2021 | 12 Pages | For Free Circulation Only | [www.msdstrust.org](http://www.msdstrust.org)



**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. Phone : 044-42805365

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## FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

Non-violence or 'ahimsa' is a practice of not hurting anyone intentionally or unintentionally. It is also the practice professed by Gautam Buddha, Mahaveer and Mahatma Gandhi.

Mahatma Gandhi's efforts for Indian independence are unparalleled. A great social reformer, he is remembered for his virtues such as non-violence, truth, love and fraternity. The UN General Assembly announced on 15 June 2007 that it adopted a resolution which declared that 2 October will be celebrated as the International Day of Non-Violence.

Gandhiji worked hard against untouchability in our society, upliftment of the backward classes, and raised his voice to develop villages for social development. He brought together citizens to participate in the freedom struggle and inspired Indians to use only swadeshi goods.

He made significant contributions to environmental sustainability. Most noteworthy, he said that each person should consume according to his needs. The main question that he raised was "How much should a person consume?". Secularism is yet another contribution of Gandhiji. His belief was that no religion should have a monopoly on the truth and encouraged friendship between different religions.

Gandhiji has influenced many international leaders around the world. His freedom struggle was an inspiration for leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., James Beve, and James Lawson. In fact, he has inspired each one of us through his teachings. In our daily lives, we come across several changemakers who have imbibed his values. Conversations salutes these Gandhians and we are privileged to feature a few of them in our publication.

Let us honour Mahatma Gandhiji's philosophy by treating people with respect and equality. Lead a life in peace by following the path of non-violence.

Jai Hind!

Marie Banu

## EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh

Marie Banu

# HOLDING THE SPACE

*"If you think of holding space as being in the center of the wheel, it's being in the center and holding the energy of what's both inside the bounds and outside; it's magnetic - you draw in what's most coherent to the intention." Margo Adair*



In the last two weeks I have repeatedly experienced the power of "holding the space". This happened in an hour of silence in an 'Awakin Circle' and later in a workshop on Non-violent Communication.

The energy of silence and the energy of empathy moved me beyond bounds. I could see how non-judgmental, unconditional love and being present to the moment produces a harmonious and refined energy field. In such an energy field the heart opens to all emotions—be it love, pain, anxiousness, peace and so on.

I also remembered another learning I had several years ago—the 'dance of insight'—the 'aha moment' where a new learning and a realization sets in in the space that one holds in a coaching engagement.

In the book "The Intuitive Body" the author Wendy Palmer refers to the feminine energy having the attribute of

holding the space. It is the capacity to be, without doing—we accept life exactly how it is. The feminine energy has an element of spaciousness in which there is room for all kinds of things to occur. The ability to hold the space, to be, to not do, is the power of the feminine.

Another way to look at it is that holding space for someone means staying engaged and present with them while they undergo a process of self-inquiry and discovery of truth. When we hold the space for someone we are just present, and listening. We aren't judging, giving advice or offering a solution.

We are just there, in the present moment, holding their pain, their anguish, their joy, their space.

By holding the space we experience Presence—an important non-verbal capacity to affect and influence the situation and the environment. It is an acceptance and

affirmation of our emotions, from our pain to our bliss. It is a waiting and a stillness that quietly holds our dreams and hopes.

An analogy, which beautifully embodies the meaning of 'holding the space', is how a mother offers space to her child when she is hurt. Perhaps the mother is not offering any medicine, not even words of assurance, but in her silent, loving presence, the child feels warmth, acceptance and trust that everything will be fine. Such is the power of 'holding the space'.

Put together, one can hold the space in meditation for oneself and also hold the space for others by deep listening and by providing a container that holds any overwhelming feelings emerging from others. The holding of space is an embodiment of love. It holds the potential to be life changing, healing and transformative.

## 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](mailto:bhuvaneshwari@teamthink.co.in) for arranging Positive Energy training and Coaching sessions.



# ON THE RIGHT TRACK



**R**ailway stations have been a memorable part of all our summer holidays and family get together events. The multitude of sounds, food, those few taps where fathers and brothers queued to fill bottles before the trains slipped off the platforms, the multilingual announcements, passenger charts, the invincible TTRs and a lot more comes to our mind. We have also noticed many children on the railway platforms, but hardly wondered why they were here without their parents. “Do their parents even know that they were here?” says Mr. Rahim Shaik, Founder Secretary of Need Base India in Bangalore.

Rahim’s father worked for the Indian Railways and therefore life in the railway colonies exposed him to the vulnerable children and the lives they led. “Every time I crossed stations I used to see children running here and there. Sometimes I saw well-dressed people behind them and sometimes police too. Now I know that they could be Child Welfare Officers,” he smiles. Rahim was disturbed by the lives these children led without their families and wanted to help them. He also came across children who were happy living here as well as those who were extremely scared of going back to their families. Rahim wanted to get closer and find out ways to help them.

After completing his higher studies in his hometown Raichur (a district in North Karnataka) Rahim was sure enough to not get into a corporate job. He joined the local NGO Sathi that worked towards rescuing vulnerable children on streets, railway stations and repatriate them with families. “This new job was enlightening. Child Rights was no longer theoretical for me. I applied it in every situation but was disheartened to see that not all families cared enough for their

children. We, in spite of desiring to protect them, are strangers to them, why would they trust us? In fact, living in an unpredictable environment, coming across caring individuals could be scary for them. I could completely understand why they ran away from us,” says Rahim empathetically.

Childhood, he believes, is that foundation that shapes personality and value systems. It is also that phase in one’s life when judgements do not influence decisions because mind is free in real sense. “Which is why we cannot leave them there,” urges Rahim. Ten long years with Sathi made him realize the challenges in repatriating children from critical backgrounds like children of sex workers, beggars, abandoned children, orphans and also some who are abused within their families. Evidently, they needed a different intervention that could nurture their lives outside their families. Rahim wanted to create that space for them and founded Need Base India in 2009.

Long term residential care was the idea and what made it unique was the thought of using space within the premises of government schools. “Funds may never be adequate for a long term intervention like this. Given the number of children out there, I could not afford the time to raise funds and build homes. When I came across government schools with good infrastructure but small strength, I wanted to make the resource useful for vulnerable children too. So, our children get play area, benefit from a wide range of schemes like free uniforms, mid-day meals and also access to good quality education. With the running costs coming down, we also had the liberty to spend better on skilling them,” he explains.

12 years down the lane, Need Base India runs eight

homes (four boys’ and four girls’ homes) for children aged 6-18 years, benefiting 500 children. Extremely sensitive and aware of children’s mixed emotions, the team organizes a variety of programmes and events to help children mingle with the local communities. Rahim feels that being raised in a home need not and should not take away the larger sense of belonging to a community. Helping them interact from early on not only makes children confident and positive but also ensures that the community begins to value child protection. “This is possibly the only way to sensitise public about vulnerabilities children are exposed to. They can then play their respective roles,” he adds.

Having reached out to more than 1,900 children, Need Base India’s growth reminds Rahim of his valuable lessons from CSIM. “First of all, I learnt to communicate issues. Nobody ever says you are wrong. They try to learn why the issue is important to you and help you add in your perspective. The immense respect for students’ knowledge inspires me and has actually helped me in interacting with our inmates. And the most important thing is, my organisation’s growth is much beyond what I decide before hand in my plans. As every child passes out, graduates, finds a job and becomes independent, responsible and a productive adult, they come back and share what more could be done for their juniors in the homes. Their sense of belonging and responsibility is reassuring. They know to attend to vulnerable children. They do what they can,” shares Rahim, hoping that protecting children will be a common social goal very soon.

*Shanmuga Priya.T*



# REWRITING THE DESTINY OF THE UNDERPRIVILEGED

Here is the story of Dr. A.S.Sankaranarayanan, an ethnobotanist who lived with a tribal community in Coimbatore district during the mid 80s and trained them in agricultural practices so as to overcome poverty.

Sankara Narayanan realised the obstacles that the tribal communities faced. This led to the launch 'Native Medicare Charitable Trust' (NMCT) in 1988, with the vision of Sustainable Holistic Development for the tribal communities through capacity building, promotion and support service.

NMCT works in 19 districts of Tamil Nadu and in a few districts in Kerala as well. The organisation focuses on providing quality education to tribal children, while also promoting agriculture, agro-forestry, animal husbandry and other livelihood activities.

"During the initial years, I focused on building contacts. The first project was a prestigious Bio-diversity Conservation Project that was launched in association with Dr. M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation in 1992. Through NMCT, I originated the tribal development programs during 1992-1993 on preservation, propagation and cultivation of medicinal plants along with CAPART," says a proud Sankara Narayanan.

HIV/AIDS was a more concerning epidemic of the 20th century, and Sankara Narayanan was passionate towards this cause as well. Through NMCT, he conducted awareness on the prevention of HIV/Aids in over 100 schools for adolescent boys and girls and supported the affected families too.

During 1998 to 2003, NMCT concentrated on educating the target

communities in Environment, Education, Health and Livelihood. Environmental Awareness programs were conducted in Coimbatore and Nilgiris districts. He closely associated with Covai Class (Covai Child Labour Abolition Service Society) and rescued child labourers from brick kilns and mainstreamed them to school education. This programme was later upgraded and supported by Karl Kuebel Stiftung, Germany during the years 2004 to 2007 which led the child labourers to mainstream education. 10 play schools and 10 bridge courses were established within the brick kiln areas through which 1625 children benefitted. Through Abhaya Students Shelter, vulnerable children were provided shelter, educational support, nutrition food and medical treatment services.

"While undertaking the project on Rescue of Child Labour, around 85 SHGs were formed in order to provide supplementary income to the migrated families. In this, 1,000 women were empowered to launch entrepreneurial activities and financial assistance was also offered. In 2008, a Block level Federation namely Vimuktha Federation was formed by merging all the SHGs under 5 clusters," he says.

NABARD TDF scheme was launched in the tribal areas wherein horticulture in 450 acres of agricultural land was cultivated and 250 tribal families were provided livelihood opportunities through milch animals and sheep rearing. With the support of NABARD, NMCT also established Rural HAAT in 2019 to enable these families market their Agri products and poultry thereby avoiding paying the middlemen. This led to sustained incomes and launch of ADI Federation in the tribal area.



NMCT also promoted and educated WaSH practice among the Government and Panchayat Union School Students. "We constructed new toilets along with handwash platforms and the provided sanitary napkin incinerators in Government Schools in Coimbatore District with the financial support of KKS, KKF, Ford Motors Pvt Ltd and Save the Children. We also promoted kitchen gardens in the schools and strengthened the School Management Committees," he says.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent lockdown have resulted in the shutting down of all the industries, hotels and restaurants. This has left many migrant workers in Coimbatore and neighbouring districts jobless and many not having food to eat. "We approached CSR programmes for support and reached

out to more than 20,000 families with groceries, sanitary and hygiene kits in Coimbatore, Tirupur, Erode and Salem areas. Community Kitchens were also established in the tribal areas of Karamadai Block of Coimbatore District," he adds.

NMCT in association with Eicher Group Foundation and Give India upgraded 44 Primary Health Centres and 2 Government Hospitals with medical equipment and consumable. It also provided Medical Equipment to Coimbatore Medical College and Hospital and renovated the Paediatric ward in Coimbatore Government Hospital.

"We were successful in creating awareness among parents on the importance of education. Apart from ensuring that education is not disrupted by the pandemic, the programme has also prevented children from falling into the trap of child labour. We roped in volunteers and started teaching the tribal children."

"Now, there are about 400 children attending classes from 9 am to 1 pm every day in eleven tribal settlements in Karamadai block and nine in Periya Naicken Palayam block. We also provide the children with nutritious snacks and food," he says.

NMCT in association with a few corporate houses is providing training programs to deserving women in dosa batter making and bakery products and also supports them with bank linkages. The organisation hopes to focus on more Sustainability Development Goals to reach out to more people in need.

*Angela Anish*





# CONVERSATIONS WITH SRI RAMANA MAHARISHI

Some Congressmen handed over the following questions to Maharishi:

1. How long is India destined to suffer bondage?
2. Have not the sons of India made enough sacrifice for her liberation?
3. Will India get freedom during Mahatma Gandhi's lifetime?

The above questions were not answered categorically. Sri Bhagavan simply remarked:

Gandhiji has surrendered himself to the Divine and works accordingly with no self-interest. He does not concern himself with the results but accepts them as they turn up. That must be the attitude of national workers.

**Q.:** Will the work be crowned with success?

**M.:** This question arises because the questioner has not surrendered himself.

**Q.:** Should we not then think of and work for the welfare of the country?

**M.:** First take care of yourself and the rest will naturally follow.

**Q.:** I am not speaking individually but for the country.

**M.:** First surrender and see. The doubts arise because of the absence of surrender. Acquire strength by surrender and then your surroundings will be found to have improved to the degree of strength acquired by you.

**Q.:** Should we not know if our actions will be worthwhile?

**M.:** Follow the example of Gandhiji in the work for the national cause.

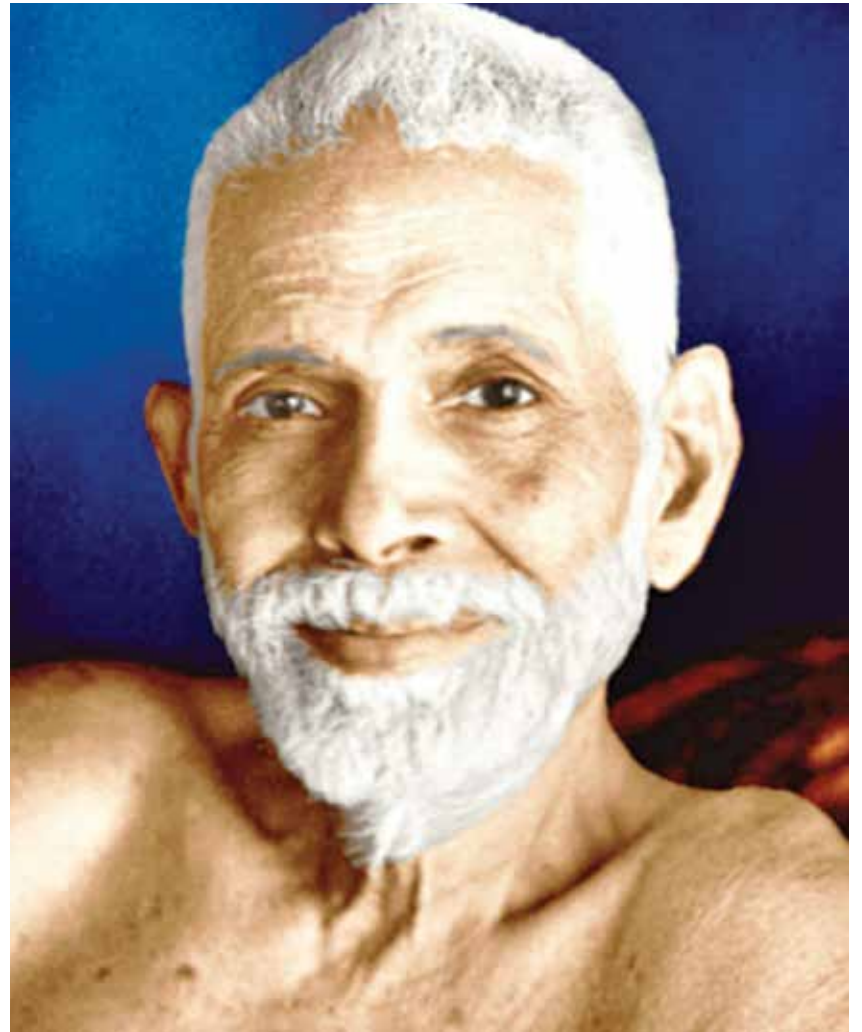
'Surrender' is the word.

The following slip was also handed over to Sri Bhagavan:

"Four of us have come from Coorg and we had gone to Delhi to wait as a deputation on the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress and we are now going back. We are sent from the Coorg Congress Committee and so kindly give us some message to the Coorg District Congress Committee and the people of Coorg in general."

When this slip was handed over, Sri Bhagavan said that the same answer holds good here too. The message is contained in the word 'Surrender'.

Source: Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi



## KARMAYOGI PND MEMORIAL FORUM

Join us for a virtual meeting  
on Saturday, 6th November, 2021  
Time: 11 am to 12 noon

THEME: ECONOMY, ECOLOGY, EQUITY



Shri P. N. Devarajan



**Mr. R. Elango**  
Ashoka Fellow  
& Founder  
Panchayat Academy



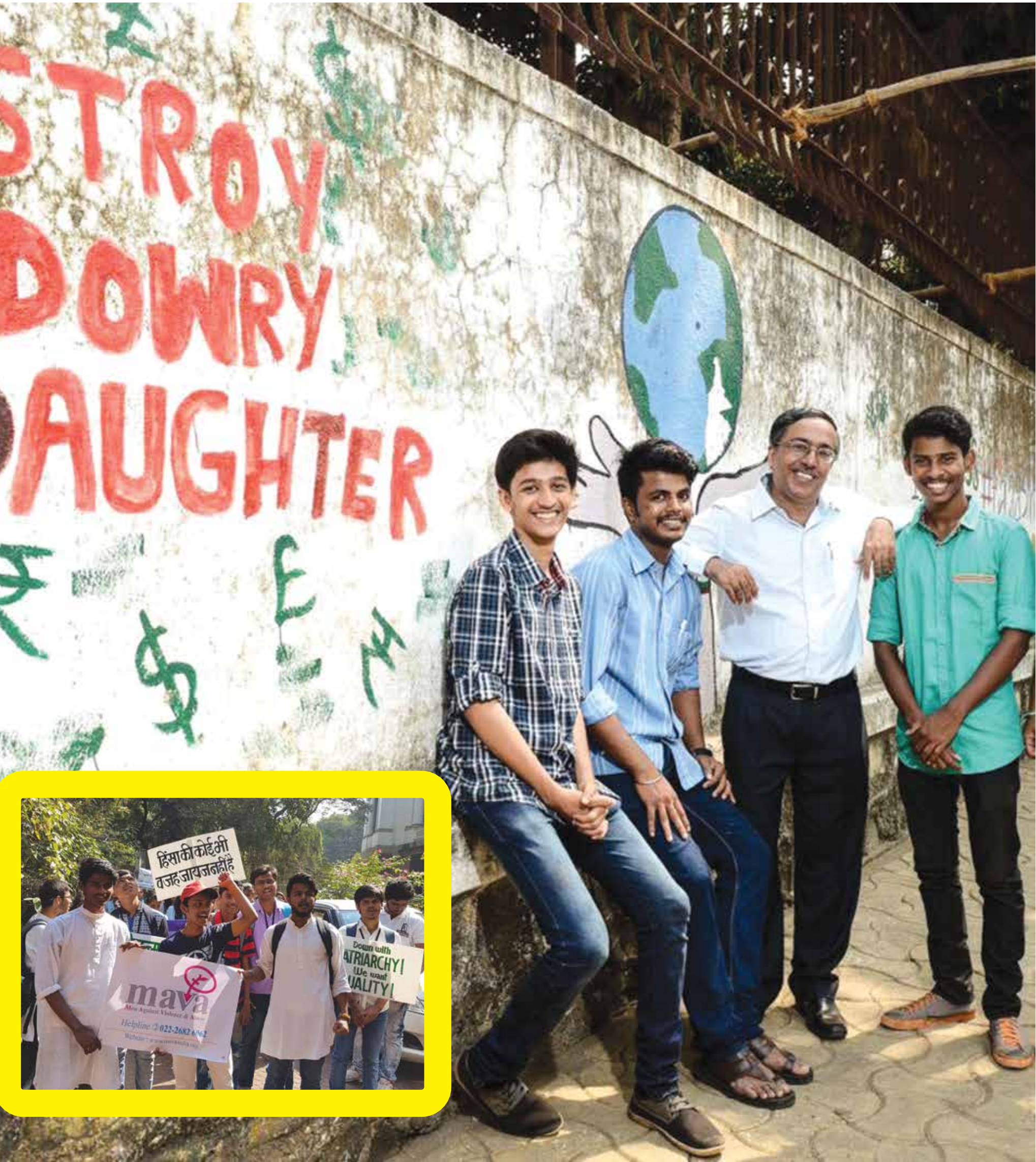
**Mr. M. Jaya Shankar**  
Ashoka Fellow  
& Founder  
Tribal Society



**Mr. Venu Puthussery,**  
Managing Partner & CEO  
iRAISE Management Consultants Pvt Ltd

[Zoom Meeting:](#)  
Meeting ID: 625 801 6305  
Passcode: csim2021





# MEN, FOR WOMEN

*MAVA is the fruit of all his introspection and innovation to communicate gender concerns to a small and large audience cutting across all social barriers.*

Inspiration is everywhere. It is ubiquitous but calls for the right combination of situation, perspective and personal drive, to be identified. “In the early 90s, domestic violence was a big social issue. As a trained social worker, incidents that I came across not only disturbed me, but forced me to look into the factors that made it persistent. Yes, there was an act in place but the issue relentlessly resurfaced everywhere. My questions never found answers. That is when a newspaper advertisement appealing to men who believed that women are not for battering gave me hope,” shares Mr. Harish Sadani, Co-Founder of Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA), in Mumbai, Maharashtra.

There were 205 men, all from different socio-economic, cultural backgrounds who responded to that appeal and after a year, it became a focused group of 30 members who consistently deliberated to identify ways to support existing efforts in the field. MAVA, the first and pioneering men’s organization was established in 1993 to demonstrate the need and effectiveness of engaging men to address violence and abuse against women. “When it was widely known that men were the most crucial part of the problem, there was hardly any effort to make them a part of the solution. We wanted to change this. We strongly believed that unless men saw through what they were doing to the present and next generation families they may not realize the gravity of their actions,” he says.

Harish was that kind of man who did not feel inferior when friends teased him ‘girlish’. He rather wondered why people teased him using that word. “Femininity is not inferior, then why?” he still speculates. He was also disappointed that entertainment industry did not portray strong men who stood up for themselves and women in their families. He sensed a huge void here and the resultant attitude in the society that was taken for granted. The absence of men in women’s movements baffled him.

“Women were there in the freedom struggle. They support families in all crucial times. They always stood for their men, whether husband or children or siblings. Then, why did men fail them? Why did we leave it to the women to fight violence and abuse against them? Is there something wrong in the way we are brought up as men?” Harish continues to raise such questions in every platform that can prompt a change.

MAVA is the fruit of all his introspection and innovation to communicate gender concerns to a small as well as large audience cutting across all social barriers. MAVA was ahead of its time 28 years ago and even today it surprises observers with its impact on individuals.

There is a serious dearth of places for men to reflect upon their actions and to help them see beyond traditional judgements about gender roles and stereotypes; MAVA provided this space. “Men needed to see how else they could handle disagreements or other situations in their families. They needed to see why violence could not resolve the fundamental issue. Making them talk, open up and speak their hearts out was a huge task, but it was important to what MAVA was trying to do. Our patience paid off well enough,” smiles Harish.

MAVA utilised every opportunity to educate masses about domestic violence being a societal issue and not a private one. Awareness programmes



and workshops were tailor-made to suit every type of audience and Harish began to see the relevance of street plays. MAVA hired professionals to conduct street plays in different places because it was significant for men to see how neighbourhood intervention could turn the table. As men began to see the roles they can play, it became easier for them to relate to what they could actually do at a community level. But, did this ensure that they acted so in reality? Harish and team thought of strategies to help men act in such situations. “It is like un-schooling them about what they were used to and getting them to behave in a completely new pattern. It took time, but efforts paid off,” he proudly says.

Extensively working with youth in colleges, universities and collaborating with other organisations helped MAVA rise as a resource organisation in mentoring audience on gender and sexuality concerns. A combination of interactive workshops, street-theatre, film-screenings, folk media, wall newspapers and social media soon drove men to support peers who took an active stand for women. MAVA was able to engage and sensitize the youth on a wide range of contemporary gender and sexuality matters, apart from domestic violence. Against a family member or community, men began to show their solidarity with disadvantaged women in their lives. This peer influence further honed MAVA’s interactions with new entrants. MAVA’s annual Marathi magazine ‘Purushspandana’ (meaning Men’s Expressions) was initiated in 1995 to educate the society about men who have taken active stands for the cause of women and gender equality, apart from providing non-threatening space to ventilate their innermost thoughts, ideas and experiences through first-person accounts, stories, poems and all other forms of contributions. It’s huge success also led to the publishing of an English book called ‘Breaking Moulds’ in 2007 which articulates men’s views on sexism, patriarchy, masculinity, sexuality. Therefore, gender became a larger discussion involving everybody and not just women.

With a lot of patience and perseverance, MAVA managed its first 10 years without an office and full-time staff. Soon, new projects and new donors came on board, recognising MAVA’s work. The project Yuva Maitri created a new identity for MAVA as the objective was to demonstrate methods that can mentor peer influence on gender equality. “We wanted the results to spiral out. The two-year fellowship programme sponsored by Population Council of India was successful and from a small group of 33 young men in Pune it spread to nine other districts of Maharashtra through strategic collaborations with local social organizations. Today, we count on over 90 gender champions in three other states too – Assam, Gujarat and Karnataka. Our gender sensitisation programmes have been so impactful that women professionals from different parts of the globe visit us. Having built a cadre of over 900 youth mentors, MAVA also attempts to create platforms for all genders to reflect,” adds Harish.

SamaBhav (meaning equanimity) is the first of its kind film festival on gender diversity, masculinity, relationships that has been travelling to cities and districts across India. Over 6000 youth from Universities, Colleges and Civil Society Organisations in 23 cities and 12 districts across India have been reached out in the last 3 editions of SamaBhav through engaging conversations post screening of a wide range of national and international films. “More than the number, we are proud to have created a space where all gendered people express themselves without judging anybody. Safe spaces for such open dialogues is a must to be able to understand each other. Respect, Empathy and care comes only after we understand. Such dialogues inspire us and many youngsters who want to live in a gender-just society,” he says, adding that the fourth edition is work under progress and will be launched soon.

**Shanmuga Priya. T**  
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# UTILIZING BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGY IN ACHIEVING SDGS

**B**lockchain is a shared, impregnable and unchangeable ledger to record transactions, track assets and build trust. The fundamental logic underneath application of blockchain is decentralisation of stored data in order to safeguard it from control and manipulation by any central actor at any point in time after its first record.

Stuart Haber and W. Scott Stornetta introduced Blockchain technology in 1991. Their aim was to implement such a system wherein document timestamps could not be altered with. After almost two decades, in year 2008 Satoshi Nakamoto conceptualised first blockchain and in January 2009, blockchain had its first real-world application with launch of bitcoin.

In blockchain, Information is collected together in form of blocks. Each block has limited capacity to store information. So, when one block gets filled, another block is created in link with the previous one creating a chain. New information gets stored in newly formed block until it also reaches to its maximum capacity. In order to synchronise the data, the trusted nodes process each block (group of transactions), determining its validity. A final conclusion is determined using a consensus mechanism.

As blockchain contains data, sometimes it can be misunderstood as simple database but one has to know that a simple database structure its data into table but a blockchain structures its data into interlinked blocks. Each block in the chain is given an exact timestamp according to the time when it gets added to the chain, maintaining transparency of information. All data which gets stored in blockchain can be accessed by either having a personal node or by using blockchain explorers.

Apart from transparency, blockchain also maintains safety of information as it is almost impossible to alter the content once stored in blockchain. It is possible primarily because new blocks are always added in chain chronologically and linearly. Each block is always linked to the “end” of the blockchain.

Integration of blockchain solution may help in maintaining strong data quality and integrity. This application may be useful in location identification, delivery confirmation, condition of goods, and data accuracy for supply chain organisations.

Blockchain's key benefits i.e. immutability of data and access to public make it an efficient option to tally votes by attributing separate ID to each ballot. Voting process can be made easily accessible while improving security with the usage of blockchain technology.

## Utilizing Blockchain Technology in SDG

Blockchain technology is used in various areas, where transparency and timeliness of data is of prime importance. In social development these two parameters are always important for reporting, documentation and decision making. Recent reports and work from social scientists suggest that this technology is highly reliable in assessment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For the purpose SDGs are subdivided 3 categories

- a) Empowerment
- b) Economic Development
- c) Improving Infrastructure and Services

### Empowerment

Empowerment inherits with fundamental rights to every human being. Access of Human right begins with official identity of individual. Without recognized identity, people have to struggle for finance and formal societal participatory activities. Generating official identity of each individual will help developing countries to progress towards fulfilling their 2030 Agenda initiate to “ensure no one is left behind.” It may



also be proven as a very efficient application in achieving gender equality by providing individual identity to every woman. Without official identification of citizens countries find it difficult to impose proper taxation system. Such identity may help people to use as certifying proof of land/property ownership and existence.

Principle of good governance can be promoted by blockchain. It impacts democratic voting models by letting trace of votes to valid and registered identities stored on a blockchain. Digital casting of votes can be given to only those citizens who are registered and cannot be double-counted by a third party, such as a public electoral authority.

### Economic Development

The technology found its brilliant use in the area of promoting financial inclusion, an explicit target of seven of the 17 SDGs namely Good Health and Well-Being, No Poverty, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Zero Hunger, Gender Equality, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure and Reduced Inequalities. Blockchain technology is being used in mobile money services, financial start-ups and fintech companies with an idea to serve financially excluded people. As supply of cryptocurrencies is fixed, they can't be manipulated through money printing hence put a curb on inflation. Another benefit of cryptocurrency is remittance which is considered to be a stable source of foreign exchange in low and middle income countries. Due to the low cost associated with cryptocurrencies, in 2018, remittance grew three times higher with it in comparison with Official Development Assistance (ODA).

### Improving Infrastructure and Services

Blockchain technology is going to become part of new normal in almost all sectors making all information available at one click. All we need to develop is the relevant infrastructure and awareness about this

revolutionary expertise in the world of information technology.

Blockchain can assist in assessment and development of quality education. For example, its ability to protect certificates from any potential damage to a country's national infrastructure comes out of the tamper-resistant nature of blockchain. The ability to verify educational credentials on the blockchain is significant for particular group of people, such as refugees, who may be victim of war or any natural calamity and have lost certifications during the course of their unexpected migration.

Another area is its use in healthcare data management, where blockchain solutions can be used in recording, management and sharing of health related information effortlessly and securely between various stakeholders. Healthcare data operations running on blockchain allow greater scope to empower people to manage their own files, including sharing with new providers as they choose.

### Hacking Blockchain – Is it possible?

Blockchain support storage of different types of information with most common use as a ledger for transactions with specific time stamp every time, leaving a trail for traceability and no option to change the block information. As new transaction gets entered, it is conveyed to a peer-to-peer computers scattered network across the globe. Then, this computers network solves equations to confirm transaction validity. Once transactions are found to be valid and legitimate, they are grouped together into blocks. These blocks are then chained forming a long history of all transactions that are permanent. After that transaction is considered complete.

Every block has its specific hash, along with the hash of the previous block, as well as the previously mentioned time stamp. So, once a block is added to the blockchain, it gets very challenging to go back and change the data of the previous block. Change in data leads to change in hash of block which is mentioned in the subsequent block also. Hence, alteration in one block will lead to information mismatch in rest of the blocks of chain. Even if some hacker wants to alter the blockchain and make changes in his own copy, it would not match with copy of everyone else. So, when other people cross-reference their copies against each other, they would find this one copy stand out and that hacker's version of the chain would be cast away as illegitimate.

To make changes in information stored in block, one has to simultaneously control and alter 51% of the copies of the blockchain so that their new copy becomes the majority copy and thus, the agreed-upon chain. Controlling and changing 51% copies of blockchain would also need an enormous number of resources and money as they would need to change hash codes and timestamps in all blocks and their copies. Blockchain permits maintaining and distributing digital information but do not allow to make any alteration or editing in it. Due to this multilayer safety provision and transparency of information, today applications of blockchain have expanded beyond cryptocurrencies to a broad suite of sectors, including foreign aid and development cooperation. Many organizations are creating their own blockchains for business and industrial purposes the most profound proven benefits of blockchain support furthering its integration into development solutions. These include ability to disrupt established societal models (and linked ability to alter the balance of power between actors), as well as greatly reduce inefficient bureaucracy and costs.

*Dr. Agyeya Trippathi*



# MAKING LIVELIHOODS SPROUT AGAIN



Uttar Dinajpur is a district in West Bengal, known for its historic sites and biodiversity. It is home to Raiganj Wildlife Sanctuary, the second largest bird sanctuary in all of Asia. The soil in the region is very fertile, its alluvial deposits aiding in the growth of paddy, jute, sugarcane, etc. However, Uttar Dinajpur was also named one of the country's 250 poorest districts, by the Ministry of the Panchayati Raj in 2006. Years prior to this, sensing the need for a grassroots movement towards holistic, multi-sectoral development, the idea for a voluntary organization was born. The Islampur Ramkrishnapally Rural Welfare Society (IRRWS) was founded in March 1995, as a platform to address issues of rural and urban development in Uttar Dinajpur district. Founders Mokter Hossain and Abdul Alim Parvej mobilized energetic youth, social workers, educators, retired government officials and other volunteers to get together to carry out a host of projects, which have helped transform the region over the last 25 years.

Today, the organization runs several programs addressing livelihood needs and agricultural reforms, education, health needs, training programs, consumer awareness and advocacy programmes, as well as seminars and awareness programmes on various topics. Through their LIFE program, in 2019-2020 alone, IRRWS managed to establish eight community mushroom cultivating units, six new self-help groups (SHG), one producer's organization, and four farmers clubs. The organisation also enabled farmers in the area to adopt natural fertilisers through vermi-compost pits and azolla cultivation.

Out of 168 new kitchen gardens that were started in this same period, the story of Asiha Khatun (50) is noteworthy. Asiha and her husband Mohammed Salaluddin own 2,100 square feet of land in their backyard, that was left untouched for years. In October 2019, Asiha was a participant of the LIFE project meeting that was

conducted near her home. She felt convinced to start a kitchen garden in her backyard and her family initially sowed leafy vegetables, gourds, green chillies, and herbs such as coriander. Having invested around 200 rupees for seeds and 300 rupees for organic manure, they were able to harvest vegetables just enough for their own consumption. Asiha used old and worn clothes to fence her garden, to keep away trespassing animals. As she kept regularly attending meetings and information sessions of IRRWS, she learnt to handle the challenges that came along the way – how to get rid of pests, how to increase the harvest, etc. After a year, she scaled up her operations, prepared a vermicompost pit as well as started cultivating azolla which served

transplanter. Enthused by this, Asila Begum and her husband purchased seeds worth 200 rupees and chose to grow them through the SRI method. IRRWS staff helped them with additional techniques such as seed purification using dense salt water technique, use of bio fertilizers, etc. The family's yield in the next harvest shot up to 22 quintals of rice, a substantial increase, compared to the previous year. They not only had rice stored away for their family for the whole year, but were even able to sell the surplus in the local market.

Apart from intensive organic farming related initiatives, IRRWS also helps establish technology in various aspects of their services. They run computer centres that are approved by the

of trusted partnerships with the local government, the Krishi Vigyan Kendra, public schools, hospitals, various regulatory authorities etc. Experts from each of these partner organizations go to the doorsteps of the people in Uttar Dinajpur to deliver their programmes, which makes it highly accessible to the target population.

In response to the COVID 19 pandemic, IRRWS, with support from GOONJ, organized the Dignity of Work programme. This program provided temporary employment to locals through Kaccha Road reparations, building ponds, as well building a tribal community hall. Over 250 families were provided with dry rations to sustain through the lockdowns.

There are multiple challenges in running IRRWS' programs. According to Abdul Alim Parvej, Co-founder, the changes in government policies, such as the FCRA act, hinders the smooth functioning of their foreign aid-dependent projects. Apart from these, local political issues and climate changes, such as unexpectedly heavy rainfall also affects their programmes.

"The COVID-19 pandemic proved to be the biggest challenge to run our programmes for the last two years," says Parvej, adding that, "During the lockdown, it was very tough to continue field work as well as conduct our regular office work. Several of our upcoming programmes had to be cancelled. Funding took a severe beating, as we received funds after a long delay for some of our programmes, whereas for some others, previously approved funding was halted."

Abdul Alim Parvej remains optimistic about what the future holds. He says, "IRRWS is poised to be a pioneer resource center for grassroots development initiatives. Our vision is to achieve a value-oriented sustainable society based on welfare-orientation, economic growth, local capacity-building and empowerment of people."

Archanaa Ramesh

*Apart from intensive organic farming related initiatives, IRRWS also helps establish technology in various aspects of their services*

as feed for her cattle as well as a natural manure for her plants. Asiha is now producing vegetables in abundance and is sharing her knowledge with new trainees who wish to learn about organic vegetable farming. Her family has thus far been able to save Rs. 15,000 in fresh produce alone.

Another exceptional example of IRRWS' success is that of Asila Begum (30). Asila Begum and her family cultivated paddy using traditional methods and got a yield of 10-15 quintals per year in their half-acre piece of land. Asiha and her family attended LIFE Programme's training in Systematic Rice Intensification (SRI) method of paddy cultivation, which is a modern technique using a paddy

Ministry of Human Resources Development, for training candidates in the fields of accounting, computer applications and multilingual DTP thus enhancing their employability skills. The organisation runs a Diagnostics Centre and a Pathology Lab in the Islampur municipality where people living below the poverty line receive essential health services at half-price. Regular health camps are conducted in the region. IRRWS volunteers put up street plays, street art, and other creative expressions to help educate locals on consumer awareness. They also distribute books, bags and other school supplies to children in Uttar Dinajpur.

A wholly volunteer run organization, IRRWS has a well-established network



# PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Disability is a contested concept. It has been referred to as an 'embodied difference', 'specially challenged' or simply 'differently abled'. People with disabilities are considered burdensome or a liability and are most often ridiculed and neglected by society.

According to the World Report on Disability, about 15% of the world's population or one billion people are affected by disability; of whom 2% to 4% experience significant functional impairments. A disability may be readily visible, or invisible in nature. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities defines disability as long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder a person's full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

LCDDP, short for LC Disability and Development Programme, was established in 2006 at Ongole, Andhra Pradesh, India. The project addresses the need for skill development and employment of people with disabilities by directly facilitating greater equitable access to livelihoods and employment opportunities for them.

"People with disabilities are also people with destiny. They need extra facilitation and mentoring to stay well, active, and be a productive part of the community. The identified candidates have to undergo a self-motivational programme titled 'Ready2Succeed' at our Livelihood Resource Centre. After finishing the training in the trade of their choice, they are given a kit in case they opt for self-employment instead of job placement," says Mr. A. Raj Kumar, Livelihoods Manager of LCDDP.

Narendra Kotinarayana Murthy is affected by severe speech and hearing impairment since birth. Despite his disability, he somehow managed to finish his primary education in a government school but had no means for livelihood. After marriage, his wife, who was into tailoring, tried to teach him sewing but was not successful at that. Things had gone from bad to worse after the birth of their children. It was at this point in time the couple heard about the LCDDP. Murthy and his wife were trained in making artificial jewelry and the duo learnt to make several varieties of this jewelry. With the self-employment kit provided by LCDDP, the couple set up a unit and sold the artificial jewelry they produced through retail shops in towns thereby gaining sustainable income.

Raj Kumar explains, "A self-employment kit consists of tools and materials and related equipment required for the business. For instance, artificial jewelry kit consists of beads, needles, threads, etc. We encourage non-monetary support rather than just giving seed money to start a business. The organisation also facilitates bank loans to the trained participants, if required."

LCDDP, through its 'Ready2Succeed' programme and Livelihood Resource Centre, provides people with disabilities with various technical and non-technical skill training. Technical skills in computer related services – from computer basics to hardware and networking, DTP, Photoshop, Multimedia, Tally ERP 9 and Cell Phone Technology – are taught in the centre.

Other skills that are taught at the resource centre include tailoring, beautician course, artificial jewelry making, food processing and fast Food preparation, pickles, spices, candles, phenol, greetings cards making, etc.

"I was stricken with poliomyelitis at an early age. I was doing my polytechnical course with government sponsorship when I fell in love. Both of our parents did



*After finishing the training in the trade of their choice, they are given a kit in case they opt for self-employment instead of job placement*

not agree to our marriage as my boyfriend was a Hindu while I was a Muslim. So, we eloped. My husband worked as a chauffeur and the money he earned was barely enough for house rent and grocery items," says Shaik Valiya Bi adding,

"Things were getting very dismal and when I learnt about LCDDP's Ready2Succeed programme, I immediately enrolled. I was trained in Data Entry and accounting with Tally ERP 9. Thereafter, I got a job in a granite company and later on as an outsourcing employee in a government office where the salary is good. Now, I can provide good education for my children and buy a house too!"

LCDDP's interventions for people with disabilities covers almost all categories of Locomotor Disability – Orthopedic disability, Visual Impairment, Low Vision, Intellectual Disability, Leprosy Affected Persons, Hearing Impairment, Cerebral Palsy, Muscular Dystrophy, Dwarfism, etc.

"We have also covered young people with spastic disabilities by providing computer skills, physiotherapy, and supporting them with assistive Devices. In fact, our website has been designed by a Spastic Disabled person," Says Raj Kumar.

"LCDDP's project intervention takes into account the inter-linkages between social, economic, and cultural rights and calls for a holistic view of the rights of people with disabilities and their access to employment and livelihoods," concludes A. Raj Kumar.

Harry Jayanth



# BOTTOM UP – MICRO ENTERPRISE – SCALE OUT NOT SCALE UP

**T**op-down should give commitment of resources to match the planning of the Bottom-up process. Societal needs are better understood by the people in the bottom of the pyramid. Needs definition underlines the existing gap or not existence at all. Once the perceived gap is understood, it will lead to an exercise of qualifying it. The gap may be existing temporarily or permanently or occurring cyclically or irrationally. One has to assess the influence of gaps on lifestyle, living standards and or impacts, short term or long term on citizens, communities or groups or society.

Many a time the impact is so severe, the people suffering are left numb; the people do not know the suffering. The issues are complex, varied and confounding and are basic. Hence, planning, profound solutions and strategies are found or developed by the people and only facilitation is done by Social entrepreneurs who are sensitive and deeply concerned. Therefore the planning is bottom-up and financial, infrastructure and competence inputs come from top-down process.

Optimum and effective use of resources should be seen in the performance of the organisation and such competence must be built by local organisations and facilitated by local members.

Bottom-up processes bring in and reinforce 'the ownership' component of social enterprises. The changes that are brought about in these bottom-up enterprises are almost a revolution in evolution.

The people at the bottom of the pyramid are concerned about nature, animals, birds, underground and surface water, waste reduction and waste recycle, as a part of their existence. Therefore, they will protect, preserve and nurture these elements in the process of building a social enterprise.

The people at the bottom of the pyramid will not allow lopsided growth of the individual components of life, namely, Economy, Equity and Ecology. (The Three Es).

Top down planning has always attempted top sided growth unintentionally or unknowingly, that is what past tells us. We need to correct the major misalignment to bring Economy, Equity and Ecology in a harmonious balance. Social Enterprises are wholesome, interdependent, smoothly meeting ever-changing change by sound practices and early interventions.

Social enterprises can belong to different sizes and scales. The scales are mega, medium, small, mini/micro orders. While each one of the above scales have good, bad and indifferent dimensions, the selection of scales will emanate from one that is more effective and simple, in every context, one considers. Another guiding factor is resource availability, mobilization, movement, application and its management. Local resource



*The people at the bottom of the pyramid will not allow lopsided growth of the individual components of life, namely, Economy, Equity and Ecology. (The Three Es).*

dependency is to be largely recouped. With all the above ramifications, social sector, social enterprises should tend to be a micro enterprise (there could be exceptions).

If one has to manage a micro enterprise, the resources, monetary, human, infrastructural is very small. A microenterprise should be accessible and could be located within limited geography. One can qualitatively demonstrate 'giving' and 'sharing' as a basic philosophy of living. Of all factors, 'relationship' will be its strongest and admirable. In such a micro enterprise it is possible to demonstrate that Quality of

outcome, impact or goal is the supreme and not Quantity. Documenting the practices and developing replicable best practices will be dominant activity.

A question will arise as how do we reach out to more people in the bottom of the pyramid. This will be achieved by customization and replication in many paces by local ownership, local training and local support.

Through a network of communication processes the multitudinous micro enterprises can stay connected and derive advantage by replication of appropriate practices.

A micro enterprise is simple, nimble, quick, quickly and clearly communicative and alert to changing change. It can be creative; innovative (innovation is not invention but doing things differently). It will trigger servant leadership and create social entrepreneurs for the community/society/neighbourhood. The replicability effect will provide an epidemic like movement in spread and reach for the common good.

Micro enterprise can be micro financed and serving of debt and its repayment will become the responsibility collectively of the micro community. (Dr. Kurien somewhere wittily said you could cheat the government but not your neighbour).

Scale out not scale up concept is a running mate of the micro enterprise concept. Scale up results most often into a monolithic, giant like structure. This structure slowly and definitely promotes inflexible bureaucracy. The structure becomes rigid and decision making takes undue long time. Naturally, the exercise becomes expensive and unaffordable. The cost of maintaining the structure and bureaucracy becomes so heavy; almost entirely the budget provided for the cause/goal is consumed. The passion to do social good through a Social Enterprise goes out of the window.

Where as 'Scale out' as opposed to 'Scale up' is a solution that supports people and is entrepreneurial. To 'Scale out' and at the same time, meet the social expectation, you have to have multiplicity of ventures, leading to micro enterprises. Scale out reaches out to the doorsteps of the people at the bottom of the pyramid, trains them and gets them in a self help mode, help each other in mission achievement.

Scale out to every nook and corner, kindle the enterprising spirit each citizen has and inspire him or her to work together to create, innovate and become productive and effective.

The 'scale out' philosophy should be 'Each one, reach one', 'Each one teach one', 'Each one bring a smile on the face of the other'. How blissful is such a solution, long lasting, everlasting, ever sustaining, to a 'new world', 'new way of life' and 'new spirit of existence'!

*P.N. Devarajan*



## Centre for Social Initiative and Management

### Contact Persons:

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

**CSIM offers training and consultancy to social enterprises** – for-profits and non-profits to facilitate them to apply successful business practices and yet retain their social mission. It also offers training and hand holding support to prospective social entrepreneurs and enable them to launch their social initiatives. [www.csim.in](http://www.csim.in)

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

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# “Truth is the basic driving force; our lifeline.”

## Shri. R. Elango shares with Marie Banu Gandhian principles and his inspiration to launch egalitarian villages

Shri. R. Elango was born and brought up in Kuthambakkam village, in the adjoining district of Chennai City and was involved in the social work right from his childhood. After completing his B.Tech in Anna University, he joined Oil India and shifted to CSIR as a Scientist. He resigned from his government job to contest the village elections after he saw the miserable conditions liquor had created.

Having demonstrated that effective and participative planning in local governance can dramatically improve village development, Elango is now using his Panchayat Academy to build networks of emboldened local leaders who embody a common vision of good democracy and governance.

*Shri. R. Elango shares with Marie Banu Gandhian principles and his inspiration to launch egalitarian villages.*

### In what ways has Mahatma Gandhi inspired you and your work?

Gandhi is big inspiration for everyone. He was a man known for simplicity, for non-violence and above all truth. From one's childhood, Gandhi's ideologies are conveyed to you in one way or the other and his teachings closely track you.

When I was 9 years old, Mahatma Gandhi's 100th birth anniversary was celebrated in a big way. His portrait was decorated like a deity and there were many processions organised by the villagers, especially school-going children. This was during the month of October when people worshipped Lord Vishnu. When I witnessed the celebrations, I perceived Gandhiji to also be a God.

While at school, we were taught moral stories of Harichandra and how he spoke only the truth; about Shravan and

how he obeyed his parents, etc. This makes us inculcate attributes like truth and obedience while young.

Later, witnessing the poverty in my villages and seeing the lives of farmers and their humble way of life, I was further attracted towards Gandhi's principles. I was touched by Gandhiji's commitment and truthfulness and decided to follow his path.

### Do you think Gandhi's philosophy is still applicable in today's world?

Truth is the basic driving force; our lifeline. Be it a father-son or husband-wife – you should have faith in the relationship. Else, misunderstandings will be caused and might lead to abuse.

All religions also advocate for truth through their scriptures – be it Gita or Bible or Quran. I would say that these are all hypothetical, whereas we have witnessed Gandhiji living in our own country. As long as the truth exists and we kindle it, there is a chance for each of us to be a Gandhian.

The prominent face of Gandhiji is in our Indian Currency which is meant not only to commemorate his life but to also drive his values in each one of us.

### What was your motivation to create model villages?

I gave up my government job and started my life as a villager in my native Kuthambakkam. When I was elected as the Panchayat leader, I had the opportunity to build a model village. Issues like discrimination, caste conflicts, domestic violence and alcoholism were prevalent in those times.

Caste plays a crucial factor in villages. While all the caste groups worked together during the day, sharing their food and tea, they went back to their homes in the evening – and interacted only with people who belonged to their own caste/community. This led me to conceive the idea of having a model village where people of all castes live together so that the vehemence between castes can be mellowed down.

As Kuthambakkam panchayat was in the belt of Chennai, I had to seek the approval of the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Dr. M. Karunanidhi to allocate the Panchayat Land for the model village. He was a great leader and a social emancipator who said that this was a historic initiative. He named it 'Samathuvapuram' and his government granted us permission. After a lot of discussions on how to bring the communities to live together, we finally decided to have twin houses where the neighbour belonged to a different caste.

The then Collector of Tiruvallur District and present Home Secretary, Shri. S.K.Prahakar IAS took the lead and created the first model village in Mapedu and later at Tirutanni. Dr. V. Irai Anbu IAS, the present Chief Secretary, launched the model village in Kanchipuram when he served as District Collector here. Later, the State

Government of Tamil Nadu advised all the District Collectors to create one model village in their respective district.

The 77th model village was launched at Kuthambakkam to commemorate the 77th birth anniversary of Dr. M. Karunanidhi. I am now pursuing a research on the effectiveness of Samathuvapuram and lobbying with the government to launch it in more villages.

### About Panchayat system in India and your efforts to transform the villages?

Interestingly the Panchayat System in India is very much in existence for a very long time now. When Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was working on the constitution, he recognised the villages to be dominated by caste and felt that the panchayat would be dominated by the upper caste alone. Thus, he did not focus on this much. With pressure from Gandhians, he included a schedule 40 in the Constitution, but did not give much power to panchayats.

When Shri. Rajiv Gandhi came in, he analysed the reasons why villages did not to grow as expected. He recommended the 62nd amendment to Panchayat Raj in the Indian Constitution and aimed to connect Panchayats with the Parliament. Unfortunately, his efforts failed in the Rajya Sabha due to the state level leaders opposing it as they perceived it affecting the power of the state. However, in 1992, during the regime of ninth Prime Minister of India, Shri. Narasimha Rao, the Government passed the 73rd Amendment in the Parliament to implement Panchayati Raj in the entire country.

I focused on creating a ripple effect by creating model villages and succeeded at that. In the first five years, I tried to solve the problems in my own village. Later, I focused on the neighbouring villages, started traveling across the state and coordinated with the District Collectors in identifying locations for model villages. We created a network among the Panchayat leaders in these villages and offered training to them on how to develop their panchayats.

### Please share the future plans of the Panchayat Academy?

Shri P.N.Devarajan, Founder of CSIM, has been my inspiration. His concept of making young people to think for others is laudable.

Interestingly, after 20 years of my journey in the domain of sustainable livelihood, and the results of Samathuvapuram, I am now focusing on Panchayat Academy to train Panchayat leaders on village administration and how they can align their work with UN sustainable development goals. We are calling it Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Solutions. We are looking for partnerships and am sure that the academy will benefit many villages in the years to come.

