

# Conversations Today

*Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises*

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Photo: Marie Banu

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About Anandam - a home for the abandoned elderly in Chennai



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should believe in himself."**  
An exclusive interview with  
Shri N. Mathivanan IAS



## From the Editor

Dear Friend,

There is no joy greater than the Joy of giving. We live in such a busy, fast-paced, instant-everything culture and we often forget about those who need our attention.

Providing for one's relatives comes more naturally than reaching out to strangers. Nevertheless, it is worth to be kind to people outside the family. Anonymous benevolence directed to causes, unlike people, can give nothing in return, but it certainly makes us feel good. Our simple act of kindness means a lot to people as they see that you took the time to make them feel special.

Work "giving" into your budget and be realistic about how much you can donate in a year. That money will make a difference to a charity, big or small. If you do not have funds to spare, donate time instead. There are several charities that need just your time!

We have been featuring several charities in Conversations Today and hope that at least one of them has inspired you to give.

Marie Banu

# The Wooden Bowl

A frail old man went to live with his son, daughter-in-law, and four-year old grandson. The old man's hands trembled, his eyesight was blurred, and his step faltered. The family ate together at the table. But the elderly grandfather's shaky hands and failing sight made eating difficult. Peas rolled off his spoon onto the floor. When he grasped the glass, milk spilled on the tablecloth.

The son and daughter-in-law became irritated with the mess. "We must do something about father," said the son. "I've had enough of his spilled milk, noisy eating, and food on the floor." So the husband and wife set a small table in the corner. There, Grandfather ate alone while the rest of the family enjoyed dinner. Since Grandfather had broken a dish or two, his food was served in a wooden bowl! When the family glanced in Grandfather's direction, sometime he had a tear in his eye as he sat alone. Still, the only words the couple had for him were sharp admonitions when he dropped a fork or spilled food.



The four-year-old watched it all in silence.

One evening before supper, the father noticed his son playing with wood scraps on the floor. He asked the child sweetly, "What are you making?" Just as sweetly, the boy responded, "Oh, I am making a little bowl for you and Mama to eat your food in when I grow up." The four-year-old smiled and went back to work.

The words so struck the parents so that they were speechless. Then tears

started to stream down their cheeks. Though no word was spoken, both knew what must be done.

That evening the husband took Grandfather's hand and gently led him back to the family table. For the remainder of his days he ate every meal with the family. And for some reason, neither husband nor wife seemed to care any longer when a fork was dropped, milk spilled, or the tablecloth soiled.

—Source: [moralstories.org](http://moralstories.org)

ADD SPARKLE TO THE SEASON WITH A  
TOUCH OF THE ORIENT AT **China Town**  
A SIP OF SCINTILLATING SPAIN AT **Zara**  
A TINGE OF EXOTIC THAILAND AT **Benjarong**  
A MESMERISING SENSE OF NORTH INDIA  
AT **COPPER CHIMNEY** A SPLASH OF COASTAL FRESHNESS  
AT **Kokum** A MÉLANGE OF SPICES AT **ENTÉ KERALAM**  
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# Sustainable Technology With A Twist

**A**ddressing the much voiced concerns of sanitation in the Indian Railways is a Herculean effort of sorts, and clearly enterprises think twice before entering the squeamish world of toilet-revamps.

“Everyone’s day begins with the requirement of water and sanitation, so isn’t it easily the most important thing?” asks Namita, who heads Banka Bioloo, a one-of-a-kind environmental enterprise that is changing the way we see the average toilet. A textile science graduate from Lady Irwin College, Delhi University and a Post Graduate in Jewellery Designing, manufacturing and appraising, Namita is a first generation entrepreneur in her family. The initial brush with the business world began with diamond jewellery designing and manufacturing in 1999 in Surat. Wildly successful, the business continued for almost 8 years where she brought the concept of customized diamond jewellery that suited all pockets. The business was very revolutionary in the way that the dream of owning and wearing a diamond had become a reality with her clients of all strata, and making accessibility a priority is something she still continues to follow.

While pursuing a weekend certificate program in Social Entrepreneurship at Center for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) at Hyderabad in 2009, her mind opened to the wonders of social enterprise. “I came across social entrepreneurship and met people who inspired me to work towards betterment of the environment and people, and to also take it as a full-time profession. To be honest, it changed my outlook on how social enterprises work, and the faculty that we get to interact with has truly made it a turning point in my life. The primary idea that I picked up from them was the motive to connect with people and not earn from them.”

“Once we had to move to Hyderabad, I knew the



existing business model of customisable diamond jewellery would not work for various reasons. So I came up with the idea of print cartridge recycling, and Cartridge Café came to being,” she says. But the idea soon went bust, as their franchisees had not marketed or supplied the products efficiently.

Acknowledging her family’s roots in the Railways, she began pursuing the Indian Railways to adopt environmental friendly solutions and services to help effectively manage their resources. A persuasive nudge got her actively working with railway officials and vendors as a liaisoner to improve the sanitation situation in the coaches by continuous

monitoring and attending to the schedules of these toilets on daily basis, all for free.

This helped in improving the once-abysmal state of CDTs (Control Discharge Toilet System) and helped her bag the tender from the Railways for two years in a row, from 2011 to 2013. “The Bio-Loo idea came to me when I started my portable toilet rental service in Hyderabad in 2011. The bio toilet is a system which degrades human waste inside the toilet’s system itself, without having to go through many processes, and the method being used is the most eco-friendly way. Being a very economical idea, it’s also customisable for homes.”

They currently cater to schools, villages, resorts, construction sites, Indian railways and industrial factories. “I learnt that DRDO has a technology which can be utilized for treatment of human waste where one need not empty the waste collection tank, which in turn helps reduce the cost of transporting and disposing the sewage from the location.” This led her to convert her firm to a corporate entity in August 2012 and with the commissions she received, took a giant leap in setting up manufacturing units for Bio loos.

Currently exploring the possibility of including water-waste management in their already fruitful model of human

waste management, Namita has her mind set on revolutionising the untapped potential of effective waste management through eco-friendly technologies.

“We’re also looking at solid-waste management, but as of now it remains tough to make it happen on a large scale level. Right now, we can only work with the Sanitation department of the Government to deal with the issue on a household level.”

Her milestones include winning the Sankalp Award for Excellence in Health, Water and Sanitation Sector, the inauguration of a bioloo project at DRDO Dhamra by the then Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh and the Kovai Outstanding achievement award for Biotechnology. Also a finalist of the Cartier Woman’s Initiative awards, she represents India among 18 finalists and will contend for the award at Paris in October. As for her struggles she says, “I have received much flak for my being a woman in a Marwari household and starting an enterprise on my own. But it doesn’t get to me. I think the most important thing is to not heed to the hurdles in front of you but stay focused on the overall vision that you have.”

—Divya Karthikeyan

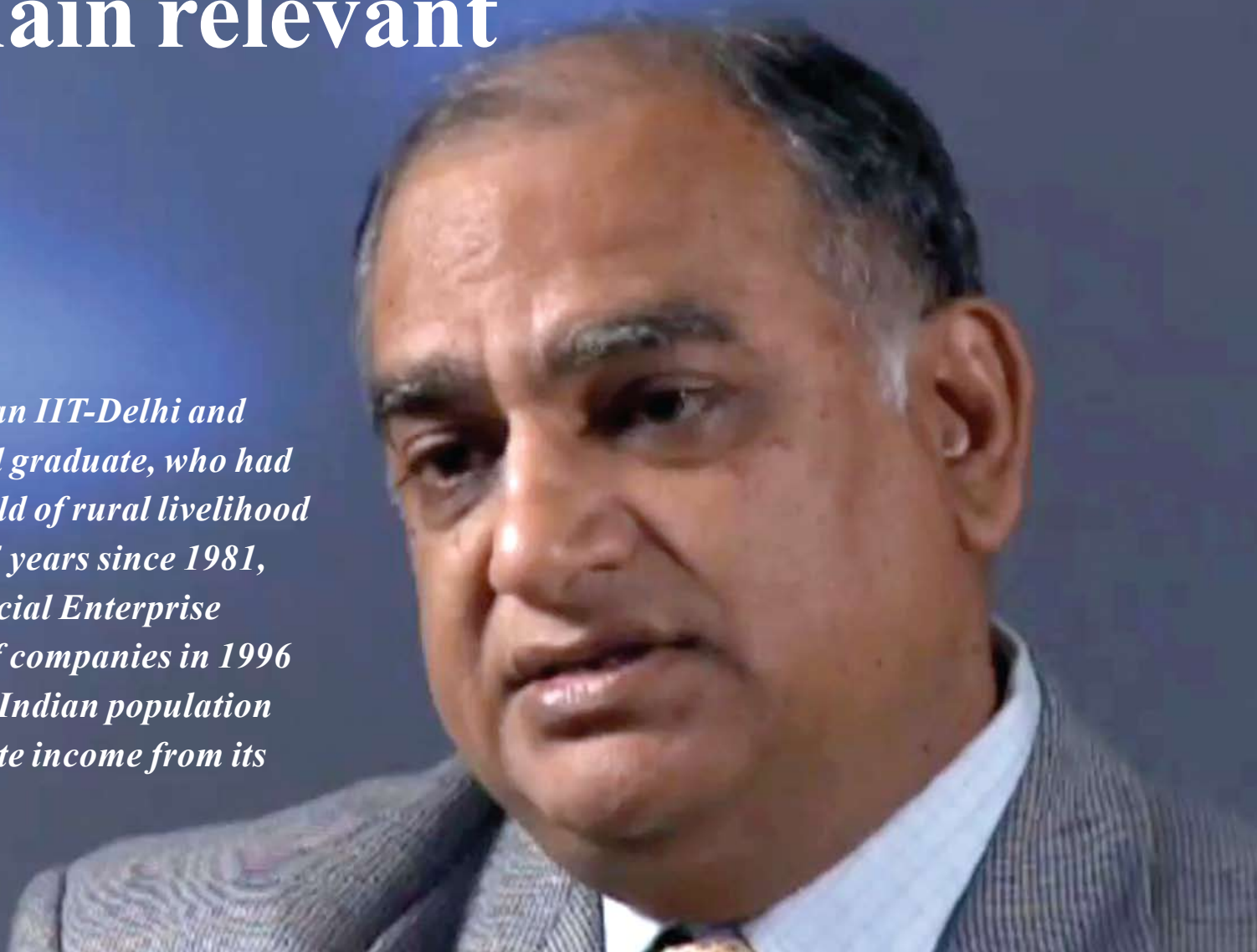
***“I came across social entrepreneurship and met people who inspired me to work towards betterment of the environment and people, and to also take it as a full-time profession.”***





# Restructuring to Remain relevant

*Vijay Mahajan, an IIT-Delhi and IIM-Ahmedabad graduate, who had worked in the field of rural livelihood promotion for 15 years since 1981, formed Basix Social Enterprise Group (Basix) of companies in 1996 to help the rural Indian population generate adequate income from its livelihoods.*



**B**asix Social Enterprise Group started by providing solutions to enhance the income levels of rural India and now runs 13 entities for varying needs.

Vijay Mahajan, an IIT-Delhi and IIM-Ahmedabad graduate, who had worked in the field of rural livelihood promotion for 15 years since 1981, formed Basix Social Enterprise Group (Basix) of companies in 1996 to help the rural Indian population generate adequate income from its livelihoods. He realised that the greatest challenges rural India faced were low productivity, unmanaged risk, low access to market information and financial services, geographical and social exclusion and low-price realisation. He was joined in this venture by co-promoters Bharti Gupta Ramola, Head of Financial Sector Practice, PricewaterhouseCoopers, and Deep Joshi, rural development expert, and a graduate of MIT and the Sloan School, who had co-founded PRADAN, a leading NGO in the field of rural livelihood promotion.

When the Andhra Pradesh ordinance shook the micro-finance sector two years ago, the future of companies working in this space seemed uncertain. Basix, though, restructured its model to maintain its relevance and, today, works in 26 states

of India and 6 countries overseas through its 13 group companies.

## Experiencing the ups and downs

So far, Basix has touched the lives of over two million households in India and about 1,00,000 abroad. "There are several independent studies to show that people have enhanced their incomes, reduced the variability in incomes; avoided shocks due to adverse events, improved their productivity in agriculture and livestock activities; acquired new skills; linked with distant markets for input supply and output sales; and most importantly, organised themselves into producers' groups to do things they could not do individually," says Mahajan.

While the company has been able to achieve this due to its dedicated staff as well as local level leadership/managers, its greatest constraint/challenge was in raising adequate finance especially after the AP ordinance was issued.

To overcome this crisis, Basix stopped further loaning and recovered as much as it could of its previously issued loans so that it could repay banks to whatever extent possible. It sought corporate debt restructuring benefits and moved away

from a pure interest income model to a fee-based model with a focus on maintaining a connect with customers. It established the other entities in its group and moved its trained staff from the MFI division to those entities. It opened nearly 4,000 common services centres with the support of the government and worked with banks to run and manage business correspondent outlets- as many as 2,500 have been opened, since then. It also collaborated with funding agencies to expand overseas while moving the government, RBI and others to favour MFIs with a more supportive policy. Most importantly, it talked to the media to improve the image of the MFI sector. It also had to reduce its operating expenditure by scaling down regular disbursement and reducing its staff to 1,460 from 10,240 in 2010.

## Forming the triad

In 2011, Basix launched a range of specialised entities to address the continuing need for livelihood through a strategy it has termed as the 'livelihood triad'. "In backward regions, underprivileged, in addition to credit, need a whole range of agricultural and business development services such as input supply,

training, technical assistance, market linkages," points out Mahajan. To offer these services in a cost-effective manner, poor households need to be organised into groups, informal associations and sometimes, cooperatives or producer companies. This in turn needs institutional development services, which Basix addresses through the livelihood triad model providing financial inclusion services, agricultural and business development services and institutional development services to its customers.

In backward regions, underprivileged people, in addition to credit, need a whole range of agricultural and business development services such as input supply, training, technical assistance, market linkages.

The holding company manages the investments and builds synergies across its corporate structure while each individual company meets specific needs of target customers in a cost-efficient, sustainable and profitable manner.

"We recognised that the problem of rural poverty in India cannot be solved with just grant support. So since inception, we have operated with commercial funding (loans, equity) and aimed to give a competitive

rate of return to our investors so as to continually access mainstream capital,” explains Mahajan. Basix also uses grants for research, capacity building and public purposes. Individuals, funds such as The Acumen Fund and organisations such as the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation have been part of Basix’s journey.

### Touching lives

Each of the Basix entities provides a specific set of livelihood promotion services for which it has been set up, in sync with the other livelihood triad services.

It provides comprehensive services to the rural poor and urban slum dwellers and has set up a group of financial institutions to provide access to financial services to micro-entrepreneurs and skill building institutions for creation of the jobs for the weaker and marginalised sections of society. Through its learning in India, Basix has also set up livelihood promotion models across the globe to reach out to the women, poor and disadvantaged especially in least developed countries. It is already working in Asia-Pacific and African regions.

Each entity is expected to earn enough to be sustainable so that the services being rendered to the customer continue to be delivered without interruption.

Interest and fee income for various services it renders to its customers; interest on micro-credit and fees for various technical support services rendered are some of the revenue streams. “The poor are willing to pay as they see value in the services they receive which leads to enhanced productivity and incomes; needless to add, every effort is made

by Basix to ensure that the interest or fee charged is as low as possible so that poor can afford to pay the same,” stresses Mahajan. While the margin of earning is very slim, the volumes are large to make the model viable.

### Riding on success

Basix has several milestones to its credit: it pioneered the SHG bank linkage model, introduced micro-insurance, pioneered the design of weather index-based crop insurance, was the first in the sector to carry out a portfolio securitisation deal in 2003 and has won several awards including the 2009 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Deep Joshi, Director, Basix. Mahajan was selected among 60 outstanding social entrepreneurs of the world at the World Economic Forum, Davos in 2003, among “the 50 most influential Indians” by Business Week, Asia in 2009, and among “the twenty Indians who will lead India’s reforms this decade”, by the Financial Express in 2011.

Having now steadied its course with its livelihood triad model, Basix aims to become an engine of inclusive growth in India and in other developing countries across the globe by working synergistically with user communities, governments, banks, technology solutions providers, funding organisations, civil society and others to create an equitable and just society.

—S. Meera

*This article was first published in The Smart CEO Magazine (www.thesmartceo.in)*

### The 13 companies of Basix, function broadly under four categories:

1. Financial Inclusion Services companies—BhartiyaSamruddhi Finance Limited (BSFL), Krishna BhimaSamruddhi Local Area Bank (KBSLAB) and Basix Sub-K iTransactions to offer credit, savings, micro insurance, micro pension and last mile transactions services.
2. Livelihood Promotion Services companies—Agricultural and livestock development, skill building, and urban solid waste management.
3. Consulting Services companies: Inclusive Banking, institutional development both in India and least developed nations around the globe; energy, environment, climate change and adaptation with particular focus to mitigate the risk and minimise impact on the underprivileged and their livelihoods.
4. Non-profit affiliates—for incubating models in livelihood promotion, knowledge building through action research, R&D, HRD for the sector as a whole.

## Launch of PGDSEM with LIVE-Loyola

**L**IVE-Loyola and CSIM launched a one-year weekend programme, Postgraduate Diploma in Social Enterprise Management (PGDSEM). This is a cross-disciplinary programme that combines both business and social sciences. PGDSEM equips the participant with broad-based business skills; empowers them with key innovation strategies and tools; and provides exposure to underlying global and local social concerns.

The inauguration of this course was held on 24th August, 2013 at Loyola College, Nungambakkam, Chennai. Shri P. N. Subramanian, Managing Trustee of MSDS, Shri Deenadayalan, Governing Council Member, CSIM, Smt. Latha Suresh, Hony. Director, CSIM, Smt. Marie Banu, Director, CSIM, and Shri Rajendran,

Coordinator of LIVE-Loyola attended the programme.

19 candidates from varied backgrounds have enrolled.

At the end of the course, a one-month internship in a social enterprise will be offered to each candidate to facilitate project report preparation. Besides, hand-holding support will be offered to participants who wish to launch their own social enterprise, and scholarships will be offered to deserving candidates.

The programme is being held at Loyola College, Nungambakkam, Chennai on Saturdays from 1PM to 6 PM. and on every second Sunday of the month from 10 AM to 1 PM.

*If you wish to learn more about this course, please contact Lakshmi at 9840194810 or visit [www.csim.in](http://www.csim.in).*



## Editorial

Latha Suresh  
Marie Banu





# God's own Home

*“Today’s food is being sponsored by a donor. Hence, vada and payasam is being served along with lunch. It is almost every day our elders get to eat such good food, as we have donors supporting us regularly.”*

There are lots of experiences and special days in one’s life. I would like to share with you one such experience that I shall never forget—my visit to Anandam, a home for the destitute elderly in Ambattur, Chennai. The few hours I spent here taught me life’s lessons in a subtle way.

Although it was raining heavily, I was determined not to re-schedule my plans as I had already informed Bhageerathy that I would be visiting them.

When I reached the home around 11:30 AM, I was led straight to the dining hall where all the elders were seated. Bhageerathy introduced me to Natarajan and Saraswathi who were busy serving food for the elders. She addressed them as *Appa* and *Amma*, meaning father and mother. She said that they were as loving and caring as a parent would be, and it is not just her but everyone in the home who address them so.

“Have you had your lunch?” was the instant question posed by Natarajan.

“I had my breakfast just before I arrived here. But, I would not mind coffee though,” I responded politely.

“Sure! After I have finished serving food,” he said.

I requested Natarajan and Saraswathi to continue their work and stepped aside to click pictures.

I overheard Natarajan speak to the elders as he served rice and felt as though I was witnessing a domestic function.

“Do you want an extra serving of rice?”

“Please have some more *sambhar*?”

“Shall I pour some more butter milk?”

“Is the *payasam* tasty?”

The conversations seemed endless.

I noticed a few who sat without expressions, while there were more who were happy when I clicked their pictures.

One of the grandmothers—Kalavathi—pulled me by my hand and asked me to sit beside her. I was touched by her kindness and told her that I shall wait for her outside the dining hall.

I entered the kitchen and found a lady making hot vadas. “Today’s food is being sponsored by a donor. Hence, *vada* and *payasam* is being served along with lunch. It is almost every day our elders get to eat such good food, as we have donors supporting us regularly,” said Bhageerathy.

The kitchen was fully equipped and the store room had enough stock. There were grinders and also a flour mill



disappeared one day. We tried our best to find him, but failed,” said Radhakrishnan sorrowfully.

“How did you know about Anandam?” I enquired.

“At first, we settled in an ashram at Tirupati. We did not like staying here as we found a portion allocated for leprosy affected persons in the same premise. One of the residents suggested

Anandam, and gave us this address. I think that it is God who sent us here. We feel as if we are living in God’s own home,” said Radhakrishnan with tear-filled eyes.

I then traced my way to Bhageerathy’s office and spent some time with her to know more about Anandam and how it was started.

“I was working for the Indian Bank at Villivakkam and used to manage the pension section. I knew many elders who used to wait in front of the bank since four in the morning to claim their monthly pension. Several of them have complained to me about their children ill-treating them and taking away the little pension money they had. I used to wonder about those elders who did not have any source of income and wanted to do something for them,” she said.

“I shared my idea of starting an old age home with few of my friends, and we decided to focus on the deserted elderly. We went looking out for a rented house, and it was then one of my bank contacts offered to give her house to run the old age home free of rent.”

“We first started with three inmates, and slowly expanded to two more rented homes in the vicinity to house 20 elders. After a few years, we decided to build our own home and mobilized funds from our contacts to purchase this 15-ground plot at Ambattur. Now, we are able to house 100 senior citizens who have no living children and do not have any income. For me, each of them is my parent or grandparent; and I feel treated like a child here,” she added.

Natarajan entered the room with a steaming cup of filter coffee and a



*“One of the residents suggested Anandam, and gave us this address. I think that it is God who sent us here.”*



bowlful of *sundal*. He waited until I finished the coffee and asked if I liked it.

“It tastes extraordinary because it is prepared with love and affection,” I said truthfully.

While Anandam is entirely managed by the Trustees and the residents, two caretakers are employed to take care of elders who are bedridden. All the elders go through a master health checkup at Sundaram Medical Foundation before they are admitted, and are given six sets of new clothes every year.

“We call them our parents. Therefore, we don’t want to give them old clothes to wear. The children in the neighbourhood visit the home during evenings and the grandparents enjoy teaching them. Students who had scored below 30 marks are now class toppers,” said Bhageerathy.

There is so much potential in these elders. All they need is love and care. We don’t need any special day to make our parents or grandparents make them feel their worth. If you have never told them how much you care for them, do say it before it is too late!

—Marie Banu



Photos: Marie Banu



# Convergence of Needs and Capacities



**H**ow does it sound to learn about professionals from different walks working together in a community to make it sustainable and self-reliant? All doubts about this conception are grounded by EWB – India (Engineers Without Borders – India), which is an evolving network of professionals striving to create a movement for ‘constructive change’. This is probably the microcosm of what we all envisage in the name of good governance.

“EWB India was established in 2005 by Prof. Ali Uddin Ansari of Muffakham Jah College of Engineering and Technology (MJCET) and friends in Hyderabad,” says Dr Ashok Agarwal, Chairman, EWB-India who is also its Co-founder. EWB – India’s work intends to encourage students and professionals to take up socially relevant projects that impact those at the bottom rung of the ladder, all during their academic duration itself. Interestingly, different chapters are formed, not by the parent body, but by the students or professionals who intend to bring about a change in the present situation.

“We try to create an interface for technology, need, professional capabilities and aspirations to learn to complement each other, in the process of bringing about sustainable rural development,” he elaborates. The heterogeneity of individuals who come forward to join this effort is also reflected in the Board of Directors and Advisory Board, which are comprised of individuals from the fields of Environmental Sciences, Human Resources, Telecommunication Engineering, Information Technology, Civil Engineering, Mining Engineering, Economics and others.

Here is how it works – a student or a professional who is socially concerned and wishes to contribute towards the development of rural and backward urban communities registers with EWB-India. Upon registration, the individual is connected to the already existing chapter or

a new chapter is established depending on the interests expressed. Thereafter, the team is encouraged to conceive, prepare and implement projects for the communities. All along, they will be guided by information and networking support from EWB-India, in addition to the workshops and conferences organized by the national and international offices and panel of experts provided to mentor the students.

Initially, it sounded a bit complicated. Ashok clears the air, convincing that the best solution to existing problems can come only from the concerned communities. That the involvement of youth from the very community makes the execution of the identified solution easy and effective is a given. “EWB only facilitates the process of bringing these youth on a common platform. The members are given the liberty to identify and propose projects that meet the needs of food, clean water, shelter, sanitation, education, health and livelihood,” he adds.

Youngsters today are urged to do different things at the same time - volunteer, undertake vocational training courses, etc. So, how easily do they identify themselves with EWB – India’s mission might be a concern to any stranger. “EWB works with a long term perspective in mind. The idea is to create a network of mutual help and capacity building, with a responsible attitude towards nature’s resources. The same problem might require different approaches in different communities. Capacity building and mutual help comes in very handy to help the communities identify and execute the solution”.

Some of the recent projects being implemented include solar power plant at an orphanage in Hyderabad, converting agricultural waste into Fuel Briquettes in Madhya Pradesh, solar lighting at Sirohi village, Haryana by providing individual lighting to about 500 families, creating a self sustainable village economy with economic analysis and

background research in West Bengal culminating in the development of a sustainable action plan, vocational training for women in Faridabad to support family incomes, etc. “We confront the real issues troubling and people’s development with small, yet effective attempts,” remarks Dr Ashok.

Over the years, it can be seen that it has evolved into a global network of students and professionals engaged in a large number of projects that promise a better tomorrow. Environment sustainability rural development, and upliftment of backward communities are terms that may not augur well together in the vocabulary of industrial growth, given the scenario in our country. Nevertheless, ‘putting the last first’ seems to have been the guiding principle for EWB – India’s work, where no member in a community must go without food, water, shelter and other basic needs.

For Ashok, working with the communities is met with mixed responses. “Quite often the community takes it as a charity without really owing the initiative and supporting it from their side. The critical issue here is effective participation of the community, which includes financial participation by the community to some extent to ensure the sustainability of the project over the next few years. As you know, it is very challenging,” he admits. So what keeps them going? “When we look at the smile on the faces of young children in the orphanage and the children in the Government ZPS High school for the infrastructure we had set up; the tribal community that never had any power earlier and now has the power on the streets and in homes, we are moved. There is fresh energy to work for many more such communities and concerns”.

Beginning with the formation of a chapter in a locality or the collaboration with an NGO to work in a time bound manner to receiving consent from the community to go ahead with the projects, every step is a challenge that members of EWB-India are facing. Undeterred, they are determined to get this network growing, fostering the convergence of needs and capacities in every community, for development that is sustainable and responsive to nature.

—Shanmuga Priya. T





# From The Bottom-Up

**Art, sports, theatre, music and dance: what Pudiyador has successfully managed to do in 12 years is introduce underprivileged children to the kind of education that only a privileged few were able to enjoy.**

**T**he story of how Prof Narayanan and his son, Manickam, were quite taken aback on witnessing a ten-year-old mechanic mend their car in 2001, is well-known. In fact, their “unsettling” encounter with Muthu, a little boy who was supposed to attend school but was working as a young mechanic, led the father-son duo to take their baby-steps towards establishing Pudiyador, twelve years ago. More than a decade has passed since that evening at the mechanic, and the duo still hasn’t lost sight of their mission: to bring about after-school academic help, to encourage children to pursue extra-curricular activities and to build character through various interactive means. In fact, it is this continuing mission that has served many a young child in realizing potential and leading better lives.

“In a nutshell, in order to bring about all this, we first need to ensure that our little children stay healthy,” says Chiai Uruguchi, Programme Director at Pudiyador. “What is health? The World Health Organisation defines Health as staying physically, psychologically and socially fit. And as part of our efforts at Pudiyador, we ensure our kids are physically healthy by taking good care of them and their dietary requirements, we take care of their social health by way of interactions and getting their parents involved in their growth process and finally, our counselors ensure that psychological wellbeing is guaranteed, which takes care of that last element of their health.”

Quite simply, Pudiyador has taken upon itself the mission to bring about sensitivity in underprivileged children, even as it strives to encourage uniqueness and the child’s natural intelligence. The NGO has put its best foot forward in bringing about such qualities from a child by way of comprehensive classroom and extra-curricular environments after class. “The focus is on growth and the need to provide basic healthcare for these children, and to sensitize their parents to the need for this as well,” says Chiai.

Over time, three centres were established to cater to the needs of such children. The first was established in 2001 itself, at Ramapuram. Run by Prof Narayanan and Manickam, the centre began with a small gathering of five children, but is second-home to nearly 40 children today. When Pudiyador opened its second centre in 2005, at Urapakkam, the number of children at this centre was

60. Just two years later, a third centre was opened in Adyar, on the same model of the Urapakkam centre. In fact, the Adyar centre of Pudiyador is of special significance since it plays host to

able to enjoy. “In fact, we conduct comprehensive programmes to monitor the progress of these children, even as some of our very own teachers undergo learning experiences in how we ought to

to make each centre self-sustainable, and thus hand over the operations of such centres to the local community within a five-to-ten-year period. And it isn’t just children that the NGO focuses on. Programme modules on substance abuse awareness and adult literacy are also conducted from time to time, even as means to improve economic conditions of families are also being worked on.

Needless to say, help is always welcome. Donations to the NGO by way of funds, good or services are invited, even as specific emphasis is laid on manpower: full-time staff and volunteers. Books for the library, electronic equipment like old laptops, and chairs and desks are also some of the requirements of the NGO, today.

From a little club in Prof Narayanan’s



students from the University of Michigan who assist volunteers of Pudiyador in running this centre. After having served at Pudiyador for close to 7 months now, Chiai is also slowly learning the ropes in running the day-to-day affairs of the NGO. “It has been such a learning experience for me,” she remarks.

Art, sports, theatre, music and dance: what Pudiyador has successfully managed to do in 12 years is introduce underprivileged children to the kind of education that only a privileged few were

go about this process of transition,” explains Chiai. No doubt, the very attempt to provide underprivileged children with an education that they haven’t had the privilege of experiencing, is perhaps Pudiyador’s noblest initiative. The NGO’s centres work from 5.30 to 8.30pm on weekdays, while weekends see activity at these centres from 9am to 6pm.

Interestingly enough, the transition doesn’t stop with just the kind that is imparted to children of the local community. One of Pudiyador’s aims is

backyard to a fledging NGO today, there’s no denying that Pudiyador has come a long way. “But our short-and-long-term objectives continue to focus on ensuring that our children are healthy, and only by way of this health can we bring about some solid change in their lives and academic careers,” says Chiai, “And being healthy essentially includes staying physically, psychologically and socially fit.” In a sense, that’s what has become Pudiyador’s standout feature: that beyond the need to bring about societal change, and educate the underprivileged, it’s the methodology to work from the bottom-upwards that has been this organization’s most prized asset. And for that, this NGO looks all set to go places in what Chiai calls a “holistic approach to change”. Being holistic, more often than not, includes being thorough. And in the attempt to bring about change on a personal and societal level, there’s no better substitute for thoroughness, today.



# Conversations with Shri Ramana Maharishi

An interesting conversations with Shri Ramana Maharishi with his disciple.

**D.:** The world is materialistic. What is the remedy for it?

**M.:** Materialistic or spiritual, it is according to your outlook. *Drishtim jnanamayim kritva, Brahma mayam pasyet jagat* — Make your outlook right. The Creator knows how to take care of His Creation.

**D.:** What is the best thing to do for ensuring the future?

**M.:** Take care of the present, the future will take care of itself.

**D.:** The future is the result of the present. So, what should I do to make it good? Or should I keep still?

**M.:** Whose is the doubt? Who is it that wants a course of action? Find the doubter. If you hold the doubter the doubts will disappear. Having lost hold of the Self the thoughts afflict you; the world is seen, doubts arise, also anxiety for the future. Hold fast to the Self, these will disappear.

**D.:** How to do it?

**M.:** This question is relevant to matters of non-self, but not to the Self. Do you doubt the existence of your own Self?

**D.:** No. But still, I want to know how the Self could be realised. Is there any method leading to it?

**M.:** Make effort. Just as water is got by boring a well, so also you realise the Self by investigation.

**D.:** Yes. But some find water readily and others with difficulty.

**M.:** But you already see the moisture on the surface. You are hazily aware of the Self. Pursue it. When the effort ceases the Self shines forth.

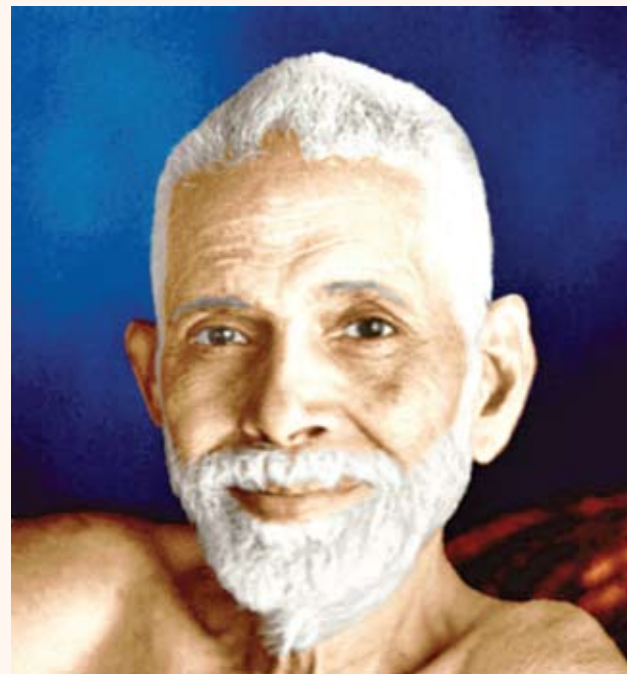
**D.:** How to train the mind to look within?

**M.:** By practice. The mind is the intelligent phase leading to its own destruction, for Self to manifest.

**D.:** How to destroy the mind?

**M.:** Water cannot be made dry. Seek the Self; the mind will be destroyed.

—Excerpted from Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi



## Belongingness Dimensions – Nurturing Creativity

One of the key roles of HR in any organization is to ensure that the talent and creativity of the people in the organization is kept alive. There is no bigger loss to an organization than losing the spirit and energy of the people and moving towards monotonous life. Many times it is assumed that by doing a couple of motivational and inspiration activities every now and then the people's energy and spirit can be pepped up. This is a myth. The pep up is temporary and very soon the routine sets in again. This requires the HR to look into building a culture that enables the people to find themselves and blossom. It has to be a process of evolution with highest capacity to respond to the context with what is needed than what one wants to give. Creativity then is an outcome of such existence than a process to be administered and followed.

Social organizations have a very high level of dynamism in their work processes. They have to be responsive to the changing context in their interactions with the world around. If the creative channels of the people working in the social organization is not opened the sustainability of the organization will be in question. Creativity is not for creativity sake. But it is to be anchored in the vision and values of the organization. There are certain values and processes that need to prevail in the organizational climate and culture for creativity in people to be sustained.

Creativity is considered many times as something that is extraordinary and as a special quality. Every child is born with creativity to learn and grow to manage life right from birth. With the right mindset and appropriate stimulating environment creativity blossoms and shows forth in

every action that one performs.

**The values that facilitate creativity to blossom are**

- the ability to observe
- willing to receive the inputs with openness
- ability to introspect
- ability to let go and be with the flow
- common sense which is highly uncommon many a time
- ability to be involved and focused in present moment
- critical thinking and fine blend of logic to apply appropriately
- deep love and passion in whatever they pursue
- being essence focused and change sensitive
- high level of context sensitivity
- ability to connect, correlate and create

**The values that restrict creativity are**

- being conditioned to the processes and methodology from past knowledge and experiences
- being rigid and unwilling to let go of the known to move into the unknown
- feeling of inferiority or superiority
- getting caught in ritualism and fear of facing implications
- avoidance of conflicts and problems
- too much adherence to form and being attached to form and structures
- looking for prescriptive solutions to



solve problems and issues

The HR has to ensure through its various activities that the facilitative values are integrated into the organizational culture. To integrate the same they have to derive the beliefs that will enable these values to be practiced in the functioning of the organization. These values need attention and appropriate encouragement every time they guide the actions of the employees in the organization.

The challenges in social organization need high level of creativity right from resource utilization to execution of projects. Since social entrepreneurs are primarily change makers they face a resistant society many a time. As an organization, creativity is needed in several dimensions that directly impacts organizational sustainability like cost; quality; service; cycle time; demand management and so on.

Creativity is the ability to detect the extraordinary from ordinary. It is actually a matter of perspective. It is in the way of thinking, the lens through which every issue is being looked at in the organization. The issue and problems do not go through a change when creativity is applied, but the treatment to it and converting it into learning opportunities goes through a change.

For creativity to be stimulated, passion should run in veins of the organization. While on one end social entrepreneurs are charged with vision and passion, the challenge is how to make this a part of the entire organization. For this, the organization should give enough space and

freedom for people to explore themselves and their capabilities. They may have a main stream work that is designated to them but there can also be spaces where they lend themselves as volunteers to connect and further the organizational vision. The idea of informal discussion forums; spaces where people can pen their ideas and circulate; space to explore and experiment different methodology and processes and an environment which is appreciative of stretch and contributions.

For creativity to be optimal, one has to fall in love completely with what one is doing. When there is love there is highest level of creativity that is ignited. Creativity thrives when one is not afraid to make mistakes. If one is not afraid one is free to flow out of the box and accept different perspectives. Creativity springs from being child-like; have a sense of awe in life and a wonder that never ceases to die. Every problem is seen as a space to grow and push to evolve. It is the critical role of HR and Management to ensure creative minds and loving hearts beat as away of life in the organizations aiming to influence society and people.

### Reflections:

1. To what extent does the organizational culture allow free wheel thinking and out of box solutions?
2. What are various discussion spaces that exist in the organization to share thoughts, emotions and ideas?
3. To what extent is creativity appreciated and what processes ensure creativity is identified and used?

— Dr. Kalpana Sampath, PhD



# Successful experiments in integration

Whenever, stake holders discuss about integration and mainstreaming, the beneficiaries with special needs are trained or prepared to adapt to the new scene. However, practices to ensure their acceptance by the other half is usually forgotten. In this column, we will get to know about Ms. Diana Tholoor, Founder, Chrysallis Performance Arts Centre for the Challenged and her efforts along this unbeaten path.

Integration to her was a multidimensional concept. "Failure to capture its significance in totality might affect the challenged children rather than creating a support system for them," she says very consciously. The birth of Chrysallis is a very interesting encounter between her Christmas parties for children and the idea to help differently abled children to perform. During the party organized for 300 children from low economic backgrounds, a child affected by polio and cerebral palsy wanted to join the musical chairs game. In spite of her trying to dissuade him, he went on and... WON! "Hanumanth was the fastest, moved around in lightening speed, with his face communicating nothing but pure joy of participation," she says.

This was the critical incident. She was more than sure that she wanted to do something for these children.

Diana is a theatre person who works through movement, dance, drama for children with different challenges. The first performance 20 challenged children, many of whom were blind, became a huge success. Today, she has more than 150 stage productions, social films, radio shows and art programmes to her credit, all in the span of a decade. She has written original scripts for Special Need Schools and has directed and staged theatre performance bringing on stage over 320 performers in a single production. "The sense of participation brought in by these performances adds to their confidence levels. The kids will always want more and never less," she smiles in her own characteristic manner.

Essentially Chrysallis started in 1999 as an outreach programme teaching dance and drama to children from Bangalore Special Schools. Eventually the network she tried to build up paid off. She introduced 'Christmas with Chrysallis' to bring all the children to a single event. With only 2000 children in the first two years, it presently reaches out to more than 1 lakh children across India's metro cities. Friends and individuals are contacted to send gender neutral gifts for children costing no more than 25 rupees to Chrysallis, with a note inside, mentioning to age and gender of the recipient. The volunteer teams wrap it and distribute the gifts to the children.

Talking of volunteers, I must mention her open appeal in the blog: "Every moment of every day - I think about how to change



perceptions on the abilities of children with challenges. Join me on this journey and help make a difference." Evidently her volunteers are her great strength. She aims to create a network of youngsters who believe in the abilities of challenged children and spread the message of equal opportunity. Chrysallis also organizes volunteer enrichment programmes to create awareness on various issues concerning children with special needs.

Besides her engagement with Chrysallis, she also takes time out to direct and choreograph plays on causes taken up by various organizations. 'Lion King' with Spastics Society of Karnataka, 'Alladin' with the Vidya Niketan, 'Who loves you?' (an original stage musical) for the launch of the Alpha and Omega theatre are just a few. In 2003, she staged a play titled 'Bhavana' for the awareness campaign of Sudatta, an adoptive parents association. The film undertakings by her are on the topics of Suicide Prevention, Mental Illness, Adoption of a special child, Foster Care, Adoption of a child with HIV/Aids, Abuse of a Male Child and others.

She also organized a programme bringing children with and without challenges, and teachers together to create awareness on the needs of special children. This was part of a process to evolve a module or a strategy to integrate children with disabilities with regular schools in future. "In an attempt to expose children

and teachers to stark realities, 15 children were paired with disabled children and six teachers were asked to teach them for 10 minutes each. A sign language expert explained what was being taught for the benefit of the children with hearing disabilities. At the end of the history class, two children with visual disabilities could not say anything about what they had learnt, and apparently children with hearing disabilities had found the class was going too fast and hardly understood what was being taught," she recounts.

With sufficient experience convincing her on the need to bring children with and without challenges together, she launched a project in 2006. "The Chrysallis Power of One" was a 180 day long campaign raising awareness on integration of children with and without challenges across 33 states and union capitals in the country. "The intention was to inculcate peer acceptance, social interaction, fellowship and understanding among the children. They cannot be peers unless they are encouraged and taught to play and study together. We have to start from them," she adds. The various paintings that these children had made portrayed the importance of special relationships, says a visitor at the exhibition of these paintings.

Besides arts and drama, sport is also used as a medium of integration. In 2007, Chrysallis decided to organize the first of its kind carom and chess tournaments for

children and adults from both the groups. A team was formed with one challenged individual and a normal person.

Whenever children with different challenges and those without any come together to play or perform on stage, it certainly becomes a sight of happiness, paying off for all the hard work invested through various programmes and the numerous rehearsals they had been through. More often, it is very hard to realize that children performing are challenged. But for Diana, all this was not hard. "Inculcating discipline was. We try to focus on articulation and sign language to convey stories. Stories, Diana says, with a simple line and message can really do well, leaving an impact on the audience.

Having learnt the holistic approach through performance arts that she has evolved to bring about integration in every sense, it does not come as a surprise to know that she is the recipient of numerous awards like Kalasha Women Achiever Award for Social Work by the Inner Wheel Club, Sadguru Gnanananda Award for Woman in Social Work in 2004, and Shrishti Special Academy for Social Excellence in 2003.

What all of us can do for this integration oriented initiative to succeed is spread the word, send Christmas gifts, volunteer and wish them all success in their endeavours!

—Shanmuga Priya. T



## “Anyone who wants to become an IAS officer should believe in himself.”

**Shri N. Mathivanan IAS shares with Marie Banu the reason for increase in crimes in our society today.**

**S**hri N. Mathivanan IAS is the Director of Social Defence department. He has held several portfolios, including that of Director of Sugar and Managing Director of the Tamil Nadu Sugar Corporation; Collector of Salem and Madurai Districts.

*In an exclusive interview, Shri N. Mathivanan IAS shares with Marie Banu the reason for increase in crimes in our society today.*

### What you think are important social issues today?

Perception varies from person to person. For me, the basic social issues are yet to be addressed and solved. Basic requirements like safe drinking water, good roads, and food for all; so called roti, kapada aur makaan; though we claim to be super power in 2020, there is still a lot to be done. Unless and otherwise we solve the basic necessities of our citizens, whatever we do will not sustain. These are the basic social issues as far as I am concerned.

### Increase in crimes in our society today. Your thoughts?

Predominantly, it is the IT revolution which is the cause for increase in crimes today. Ten years ago, you will not find murders related to illicit relationships.

You would have heard about a married woman Rubini in Cuddalore whose husband Sampath worked as Assistant Professor at Annamalai University. Rubini got in touch with Rajesh through a missed call. They started living together, and planned to end the life of Sampath who was in their way. Both of them are now in Cuddalore prison for charge of murder. It all started with a “missed call”.

### About the vocational training programs that are coordinated at Juvenile home?

Children are imparted with vocational training such as plumbing and electrical; videography and photography; dress making and tailoring; fabric painting; book binding, handicraft; embroidery; computer; and baking.

We have skilled trainers for each of the programmes. Winners Bakery at Alwarpet provides training for our boys in baking. The boys are offered a stipend and they have offered to provide them with placement once they leave the juvenile home.

### A touching incident at the Juvenile home which you wish to share?

During my routine visits to the Juvenile home for girls, I saw a 14-year-old mother. This girl had eloped with

a boy who had promised to take care of her. Both her parents as well as the boy have deserted her. It was painful to see her.

Most of the juveniles have been cheated and poverty is the basic reason.

### What do you think can be done to reduce repeated offenders at Juvenile Home?

Once they come to the juvenile home, they are counseled. The aim of the government is less or no institutionalization. They should remain with their family and community. In many cases, lack of supervision, family quarrels, alcoholism, and drug abuse are the reasons for the juveniles to relapse. It is up to the parents to take care of their children.

During the trial period, when the trafficking victims are taken to the court, the pimps try to change their mind and influence them to return to sex trade. Now, the government has sanctioned 20 lakh rupees to facilitate video conferencing facility, so that the girl need not have to commute from prison to court. This effort will go a long way to reduce relapse.

### You have held several portfolios. Which of them do you cherish most?

As you know, I served in Raj Bhavan

for 10 years. I joined in 1995 when Dr. M. Channa Reddy was the Governor of Tamil Nadu. Unless and until you have an unblemished record in service, it is difficult to serve in such highly sensitive positions. I served seven Governors, and worked here until Shri Surjit Singh Barnala's period.

This part of my career was most enriching to me. Although, work per se was comparatively less, the stress was high. Anything may happen any moment, and I had to keep my television always on. I was the first to inform the Governor about any sensitive information happening in our country/state.

A lot of interesting things have also happened during my time at Raj Bhavan. Personally, I feel that Dr. Channa Reddy was the greatest personality I had ever seen. He had an amazing memory and it was a wonderful experience working with him.

### What is your advice for IAS aspirants?

Sincere hard work is IAS. Anyone who wants to become an IAS officer should believe in himself.

Nowadays, the efficiency of the aspirants is far better than yesteryears. There is a lot of IAS coaching centres and publications which is very helpful for IAS aspirants today.



Photo: Marie Banu