

Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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About Team Everest and its activities



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act towards providing a quality
education for all."**

An exclusive interview with
Shri. Faizal. B. Abdul Cader,
Trustee, Mohammed Sathak Trust

From the Editor

Dear Friend,

Come September, we remember all our teachers who are instrumental in whom we are today. It has been aptly said: “A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.” A teacher is one who plays the role of an educator, guide, inspirational guru, and a friend. While gently nudging the ‘slow learners’ to climb the steep learning curve, the teacher also engages with the ‘bright minds’ to delve deeper into concepts and thereby meet their need to be ahead of others.

The role of a good teacher is to tap the fertile mind of young children and plant the seed of curiosity in them. This inculcates the values of self-learning, exploration, and philosophical inquiry and leads them to dream and aspire of a future which they can carve. Parents and a few friends are also teachers nonetheless who help us to shape our future.

Our salutations to all teachers who use themselves as bridges over which they invite their students to cross, then having facilitated their crossing, joyfully collapse, encouraging them to create bridges of their own.

The stories of the change agents in this issue play the role of teachers who facilitate the disadvantaged children to dream big.

Happy reading!

Latha Suresh

“Culture is the widening of the mind and of the spirit.” —Jawaharlal Nehru

From a Positive Energy lens, Culture is ‘SEEN’ in the way relationships exist:

- Relationship that we have with ourselves
- Relationship that we have with others

For example, organizational culture is the collective behavior of individuals who are part of an organization and the meanings that the people attach to their actions. Culture includes the organizational values, vision, norms, working language, systems, symbols, beliefs, and habits. It is also the pattern of such collective behaviors and assumptions that are taught to new organizational members as a way of perceiving, and even thinking and feeling. Organizational culture affects the way individuals and groups interact with each other, with clients, and with their stakeholders. Similarly, the culture of a group, family, community, state, nation, etc., functions in the same way. So, culture is the expression of the distinct cultural patterns of societies.

Some experiential dimensions of culture include:

- Language
- Food
- Dress
- Customs
- Social Collectives
- Status & Roles

However, there is a foundation below these experiential dimensions, which forms the basis for the overt behaviors and interactions. The foundational dimensions below the iceberg include:

- Values – which shape one’s beliefs and ideologies
- Attitudes – which result in the framing of norms
- Assumptions – which help determine one’s priorities
- Perceptions – which trigger certain feelings

As is obvious, the dynamics of the foundational dimensions significantly influence and shape the experiential dimensions. Therefore, when we deliberate to deeply examine and embrace certain values, rather than just take what is handed down to us, we are



more likely to form belief systems and ideologies that serve us in our growth and development. Similarly, our attitudes are not cut in stone; they change as we grow. This in turn, helps us scrutinize and question the norms around us, from time to time. And then, our ability to frequently review and ascertain our assumptions supports our pursuit of what we believe in. And yes, our perceptions drive our reality, so we choose the emotions we want to experience. This is an ongoing process of enquiry and review, resulting in making culture more dynamic than static.

When we open ourselves to different cultures and embrace the corresponding experiences with truthfulness, it serves to widen our mind. We are then willing to enquire, clarify, and modify our assumptions and attitudes, as appropriate to the context. We are able to adopt and adapt ourselves to the new aspects of that culture. However, when we approach new cultures by acknowledging the ‘one-ness’ of spirit across people, then we are able to

adopt and integrate into that culture, without becoming overly attached to it or biased of the other. This is true expansion of the spirit.

For an expansion of the mind and spirit while experiencing a new culture, one needs to practice a few Positive Energy rituals:

- Living each present moment in its entirety – When we live in the moment and keep alive our sense of enquiry, we open ourselves to the dynamics of life.
- Experience life without judgments – Be willing to embrace various aspects of life without judgments; judgments and biases interfere with the purity of the experience, which can lead to misinterpretations.
- ‘Un-condition’ the self – We are born free but soon receive conditioning on every aspect of life. Conditioning is indirect experience, served down many generations. Un-conditioning makes one seek direct experiences in life.

Yours Energetically

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

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Seeking Comfort in our Responsibility



Allvin Muthunayagam is an Engineering Graduate from PSG College Coimbatore and has been working with Tata Consultancy Services for 6 years now. This might drive us to conclusions about his weekdays and weekends, as we have always done for 'IT employees'. But Allvin is different and appears as a boy next door. His interest in the development sector has been groomed by multifarious experiences that satisfied his sense of responsibility for the society.

Allvin, like most of us, had no prior knowledge of the development sector and the scope for individuals to contribute their time, talent and resources, other than the customary way of making donations. "My stints in this sector started during my college days. As a member of Youth Red Cross during the first year at College, I took part in organising blood donation camps and raised funds for orphanages, homes for the aged & mentally challenged through charity events and sports competitions," he recounts nostalgically.

As a sophomore, Allvin had much more to come by his way. Being a part of the NSS Unit in college, he got an opportunity to work in the water resources management project in 5 villages in Coimbatore district. Alongside the numerous awareness programmes on water resources management, his team also organised training programmes for men in electrical works, electronics repair, plumbing and embroidery, mat making, and artefacts. The network of self-help-groups formed eventually helped the women take on small entrepreneurial activities. Allvin and his team initiated all this to ensure an alternative livelihood opportunity for the community members, which would in turn make them more capable of sustaining these projects. The State Government of Tamil Nadu recognised their work by awarding them with "Best NSS Unit of the State." This is

when Allvin realised how his service could create a positive impact in society.

With this overwhelming experience pushing him to do more, Allvin had to pause all his engagements in such programmes once he completed his graduation. "I had no clue about the social sector and its organised functioning. I was therefore unaware of how to get involved in social initiatives or programmes. With no prior knowledge, this drive to do something left me with an empty feeling," says Allvin.

In February 2012, Allvin enrolled for the SEOP programme at CSIM Hyderabad. Learning about CSIM from a friend, he decided to explore this opportunity. He was soon convinced of his decision as he got exposed to the social sector, the different types of organisations, and the level of impact each managed to create. He also got a chance to interact with Social Entrepreneurs who had their unique ways of addressing social issues comprehensively and sustainably.

"The kind of exposure CSIM gave me was just incomparable to what I had gone through during the college days. I immediately began to volunteer for NGOs. I knew what little I could do and also the best possible ways to do them. I got back the connect!" says Allvin.

While doing the SEOP Programme, he learnt about Solid Waste Management in urban communities and Zero Waste Management followed by Sukuti Exnora in Hyderabad. Working with small communities, training them in segregating



waste and preparing manure out of it is a concept he tries to promote even today. "I realised waste segregation could be an alternative source of income for rag pickers. Our lifestyle's impact on the environment and our role in mitigating it by small changes in our attitude and behaviour towards our waste amused me," exclaims Allvin.

His next stint was with BHUMI, in Rasoolpura, a slum in Hyderabad. Working for a programme that aimed at developing micro entrepreneurship in the slums, he first took a baseline to identify the common problems of the most prominent businesses in slums. Access to credit was the concern here as entrepreneurs ended up borrowing from money lenders at an exorbitant rate of 45 percent for a principal amount of 1000 rupees. Along with access to credit, heavy competition from the neighbourhood kiranas prevented them from scaling up their small enterprises. He developed a curriculum to train the micro entrepreneurs in coming together to scale. Networking with multiple stakeholders, he also managed to create 'Micro-Entrepreneurship Mela', a platform for the micro-entrepreneurs and other institutions to connect with each other.

Allvin became part of a start-up venture in order to promote organic farming and support organic farmers. Seven social entrepreneurs from different sectors came together to work on ways to eliminate the challenges on the supply side. Integrated Rural Development Framework was thus introduced to create a movement wherein farmers could use technology in farming, gradually improve in farm management, and demand aggregation. The extended network with field experts and agricultural universities promised to create new jobs in the rural areas. "Things in the farm sector move slowly. I could not afford to give up my full time job to work on this venture. I had to leave the team," says Allvin.

Recently Allvin joined Computer Kindness Foundation (CKF), a Trust launched by his college mates. This Trust identifies needy children from poor communities and provides them mentorship and financial support to complete their education. Funds are mobilised through their friends and contacts in India and abroad. "This year we have partnered with 15 organizations and identified 85 needy students from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana and Andhra. We also collect used computers/laptops and donate them to the needy government schools. Along with our partners we have created libraries for two Government Schools. We hope to reach more needy students and reduce the school dropout rate in our country," says Allvin voicing his ambitious vision.

With all these tasks managed during weekends, Allvin says, "One can always manage his or her responsibility towards the society in a manner that does not create any discomfort. All that matters is interest and inclination to contribute some time for a social cause. This can make a huge difference."

—Shanmuga Priya.T

Matchmaker for unorganised workers

LabourNet not only matches available skills with requirements of employers, but also upskills and cross skills workers in the unorganised sector to improve chances of employability

LabourNet was started in 2006 as an initiative of the Movement for Alternatives for Youth Awareness (MAYA), a Bangalore-based non-governmental organisation that links employers and employees in the unorganised sector. But, during the course of this matchmaking, the organisation realised a few things. There was a strong need to equip workers with the right skills to make them employable. It also needed to intervene at multiple levels – in imparting vocational education at the right age, creating awareness for this need, identifying the right employment opportunity and equipping the workers accordingly. It also understood that commonly used terms such as decent work, wage increase and skills training required some amount of standardisation.

All these learnings went into hiving off LabourNet as an independent organisation in 2008, to place workers on construction sites. More specifically, the company forged alliances with external training partners to help upgrade the skills of these workers.

Standing on its own feet

The transformation from being a project subsidiary of a larger organisation to an independent social venture required tremendous change in mindset. “We had to have commitment, focus and most importantly, sustainability and profitability,” points out Gayathri Vasudevan, CEO of LabourNet. It had to be scalable and have efficiencies built into it. The venture started off with investment from individuals, debt from Washington-based Grassroots Business Fund and other sources.

Again, by 2010, the management realised that the idea was not working the way they wanted it to. “We thought we had the workers on one hand, and vacancies on the other. We setup a call centre and thought that would take care of meeting the needs,” explains Vasudevan. But on-ground facts indicated something else. Neither the employers nor the employees were happy. The employers found the labourers still short on skills while the employees complained of poor pay.

Thus, LabourNet team went back to the drawing board and in the same year, re-launched by providing internal skill trainers instead of using just external trainers. And, apart from construction, it ventured into few other industries like engineering, manufacturing and wellness. This required intervention programs relevant to the different industries they work in. Over the years, LabourNet has partnered with companies such as DLF Foundation, Gammon India, Godrej and Schneider for curriculum development and training.



It has been funded through debt from National Skill Development Corporation, investments from friends, and through funds such as Hyderabad-based Sankhya Partners, Mumbai-based Acumen Fund and Texas-based Michael & Susan Dell Foundation. “Earlier, we had tied up with training partners and given certifications on completion of courses,” says Vasudevan. But, this was obviously not enough and so the venture enrolled trainers and developed training content. “More important than content is the delivery tool, since we are talking of a primarily illiterate population,” she points out.

Training at its centres as well as at sites is the two means of upskilling workers. Other interventions also look at acclimatising the employees to improve their comfort level on-site.

The LabourNet team has grown from 30 employees in 2008 to 50 to 55 in 2011 and 500 this year. Trainers/educators and community workers/counsellors form the bulk of the organisation given the profile of its target audience. The company earns revenues through the fee it charges for its courses. The fee is paid in part by the student, the client or the industry and the government. The company hopes to break-even this year.

LabourNet, apart from skilling and employment support, provides workers access to health insurance, bank accounts and identification cards. The company has provided various accident insurance covers to about 30,000 workers. LabourNet also ensures that under the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana scheme, workers avail benefits through sector-specific welfare boards in the field of insurance, maternity benefits, tools, housing loans, as well as health insurance.

The Roadblocks

The segment is not without any challenges. On one hand, government schools tend to orient students only towards higher education or provide vocational skills without focusing on the vocational education aspect; the difference being, preparing students to be employable rather than merely training them in a skill. The second hurdle is that, the various government freebies lead to the youth adopting a relaxed attitude to earning and employability. By the time they realise, it's too late to be able to help them meaningfully. The third is the attitude that people beyond an age cannot be trained in new skills, which works as a severe mind-block against upskilling existing labour. Over and above that is the attitude of the workers themselves. Many find leaving behind their roots and adjusting to city life or the life of a labourer difficult transition. “There are at least 10-15 thousand people who will not take up full time employment either because they find the pay too low or the environment not conducive. We just don't know how to motivate them after the training and benefit from the opportunities,” she explains.

And the last but not the least is the question Vasudevan asks – where are the permanent jobs? There is no job security for the workers and most of the work is seasonal. Therefore, cross-skilling is another area of focus for LabourNet to equip the unorganised sector against unemployment. “More than unemployment, I would say underemployment is a bigger challenge,” she adds.

The Depth and Width

Given the ground realities, LabourNet is not deterred by these limitations. As of

March 2014, LabourNet has trained close to a lakh people in various skills catering to the industrial requirements. The venture currently has a presence across most states in the country and has centres near sourcing locations (rural areas, tier II, III cities) and destination locations such as industrial estates.

The venture mostly works directly with the unorganised sectors, except in smaller places where it works with small NGOs that can benefit from its model.

“The dream is to be present in every district of the country, but in the coming years, the focus will be on West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Bihar and backward districts of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The aim is to facilitate mediated migration,” states Vasudevan.

Impact Assessment

In addition to internal systems and audit teams to gauge the impact, LabourNet also encourages external visitors to walk in freely to study the LabourNet activities and its impact. Students and professors of Columbia University and Lloyds University are among the visitors. NSDC does its own audit. LabourNet also encourages its clients to be actively involved in the training and performance improvement processes of its people. “This keeps us on our toes,” Vasudevan admits.

The greatest impact for LabourNet would be for others to replicate their model since the problem requires greater participation from more organisations in the field.

IMPACT

LabourNet started as a project of MAYA, a not-for-profit organisation that works with the unorganised workers to fill the gap between the job seekers and the employers. Over time, it ventured into training people in meeting industry requirements and ensuring appropriate job skills and commensurate pay, thus satisfying the needs of the employers as well as the employees. Though vocational education is its core strength, even post-training, the social organisation continues to handhold and introduce several interventions to equip the labourers in a way that they can grow meaningfully. Till March 2014, the company has touched a lakh lives and plans to focus on the backward states and districts of India in the coming years. It also believes that the more the merrier, and looks forward to more ventures entering this segment, given the magnitude of the problem.

—S. Meera

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

Envisioning Yoga For All



It is common knowledge that yoga chisels the human body, but it also demands disciplined practice on a consistent basis. Many able-bodied people fail in this respect, but 33 visually-challenged students from the Loyola College hostel are stepping up to the challenge. Under the guidance of R. Nethaji, a second year student of M.Sc Chemistry, they meet at 6:30 A.M. every Saturday for an hour of yoga. It has been a year since these sessions began, and Nethaji is looking forward to restarting the program for the current academic year.

"We began with 6 members. It took time for word to spread, but once it did, the numbers increased. I am grateful to

the college for permitting us to use the basketball court, and that too during weekends when players prefer to practise," says Nethaji.

From 2010-2012, Nethaji was part of the NCC camp at Sacred Heart's College, Thirupattur, and trained over 2000 students in Yoga. His Guru is Mr. Suresh from Thiruvannamalai.

"The best aspect of Nethaji's training regime is his approach. When I joined, he wanted to know if I had undergone any operations. Accordingly, he customized the program to accommodate my levels of comfort," says Shanmugam, a final year B.A. English student.

Manikandan, a final year B.A. Tamil student, is glad that visually-challenged people are recognized and encouraged. The impulse to become involved in social service is not exclusive to those studying social work or related disciplines; all it requires is a perspective – this is what Nethaji seems to suggest from his inspiring initiative.

—Prof. John Kaviarasu
Dept of Outreach,
Loyola College

*If social work organisations wish to
avail Nethaji's services,
please call +91-8015496164.*

Editorial

**Latha Suresh
Marie Banu**

CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INITIATIVE AND MANAGEMENT



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

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

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CSIM also facilitates Social Audit for social enterprises through Social Audit Network, UK and SAN, India.
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Encouraging Volunteerism



“Money is certainly important, no doubt. But if there was nobody to go about collecting these donations, making out receipts, and putting the money into good use, what good is the money?”

Kartheeban C is eight years into volunteering. And since the time he founded Team Everest in 2006, is working for an IT firm that required after-hours work. “I would finish off my job at around 11 pm, and spend time at the office till about 1 am in planning for the NGO,” he says, recounting his first steps in establishing Team Everest. Ever since he entered his teens, Kartheeban always wanted to do his bit for society. Team Everest’s website even has an anecdote about how he knew a friend who used to help his father change punctures and earn a meagre amount to help him fund his education. It’s little wonder then, that these motivations

good is the money? These processes require time. At Team Everest, we try to encourage the donation of time.”

From its inception, Team Everest’s mantra has remained a numeric fraction, literally. “Twelve-by-three-sixty-five”, Kartheeban says, “If everyone tries to volunteer once a month, we get a total of 12 days a year. Twelve days out of a total of 365 days a year is a big number if we get everyone to do their bit for a cause. A nation of a billion people can really go out there and make a difference, this way.” Kartheeban’s approach, in fact, is an extension of Team Everest’s guiding philosophy of encouraging volunteerism

volunteers have also engaged in a long list of social service activities. This includes computer training sessions, puppet shows, talent hunt competitions, organizing orphanage visits, educational tours, science awareness sessions, essay-writing competitions, soft-skills training and art competitions, to name a few. But what has truly revolutionized the way volunteering is looked at, is its novel attempts at what Kartheeban calls “virtual volunteering”. He elaborates: “a number of people don’t have the time to go out there and volunteer. But it’s also possible to volunteer from your home. Volunteering activity can also mean content-writing, working on designs,

Team Everest has also done its bit to improve acts of kindness and volunteerism, like its “Kindness Challenge” which has 10 acts of kindness, encouraging volunteers to perform random acts of kindness and then share their experiences with each other.

Going forward, Kartheeban remains firm that Team Everest’s continued goal will be its 12/365 mantra. “We want to continue encouraging people to volunteer and do their bit for society. People’s mindsets need to change when it comes to giving, irrespective of whether they’re giving their time or money.” He points out how India is ranked a lowly 133 on the World Giving Index, which attempted to gauge the generosity of 153 countries across the world. “Unless and until we change that about ourselves, there will still be a lot that’s left to be desired about the way we go about doing things today.” Along with this change in mindset, Kartheeban also plans to go about a propaganda mission to make volunteering part and parcel of everyday life. “The aim is to make volunteering as routine as visiting a temple or going for a movie. You don’t write out a status update after visiting a temple, right? Then why does it become a matter of discussion when you visit an orphanage?

creating websites, etc. That’s virtual volunteering, giving your time although you may not be present, physically.”

Team Everest’s funding is driven almost exclusively by kind-hearted individuals who make contributions from their personal income. But that, Kartheeban admits, is far from satisfactory when it comes to running an NGO. “That’s why we are literally sustained by the kind-heartedness of our volunteers. We can’t afford to hire staff, but our volunteers more than make up for it, especially because they aren’t obliged to work for us. They do it because they want to. They actually go about making that difference in our lives and the lives of others.” Along this journey of encouraging volunteerism,

That’s because we don’t do it often; it isn’t routine. Once we change that, and when we do, only then can we reconcile ourselves to having achieved a true spirit of volunteerism.” And how does he plan on achieving that? “By creating avenues of opportunity”, comes the response. “In my experience, I’ve discovered that people are interested in spending time for a cause. Volunteering, therefore, is a natural tendency. What’s missing is the right opportunity. And creating that opportunity is what we at Team Everest are committed to doing

If you wish to contact Mr. Kartheeban, please call 99402 99062. For more information, visit teameverestindia.org



served as the primary driving force in Kartheeban wanting to be a change-maker. But it wasn’t enough that he sign up to become just another agent of change. “Today, people are willing to donate their money. Time, on the other hand, has become a more valuable commodity,” he says, attempting to explain where Team Everest is an NGO with a difference. “Money is certainly important, no doubt. But if there was nobody to go about collecting these donations, making out receipts, and putting the money into good use, what

— making volunteering an activity that the common man could engage in. Today, the NGO has close to 8,500 volunteers, all of whom are active across volunteering platforms. “Our website has an active calendar with logs for volunteers; we have an android app that schedules volunteering activities and a very active Facebook page,” says Kartheeban, detailing how Team Everest has caught up with the age of social media, successfully implementing its many functions into a noble activity.

Along the way, Team Everest’s

How Zubaida Bai invested her jewellery and family savings to build a clean birthing kit that saves thousands of lives

Growing up in a middle class household in Chennai, Zubaida Bai was exposed to the typical social and economic hardships faced by women in India. She saw her mother working hard everyday. Her female cousins and friends, not given the opportunity to study, were married off early. Finances in the family were also limited. Bai, though was a rebel. She went against the grain and got an engineering degree and through sheer persistence, she snapped up a full scholarship from the Dalarna University in Sweden to do a Master's in Mechanical Engineering (product development and design). When she was 24, she married Habib Anwar and moved to Canada.

But soon she was back in Chennai, after the company where Anwar worked, decided to set up an offshore unit in India. She joined Rural Innovations Network (RIN), a non-profit that incubates rural innovations (now known as Villgro), to work on product innovation and assisting individuals and organizations to make their product ideas commercially viable. At RIN, she saw good innovations not getting commercialized. Bai wanted to change this. Based on her extensive product innovation and Anwar's financial expertise, the two decided to take action.

The epiphany:

Bai had always wanted to find a way to give back to women, especially rural women. Incidentally, this resonated with Anwar, who had lost his mother and aunt to ill health and suffering. Around that time, a chance meeting with a professor in Boston, ended up with her doing MBA in Social and Sustainable Enterprises from the Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado. During a field trip to test several products for her business plan, Bai witnessed the unclean surroundings of a hospital and unsterile instruments that were being used at the time of childbirth. For Bai, this was *deja vu*, she was reminded of the infection she suffered when her first child was born, that had taken her an entire year to recover. "I suggested to Habib to consider maternal health as an area of focus and in 2009, we registered ayzh in the US," says Bai, about the decision to co-found a healthcare product company along with her husband Anwar.

Problem identification, a precious investment and the impact:

As part of her research, whilst talking to obstetricians and gynecologists, maternal health advocates and village elders, Bai and Anwar discovered an inconvenient



With product sales and demand for our Clean Birth Kit in a Purse growing around the world, we felt the time was ripe to engage a larger audience of "change makers" and launch a global movement to give every mother and newborn a clean and safe birth

truth- they realized that the poor couldn't afford the cost of cleanliness and sterility. This insight led to the birth of JANMA clean birth kit, which provides women all the components recommended by the World Health Organization for a safe and hygienic birth, using environmentally friendly and culturally appealing materials.

"We put in all our savings and my jewelry to an unknown path. Partnering with Kuthambakkam Village on the outskirts of Chennai, we provided employment to their women to help assemble JANMA- the clean birth kit," reminisces Bai. To date, with minimal marketing efforts and a small, informal sales force, ayzh has sold 50,000 kits in India, Haiti, Afghanistan, and several countries in Africa. Demand from other countries continues to grow. JANMA is sold directly to customers, and also to hospitals and health institutions. Other than their flagship product- JANMA- Ayzh has other products under development. They include: a newborn kit to be bundled with JANMA (prototyped, 1,000 units sold); a post partum hemorrhage kit (R&D); a sanitation and hygiene solution for women (R&D); and a

household water filter (prototyped, 100 units sold).

Crowdfunding campaign on Indiegogo:

In August, this year, they kicked off a crowdfunding campaign on 'Indiegogo' to raise \$50,000 to do an impact analysis of the product and to scale a mobile phone training program to educate rural healthcare workers on clean birth practices via voice messages on cell phones. "We chose crowdfunding as a platform not only to raise funds, but also to raise awareness of a pressing global health issue. To date, ayzh has raised start-up funds primarily through social impact investors. At the time we decided to raise an additional \$50,000 to fund two innovative initiatives, we wanted to try something different. With product sales and demand for our Clean Birth Kit in a Purse growing around the world, we felt the time was ripe to engage a larger audience of "change makers" and launch a global movement to give every mother and newborn a clean and safe birth," remarks Bai.

Scaling up and looking ahead:

Founded in 2010, ayzh now has eight employees and is looking to scale

operations throughout India and in Africa. In order to keep up with demand for JANMA, they are currently working to hire and train a larger sales team, improve management systems, pilot new products, secure extra office space and launch a rigorous monitoring and evaluation program. "As we scale up over the next five years, our primary focus will be on product sales and establishing additional "regional hubs" (production/distribution facilities) in India and Africa, enabling us to reach ambitious sales targets and achieve breakeven point," points Bai. In order to scale production and distribution, ayzh is developing a franchisee model, whereby partners will set up their own ayzh facility, employing low-income women. The products assembled will be distributed to customers in a regional market created by the ayzh sales team. Bai's biggest challenge is not funding or other problems that social enterprise faces. Its more to do with a lack of awareness of the problem of maternal/infant mortality due to infection at time of childbirth and lack of understanding and knowledge around the need for clean birth practices.

Does ayzh need funding?

ayzh's primary source of revenue is through its product offering of simple, low cost, high quality technology for which both its customers and women target beneficiaries are willing to pay. With approximately 20 million births each year in India, the company has predictable revenue with affordable products sold to a large market. But in order to scale, they are also close to closing a second round of investment funding by end of 2014.

Looking back and ahead:

Bai has a big goal of bringing five million products to the market over the next 5 years, and impacting approximately 25 million lives by 2018. "Looking back, I feel the impact of all our hard work is just beginning to show as more and more women, families and health care practitioners realizing the need for cleanliness and sterility after having used the kit and spoken to one of ayzh team member... but there is still a lot of work yet to be done and it reminds me of the famous last para from Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening by Robert Frost: The woods are lovely, dark and deep. But I have promises to keep. And miles to go before I sleep. And miles to go before I sleep," remarks Bai

—Nelson Vinod Moses

This article was first published at www.social.yourstory.in

Can the other side also adapt?

Recently, there was a video on SIGNS Restaurant in the West, doing its rounds on YouTube. The restaurant employed only people who were deaf and mute. Their menu also had clear signs mentioned on it to help customers place their orders. SIGNS received an appreciable response. One obviously wonders if things like these can come up in India. And the answer, hearteningly, is YES!

Deaf Leaders Foundation, founded by Mr. Murali is the organization that has grown beyond nominal expectations. Founded in 2002, Murali had worked very hard to evolve it into its present form. Today, the Foundation is quite synonymous with empowerment of hearing impaired. Murali, himself being one, could study only till class 12. His father, who was then the District Collector of Salem, was very much interested in Social Welfare activities. When both of his children were born deaf, he decided to work more constructively for the welfare of the disabled. Education and marriage were the two areas he had concentrated upon.

Passing out of school, Murali decided to run a tailoring shop and employed two more persons with hearing impairment. However, this was not successful. The family soon moved to Ootacamund in 1990, where he worked as a Supervisor for Hindustan Photo Films (HPF). 12 years at HPF exposed him to the harsh realities that deaf people face in securing employment and challenges thereafter. Sympathy and indifference disturbed him. While discrimination in private sector was becoming way too blatant for him to handle, he got married in 1991.

Murali and his wife were very much interested in Sports and Murali represented the country in Table Tennis tournaments. By 2000, his family moved to Coimbatore and Murali was more than clear on leaving HPF and initiating something for people like him. He opened a school for the deaf children in 2000, with only 20 children coming on the rolls. The school was started in collaboration with a local NGO. Within a year of its completion, Murali learnt that the language used for transacting lessons, inability to develop leadership among deaf children, and teaching computers were serious flaws and called for urgent attention. He decided to build on this line of thought and thus was born Deaf Leaders (Deaf Empowerment Activities For Literacy Education Accessible Development Empowerment Rehabilitation & Sports) Foundation in March 2003.

Deaf Leaders Foundation works with the focused objective of contributing to the betterment and understanding of DEAF people in India. The school provides a conducive atmosphere for all round development of the deaf from class 10 way up to a wide range of UG



The school provides a conducive atmosphere for all round development of the deaf from class 10 way up to a wide range of UG courses and a few PG courses as well.



courses and a few PG courses as well. On completing their studies, the students are also assisted in seeking employment. Right of choice is encouraged and promoted in every school activity. If a student wishes to start a business independently, Deaf Leaders also routes initial capital to support their venture.

For instance, when one of the students who was interested in catering and hotel management, he was assisted in opening a cafeteria in Coimbatore. This D' Café is run completely by the deaf in Peelamedu taluk of Coimbatore district. The basic knowledge of using signs for alphabets is all that one needs to know to make life easier for the deaf people around us. The menu at D' Café had signs of the alphabets T and C detailed to order Tea or Coffee respectively. Just about a year old, the café has now attracted attention from many, thanks to the press coverage by popular dailies. Local colleges in the district are now lining up to start a cafeteria in their colleges, in

collaboration with the D' Café. Presently, there are two branches of this café – one outside a corporate office and another inside a fitness studio (both in Peelamedu), and both have been received very well by the localities.

Over the years, Deaf Leaders began to document the soft copies of the teaching modules used for different subjects. Since sign language is the medium used, these DVDs can be used by any teacher who is working with deaf children. With life skills being an in built component of the educational experience here, Deaf Leaders became more proficient in matching candidates with the jobs available in the market. Following skills enhancement and employment assistance, the foundation also took the initiative of launching a matrimonial site for the deaf people. With entries coming in from across the country, Deaf Leaders perceives this as the need to give deaf people their space in deciding on their marriages.

Besides the above activities, there are parallel programmes to create awareness and promote the learning of sign language by the community members so that deaf people can interact with ease. Social Work and Psychology students have come forward to learn sign languages. The foundation has mastered in Indian and American Sign Language, the difference being use of two hands and only one hand respectively.

National Youth Leadership Training for the deaf was organized in 2010 giving a platform for the deaf to articulate their concerns and work on possible

suggestions to take them forward with the government.

The first ever T20 cricket championship for the deaf and marathon for the disabled were also initiated by the foundation in 2010.

Interestingly, Deaf Leaders organises a pageant show for the deaf every two years and the winners are given an opportunity to represent the country at the International contest. Deaf Leaders has also pioneered in organizing the International Deaf Film Festival, the second

edition of which concluded recently in Calicut. The regular films do not have signs to help deaf understand or follow the story. This prevents them from enjoying a movie in completion. This film festival is an attempt to nourish their talent in making short films, where the entire crew are deaf members.

Additionally, these movies also have subtitles so that 'normal people' can also understand. Every four years, they also organize the International Deaf Conference where the present scenario of deaf in the society are discussed from multiple perspectives.

Deaf Leaders does struggle for its existence. There is continuous look out for sponsors and the need to expand their network of donors. The school charges a deposit of Rs. 500 from every student so as to inculcate interest and responsibility amongst the students and all services are offered free of cost here.

Murali, a recipient of Best Social Worker Award from the Government of Tamil Nadu, lives to see the day when deaf people will be treated with equal respect and rights. Believing in their potential completely, Murali also articulates his dream project of establishing a channel exclusively for the deaf and dumb people. "Why should they be deprived of entertainment?" he exclaims through his signs.

—Shanmuga Priya.T

Thanks to Ms Sneha, (Murali's daughter) in helping us with the interview

Conversations with Shri Ramana Maharishi

Mr. Satyanarayana Rao, a teacher in Vellore Mahant School, is a wellknown devotee of Sri Maharshi. He has been ailing from a cancer of the gullet and the doctors have no hopes for him. He has been given a room in the *Asramam* and the *Sarvadhikari* is very kind to him. It is now about two months and the patient is very weak.

At about 9 a.m., Sri Bhagavan was reading the *tapals*. The brother of the patient appeared in the hall with an anxious look to ask Sri Bhagavan about the patient, who was gasping. The *Sarvadhikari* also came to the hall on behalf of the sufferer. Sri Bhagavan continued to read the *tapals*. In a few minutes another devotee also came there for the same purpose.

Sri Bhagavan asked: Did you call the doctor?

D.: Yes, but he is too busy in the hospital.

M.: What can I do? (After a short time) They will be pleased if I go there.

Soon Bhagavan left the hall and went to the patient's side, massaged him gently and placed His hand on the heart and the other on his head. The patient, whose tongue was protruding, mouth open and eyes fixed, showed signs of relief and in about twenty minutes gently murmured, "Oh Help of the helpless, how I have troubled Thee! What return can I make for this kindness?" The people felt relieved. Sri Bhagavan returned to the hall. Someone offered soap and water to Sri Bhagavan to wash his hands. But he declined them and rubbed His hands over His body. However the patient passed away a few days later.

A well-known devotee remarked: "Sri Bhagavan appears so unconcerned under all circumstances. But He is all along so loving and gracious."

A visitor from Dindigul said: I suffer in both mind and body. From the day of my birth I have never had happiness. My mother too suffered from the time she conceived me, I hear. Why do I suffer thus? I have not sinned in this life. Is all

this due to the sins of past lives?

M.: If there should be unrelieved suffering all the time, who would seek happiness? That is, if suffering be the natural state, how can the desire to be happy arise at all? However the desire does arise. So to be happy is natural; all else is unnatural. Suffering is not desired, only because it comes and goes.

The questioner repeated his complaint.

M.: You say the mind and body suffer. But do they ask the questions? Who is the questioner? Is it not the one that is beyond both mind and body?

You say the body suffers in this life; the cause of this is the previous life: its cause is the one before it, and so on. So, like the case of the seed and the sprout, there is no end to the causal series. It has to be said that all the lives have their first cause in ignorance. That same ignorance is present even now, framing this question. That ignorance must be removed by *jnanam*.

"Why and to whom did this suffering come?" If you question thus you will find that the 'I' is separate from the mind and body, that the Self is the only eternal being, and that It is eternal bliss. That is *jnanam*.

D.: But why should there be suffering now?

M.: If there were no suffering how could the desire to be happy arise? If that desire did not arise how would the Quest of the Self be successful?

D.: Then is all suffering good?

M.: Quite so. What is happiness? Is it a healthy and handsome body, timely meals, and the like? Even an emperor has troubles without end though he may be healthy. So all suffering is due to the false notion "I am the body". Getting rid of it is *jnanam*.

—Excerpted from talks with
Shri Ramana Maharishi

Belongingness Dimensions –Inclusive culture

One of the critical dimensions of organizational culture is the extent to which it is inclusive rather than exclusive. Inclusive culture is one in which diversity is respected and the best of each person is integrated into the organization. There is a respect for diversity and what each one brings to table.

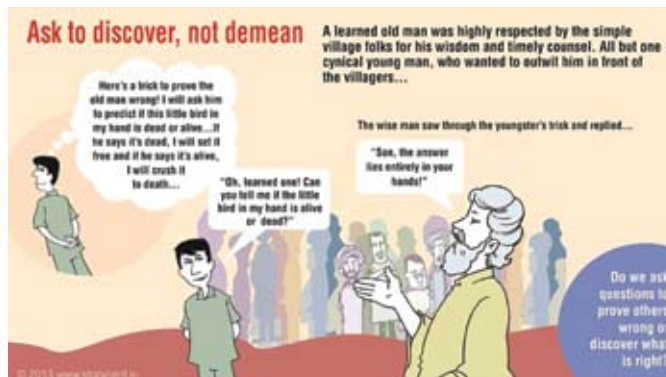
The learning orientation is an inbuilt dimension of inclusive culture. Many social organizations while they want to fight battles are sometimes unknowingly gripped with the battles internally. These battles stem around the issues of integrating diversity into the organization. The key role of HR and leaders as conscious keepers is to recognize these internal issues, resolve and dissolve them quickly if the efficiency of the organization has to be maintained.

Respect and Integration are features that show the extent to which diversity is accepted in the organization culture. Whenever employees do not accept all and get into judgments there are certain values and behaviour that they display in the culture. This article deals with some significant dimensions.

- Demeaning Vs Respect
- Discrimination Vs Integration
- Giving critical feedback without empathy Vs Effective feedback with emotional consciousness

Demeaning Vs Respect

Many a time in meetings and discussions questions are asked not to gain clarity but to showcase and test how much others know. When the person is not having the same view point, they are being demeaned, laughed and in the name of proving someone wrong the best of the projects and decisions are sacrificed. This behaviour over a period of time results in a closed, non communicative, passive culture.



Giving critical feedback without empathy Vs Effective feedback with emotional consciousness. Defense and offence in receiving feedback Vs open minded response

A man began to give large doses of cod-liver oil to his Doberman because he had been told that the stuff was good for dogs. Each day he would hold the head of

the protesting dog between his knees force its jaws open and pour the oil down its throat.

One day the dog broke away and spilt the oil on the floor. Then to the man's great surprise, it not only lapped up the oil that spilt on the floor but came back to lick the spoon.

That is when the man discovered that, what the dog had been fighting was not the oil but the manner in which it was being given.

Most of the time employees do not reject feedback but the way it is being given to them. When the intention of giving



Discrimination Vs Integration

There is a need for the ego to be constantly fed. Cliques based on gender, language, ethnicity, economic status, positions are all a bane to inclusive culture. This divide does not permit smoothness in respect and communication. When there is either inferiority or superiority complex the merit for who is saying it is much higher than what is being said.

feedback is for them to improve, then it has to be given in the way they are willing to listen. The art of effective giving and receiving feedback is a good indication of Inclusive and accepting culture. The ability to learn from each other also increases instead of wasting valuable time in defending and offending each other with words. Employees would trust and believe that feedback is an opportunity to learn and grow.

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath, PhD

Sadguru Gnanananda Fellowship Award Ceremony



Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani (MSDS) presented Sadguru Gnanananda Fellowships to three high potential, young Social Entrepreneurs in a solemn ceremony held on 30th Aug 2014 at Surana Hall, FAPCCI, Hyderabad.

At the outset of the Ceremony, Ms. Marie Banu, Director of CSIM Chennai, welcomed the guests and gave an introduction of Chief Guest and Guest of Honour.

Ms Latha Suresh, Trustee of MSDS, explained the background and purpose of the Fellowships. Ms. Bhuvaneshwari Ravi, Trustee of MSDS, read the citations for the three awardees. She also read a message from Swami Nityananda Giri of Tapovanam on this occasion. Subsequently, the awards were presented.

Speaking on this occasion, Chief Guest, Dr Saibaba Goud highlighted the need to develop and utilize the potential of differently-abled children. He explained how the alumni of Devnar School for the Blind are employed and become tax payers. Earlier, the parents of blind children were wary of sending their

children to the Devnar School because they thought it was not possible to teach them in English medium. However, now they have confidence in the education this school is providing. Given the right opportunity any human being is a great asset to the society. The Devnar School students have proved it. He emphasized the importance of social change.

Prof. V S Raju stressed on the importance of education. He could ascend the pinnacles of academics because of his education. He came from rural background and his father had studied only up to fifth standard, and wanted his son to be a matriculate. But equipped with education and determination, he could achieve a lot in life.

The three awardees — Akshay Abraham, Dilip Patro, and Shoba Gosa— explained the approach and initial impact of their organizations, especially in rural areas.

The program included a panel discussion. The panel consisting of Mr. Thiagarajan Arunachalam (Seva Counseling Centre), Mr. D.P.K. Babu (Ashray Akruti), Ms. Rubina Mazhar

(SAFA), and Mr. Gunaranajan (You See) deliberated on the issue of scaling-up of NGOs. The discussion was moderated by Mr. Thiagarajan.

The panelists highlighted benefits as well as risks associated with scaling-up. Scaling-up of operations enables an organization to serve more number of people. But on the flip side, scaling-up can lead to overstretching of organizational capacity and resources, and this may result in poor quality of service to beneficiaries.

Based on their experience, the panelists emphasized the importance of clarity of vision, organizational capacity building, use of IT tools, careful preparation and communication with key stakeholders for successful scaling-up.

In the last segment of the program, Mr Thiagarajan Arunachalam, Prof. Harsh Bhargava, Mr. D P K Babu, and Brig. I N Bhatia (Retd) were felicitated for their contribution to the work of CSIM, Hyderabad.

Mr. K. L. Srivastava, Director of CSIM Hyderabad, proposed the vote of thanks.



“We have to do a fine balancing act towards providing a quality education for all.”

Shri. Faizel .B. Cader
shares with
Marie Banu
about **Mohammed**
Sathak Trust and its
group of institutions

Mohamed Sathak Trust was established in 1973 at Kilakarai in Ramanathapuram District of Tamil Nadu, with a mission to provide quality education to children from socially and economically backward section of the society.

Shri. Faizel B. Abdul Cader, Trustee of Mohamed Sathak Trust and Director of Mohamed Sathak A. J. College of Engineering, is a young visionary with many ideas for the advancement of the Trust in providing equitable education for all.

In an exclusive interview, Shri. Faizel B. Abdul Cader, shares with Marie Banu about Mohamed Sathak Trust and its group of institutions.



Can you please tell us about Mohamed Sathak Trust and its activities?

Shri. S.M. Ahamed Jalaluddin is the Founder of Mohammed Sathak Trust. He hailed from a business community in Kilakarai. His father Janab Mohamed Sathak Thambi was a noble and great Philanthropist. He served as the Chairman of Kilakarai Town Panchayat and was instrumental in launching numerous welfare schemes at Kilakarai. He also donated his personal funds for village infrastructure, such as laying of roads, sanitation facilities, and health centres.

Mohammed Sathak Trust was established in 1973 and initially offered scholarships for poor students. In 1980, Mohamed Sathak Polytechnic College, the last government aided polytechnic in Tamil Nadu, was started. Incidentally, the polytechnic does a lot of work related to NGOs and Self-help groups. We have a community polytechnic where we empower the youth as well as the women from rural communities.

In 1984, Mohammed Sathak Engineering College—the first Self Financing Engineering College in India—was launched in Kilakarai. Today, there are 18 Educational Institutions (9 in Chennai, 6 in Kilakarai & 3 in Ramnad) that are governed by our Trust.

Our colleges have enabled many rural students pursue engineering and many of them are now working in different parts of

the world. We have to compete with a lot of commercialized educational institutions. We have to do a fine balancing act towards providing a quality education for all.

Mohammed Sathak Trust took lead in providing training in alternate livelihoods for fishermen who were displaced due to the Gulf of Mannar project (Sethu Samudram). We have formed a SHG called Syed Hammeda All Women Development, and provide micro finance to self-help-group members. So far, we have disbursed around 5 crore rupees.

There has been a decline in engineering admission over the last few years. What do you think is the reason?

I feel that this is because of the mismatch between supply and demand. We have many engineering colleges, but not adequate placement opportunities. This is due to recession in the US, as many of the companies were dependent on its economy. Also, there are very few quality educational institutions and the systems are a little different in India. For example, in US or other countries, you can study engineering in credit system. Some parents are reluctant to spend for engineering degrees as the fee is expensive when compared to Arts and Science degrees.

This is only a temporary setback which will hopefully improve. A lot of students are now interested to pursue Civil Engineering and Mechanical Engineering, because of the support offered by Central

and State Governments to manufacturing and infrastructure industries.

What are the scholarships available for your students?

We started courses in Marine Engineering, Aeronautical Engineering and Architecture during the 80's at in Kilakarai. These were new streams in engineering and many students were offered scholarships in order to encourage them to pursue these courses. We offer scholarships and fee concessions to deserving students in all our colleges. Students with merit in sports are offered free education in our technical colleges.

We also help needy students' source scholarships from National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation (NMDFC), an initiative of the Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India. In 2013, we organized a National Level Conference along with the NMDFC, where various schemes that are available for minority students were discussed.

What are the social work activities coordinated by your institutions?

Our colleges organises blood donation camps regularly. Students of Mohamed Sathak A. J. College of Engineering conduct computer literacy classes for villagers living near Siruseri.

Mohamed Sathak College of Arts and Science offers Master's Programme in Social Work. Some of our students are

interning for CSR projects. We are now in the process of launching a Rotaract club.

Does your colleges encourage entrepreneurship amongst students?

Considering the challenging trend in seeking placements, we encourage our students to be entrepreneurs in their own right. Last year, we launched the Entrepreneurship Development Cell (EDC) at Mohamed Sathak A. J. College of Engineering. In fact, we are one of the few colleges in the State of Tamil Nadu whose EDC has been established through Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India. We regularly organize workshops on entrepreneurship to motivate our students to become entrepreneurs. We have recently conducted entrepreneurship competitions amongst students and are networking with banks to provide financial support for their projects.

What is your advise for parents who want their children to pursue engineering?

I find some parents to be very ambitious. They are not able to understand their child's interest and capabilities.

Today, Arts and Science degrees have more scope and many students are opting for these courses. Success is possible in every field! Engineering or medicine is not the end of the world.