

Conversations Today

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6

COVER STORY

FOR THE LOVE OF WORDS

About Katha, an NGO based in New Delhi, that brings children living in poverty into reading and quality education

Alumni Talk



3

Promising a good beginning

Satyadev's efforts to revive interest in vedic mathematics and Abacus in pre-school education

Profile



9

Freedom In-Step With Progress

About Freedom For You Foundation, an organisation based in Navi Mumbai

Chit Chat



12

"I wake up every day feeling alive to my responsibilities."

An exclusive interview with Mr M. Mahadeven

FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

*"If you can read this, thank a teacher."
— Harry Truman*

All those who have been a part of any learning or training process or have been through the education system are aware of the significance of teachers. Teachers are like lamps that spread knowledge, awareness, and help channel the innate intelligence of students into something truly fulfilling and enriching. Teachers not only play a crucial role in imparting knowledge, but also help to inculcate compassion, empathy, and shape the perceptions of learners.

Our parents are the first teachers in our lives and impart the most important values of life since the day we are born, for learning remains a lifelong process. However, once we join school, the role of a teacher becomes very important, as we look up to them for knowledge, guidance, and encouragement.

The hard-work and efforts that teachers put in building the future citizens of the nation should always be appreciated and applauded. It takes a big heart to shape little minds, and celebrating Teachers' Day is just a way of thanking and expressing our gratitude to them.

In India, 5th of September is celebrated as Teachers' Day - the birthday of a great teacher Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, who was a staunch believer of education, a well-known diplomat, scholar, and former President of India. This day is one of the most special days in a student's as well as a teacher's life.

Our parents will always remain to be as our first and last teachers, but the contribution of our teachers in our lives is also invaluable which we must recognize and cherish all our lives. They are responsible to a great extent for where we are today, and therefore let us show our respect and gratitude to them.

— Marie Banu

EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu

Design: Blink Foundation

Buy your fancy stuff from an Indian slum

One woman is helping to transform Asia's biggest slum into a global online market place.



“Ma’am, if I may ask, what business have you in Dharavi?” Nayeem enquired.

The driver was surprised, yet careful to tame his curiosity with a measure of politeness. “Dharavi is slum area, you know? Many poor people. Not safe.”

I’d heard much about this infamous “largest slum in Asia” in the heart of Mumbai, India, and wanted to see it for myself.

Besides, Nayeem had also pointed out that the finest leather bags and wallets, including the branded stuff, were made right here in the slum.

As I walked around the maze of narrow alleyways in between makeshift shelters, I was greeted by friendly nods from shopkeepers and artisans, as well as children with oversized backpacks running around shouting “Hi!” as they trailed behind me.

The place was full of life and colour, and I wanted to take in everything.

Craftsmen

Sombodhi, my contact, told me that Dharavi is home to many migrants – some estimate that one million people live here – who’ve come from surrounding rural areas hoping to find better work opportunities.

Along with a hotchpotch of cultures coming

together, Dharavi has a high concentration of artisans and craftsmen.

These are hardworking people. And though they earn little, they seemed quite content and happy to me.

Making a difference

So how does an online business like DharaviMarket.com make any difference to them, I wondered.

What do they do with the extra money they earn from online sales – the money that doesn’t go to a wholesaler or traditional retailer?

One of the artisans, Abbas, had a simple response: “Instead of working every day, they now allow themselves to take a day off every now and again. Now with this additional income, we can take our families out to enjoy.”

I like the idea that my buying of a wallet or bag could contribute to a parent taking some time off from a 15-hour-a-day, 7-day work week, to spend it with his children.

—A story by Our Better World – the digital storytelling initiative of the Singapore International Foundation (www.ourbetterworld.org)

Promising a good beginning

Arietis is a for profit venture that intends to revive interest in vedic mathematics and Abacus.

Education is a very personal journey for every child. Its reception is determined by not only methods and children's individual capacities, but also by other factors like activity aids, family situations, tuitions, etc. Anything a child receives outside his or her classroom to support this journey has a very strong positive influence on the outcomes. "I do not want to accept affordability as the driving force in this sector. The domain of preschool education is largely driven by private players, making it out of reach for the underprivileged kids. I want this to change," says Mr A Satyadev, founder of Aalamuri Foundation, a charitable trust based in Hyderabad.

Coming from an industrial background, Satyadev had no knowledge of the development sector. He witnessed the changes liberalisation brought about in the industries in his early twenties. On learning the dynamics between big corporations and small, regional companies, he realised the opportunity to further study the flow of work and processes in different industries. "It is more important for small companies and enterprises to prepare themselves for such changes. They must be open to it, otherwise, they will lose out even before upgrading themselves," warns Satyadev, recalling how industrial automation became an urgent need, then.

With experience, he became aware of the dangers of one-person driven organisations, both in the profit and non profit sector. While he gained expertise in industrial automation, channel management and concept selling over the last twenty eight years, he became more conscious of the importance of systems and processes, and their values in both the sectors. "At one point when I felt I was ready to aspire higher, I decided to work independently. I started with a small battery industry. However, market fluctuations led to an upsurge in the price of lead and I shifted focus to distribution of batteries across India. The experience gave me the confidence to do consultancies for other aspiring entrepreneurs," he says.

Satyadev also co-founded the Arietis Inc – an abacus company, with his wife Mrs Sree Parimala Alamuri. Arietis is a for-profit venture that intends to revive interest in vedic mathematics and Abacus. This initiative exposed him to



"I was inquisitive. I saw the impact of pre school education on children's cognitive development. It promised a very engaging beginning to children's education experience."



The couple had thought of building a vedic education centre but lessons from another organisation that worked on low cost pre schooling encouraged them to do a thorough research on pre schooling for underprivileged children.

pre schools and schools run by different managements. Soon, his tenure as the Director of a play school - IRIS Florets in Kondapur and partner at Virinchi Vidya Mandir - an initiative for innovative pre schooling for under privileged children gave him new insights. "I was inquisitive. I saw the impact of pre school education on children's cognitive development. It promised a very engaging beginning to children's education experience. But its inaccessibility to a majority of children for different reasons disturbed me. Why should

affordability and accessibility keep children away from pre school education?," asks Satyadev.

He founded the Aalamuri Foundation along with his wife in 2013, as a family trust that can enable simple social initiatives. The foundation provided scholarships and free abacus training for underprivileged children. The couple had thought of building a vedic education centre but lessons from another organisation that worked on low cost pre schooling encouraged them to do a thorough research on pre schooling for underprivileged children. During the course of usual work, Satyadev got to know about CSIM and its course on Social Entrepreneurship. He believes that his association with CSIM helped him organise his thoughts and aspire higher. The sessions and interactions

with staff and senior batch mates, he feels, helped him understand how resourceful he was with his experience from the industry and the enthusiasm in pre school education. He soon worked on a model to reach out to under privileged children.

Satyadev came up with the thought of utilising physical and human resources within orphanages. As children went to school during the daytime, he wanted to use the space to provide pre school education for kids from the orphanage and neighbourhood. According to him, pre school education not only influenced cognitive, social development, but also ensured that children were motivated enough to continue their education. It lays a strong foundation for a child's character and personality. He also intended to provide free classes on Abacus and vedic mathematics for interested children. "I believe my model addresses both accessibility and affordability in the areas we work in. We have started the programme in three orphanages and are delighted to see the interest in the children. We may be testing the waters now but we feel reassured by the fact that education never dies. Therefore, there is always room for innovation and improvement," insists Satyadev.

—Shanmuga Priya.T

Leader & Leadership Matters...

9. Acceptance : Blossoming with freedom

“I went with an intention to bring her with me. I tried all that I could but she refused to come. After some days, I went just to be with her. When I left she followed me.” - (Pg 52, Inner realities, JM Sampath, Insight Publishers, 2003)



Meaning of Acceptance: The Leader allows others to be themselves, and (s) he accepts people as they are. (LOI, www.discoverself.com). The dictionary meaning of Acceptance is tending to regard different types of people and ways of life with tolerance and acceptance. The synonyms are acknowledgement, approval, assent, consent and so on. The antonyms are denial, disagreement, opposition, disapproval, dissent and so on.

Acceptance is closely linked to the ability to give freedom and allow the relationship to blossom. While we find it easy to ask someone to give freedom to us, it seems tough when we have to give freedom to others to be who they are. Acceptance, as an attribute in relationship is also about living with least expectations and simultaneously being aware that expectation is a limitation on any relationship.

Walking into a green building with a welcoming homely and earthy atmosphere is The TVS Academy. When we walk into the Principal's room, we are greeted with a wide smile by Smt Srividya Mouli. She is an affable, cheerful, approachable lady. Fondly called Vidyakka, she is a MA in English Literature with B.Ed. and nearly 3 decades of teaching experience. Vidyakka has many awards to her credit such as, The President's Award for Girl Guides; The Duke of Edinburgh's Gold Award; The Dronacharya Award for Excellence in Teaching and The award for best CBSE Senior Secondary School Principal. She is also an avid Trekker and Mountaineer; A theatre enthusiast and a keen photographer. If we interact with her, what strikes first is the ease and acceptance with which any discussion flows, bringing exploration and collaboration as an integral part to every experience. To understand and discuss Acceptance as a leadership attribute, there can't be a better person than Vidyakka.

Vidyakka, according to you what does the attribute 'Acceptance' mean to you? At what age did you become aware of this attribute in life?



“For me, acceptance is the freedom or the space. I find that as a child I was given freedom and that's where I learnt the value of it. I come from a home where they never imposed too many restrictions on a girl. If I say I will come home at 10'o clock, I have to enter the house at 9:59. Coming later than 10 was not acceptable because I was given

the freedom to specify I will come at 10. And that gave me a lot of space to grow, to make choices and also be accountable. This upbringing made me democratic in my interactions with people. I think acceptance is to know all of us are capable of making choices and stop interfering to keep telling others what is right or wrong. Initially, I used to speak my mind and walk away. I was once sick and bed ridden for nearly 6 weeks and totally dependent on my 80+ year grand mom even to turn from side to side. I did a lot of reflection and realized I need to change the way I act and the way I respond. Now unless people ask me for my point of view I don't interfere; because it is not necessary. People know what they want to do. Nobody is a perfect human being and let us acknowledge the difference in the way of every person's thinking; it may not be the way I think. But that way of thinking also has a validity”.

Vidyakka, in the many roles that you play in school, community and home, is there a different orientation of Acceptance as an attribute?

Vidyakka quotes Shri J Krishnamurthy, “The flowering of goodness is possible only in freedom and in the choiceless awareness of our daily existence and activity. It is the total unfolding and cultivation of our minds, hearts and our physical well-being. It is living in complete harmony in which there is clear, objective, non-personal perception unburdened by any kind of conditioning. It is the release of our total energy and its total freedom.” (<http://www.journal.kfionline.org>)

She adds that this will require the creation of right kind of environment that will allow this goodness to flower. She says, “In some people the flowering happens early, in some a little later; some late and also they don't flower at the same rate. The best way is to look at it as describing a lotus. A lotus is multi-layered and it takes time for the lotus to flower and each petal has its own kind of dynamics by which it opens out. Like this, each child and each individual requires a different space. We want people to be something that we think they should be. But when you can see the person as the person is, we can say there is acceptance”.

Beautifully put! Vidyakka, as a School Principal what makes the parents have difficulty in giving space and freedom to allow the flowering to happen?

“Parents want a perfect score in parenting. They see anything that the child cannot accomplish or even struggles with,

as a failure on their part. Actually what they fail to understand is that there is no exam in parenting. Certain things you get right the first time, certain things you learn by observation, by recalling your own personal experiences. Children have to make mistakes and have to be naughty. They are not to be sitting in one corner. At school, there are children who constantly keep looking to us for an approval and they need to be told there is no need for approval all the time. You can make mistakes and learn. Only thing is I say is do not to make the same mistake every time. Learn from every mistake.”

As an afterthought she adds, “My son asked me in 8th grade, will you be disappointed if I don't do science. I said categorically, I'm ok with any choice that you make in terms of your career. I have no problem. Be clear what you want to do and give it your best shot. He would at every stage eliminate saying I know what I don't want to do, but 'm still not clear what I want to do. I said, that's absolutely fine. It's a matter of choice. Now, he is in the best space in life that he wanted to be in.”

Tell me, as a Leader in organizational context, how do you balance Instructions, expectations and Acceptance?

“There are certain non-negotiables in any organization. I tell them what is acceptable and what is not, with regard to the values of the school. Say for instance in a performance based discussion between parent and child the dictat to the child is, 'you have to get more than 95% in exams next time and I don't know how you'll do it but you have got to do it.' This will be interpreted by the child as by hook or crook get the mark. When these kind of messages are being given, I definitely intervene. Sometimes there are unrealistic expectations dumped on the child. A pole vault in scores is not possible for the child. When teachers or parents don't see gradual progression as good enough, I do intervene and share my perspective to correct their expectations. Actually no body wants to do badly in life. It's just that their capacities may be different.”

Vidyakka opines, when it comes to giving freedom, as a Leader, she weighs how much the behaviour of the teacher who may be very good in her task academically is influencing the morale of the student or the team. Whenever there are concerns, a democratic conversation appreciating the teacher's good work and pointing to the areas of improvement works best. She thinks, a Leader who accepts will naturally

become a 'go to' person. She adds, "Whenever you listen to a story there are several sides. You can't just buy into one version and think that is the only version. You have to listen without judgement; without bias; and also play a devil's advocate. Many times people are not seeing all perspectives or think what they do is the best option available. So the Leader has to provide other perspectives and angles setting the teacher to think holistically. Leader should know to what extent one can push and where is the space to let go."

Vidyakka, usually how do you deal with your anxiety when you give freedom and accept? Has accepting something ever been difficult for you?

She quickly responds, "You can't fool proof everything. If something does happen that is not right, you have to see how you can discuss the pros and cons; rather than criticizing 'I told you so'. Even in my close circle, I only say I told you that the person has not anticipated this but now it has happened just step in sort this out."

When I ask her about her role as a parent, she smiles adding, "Academically, my son struggled in some subjects that every parent wants to see high marks in. His school principal used to say, unfortunately we don't have evaluation for his responsibility, initiative, empathy and leadership; if I have to give grade to those things I will give 100 plus. That is when I realized I have to accept the child for what the child is capable of; why push math when he could do so many non-math stuff very well."

Vidyakka has always believed in doing her best and giving more than 100% to everything she does. This makes her also believe that if everyone can give their 100% to every little thing that they do, freedom becomes automatically theirs.

Vidyakka, give me one example of using acceptance as a process in school. How do you use Acceptance as a learning process with teachers?



"We have launched the triangulation in evaluation where the peer evaluates the exam paper; the child evaluates and the teacher evaluates. All 3 marks are recorded. The child now says it is fine to make certain mistakes; they feel the need to perform better. Automatically, it kind of makes them feel they are capable of putting better effort."

In my classes, I tell them that there are no right or wrong answers. It is the way you put across your point of view. How convincing are you in the arguments where you have to validate what you are saying. This perspective allows them to speak out because they know anything is fine. They are not judged.

I have even given students an opportunity to choose what they want to be tested on in English. The teachers

thought it was too much work and I am setting 32 question papers for a class of 32 students. The actual trick is that, from each of those lessons set as many questions as possible. What it requires is a logic, rubric and a plan to set the paper. Once 800 marks worth paper is set, a number of question papers can be prepared. I just tell my teachers this is what I am doing. I never claim it as a best practice they should follow. Initially teachers wanted to come and watch. Some of them then talk to children. Then they get very curious and begin to try out. Students love it because the question paper reflects their choice."

Unless you have the inner-discipline or self-discipline that will regulate your actions to see that you don't default you cannot have others meeting the expectations.

What works to allow acceptance to blossom in others? What are the actions that can increase acceptance in us?

Vidyakka thoughtfully says, "If you want people to live by certain standards you have to demonstrate those standards. You have to first comply with whatever is your expectation and rules. So to be a good leader you have to be the best follower. Unless you have the inner-discipline or self-discipline that will regulate your actions to see that you don't default you cannot have others meeting the expectations. I correct my answer sheets in 48 hours, whatever be the number. Any mail that anyone sends, or any query I need to get back to I have given myself 24 hours to respond. Acceptance is actually putting a rule to oneself. Whatever you want of others to comply with you have to put it to yourself first and know it. As a Nation itself we want others to follow rules but don't want to abide by it. If we turn to be people who walk the talk, acceptance becomes a way of life."

Acceptance needs a lot of reflection and introspection. For me my travel time every day to school and back is the best to reflect. It's a time to myself."

Some actions to learn acceptance according to Vidyakka are

- Have conversations and not judgments when something wrong has happened
- Give time to reflect
- Put down your thoughts
- We give no space to just say 'sorry'. Instead we say if you feel what you did is not ok, don't repeat it. That itself is to me an indication that you have understood.
- When people experience acceptance, they also learn to be tolerant and accepting.
- Meditation and circle time reflection are activities as a part of our time table. Everyday half hour time for reflection is mandatory
- Being with nature can be one of the most rewarding spaces to learn to flow and let go.

"It is not our differences that divides us. It is our inability to recognize, accept and celebrate those differences." – Unknown

Vidyakka, how are you at home with Acceptance as an attribute, especially with family?



"Interestingly, I have one of the most beautiful relationships with my mother-in-law. In fact the bank where we have a joint account once refused to believe we are mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. When we give respect and accept each other, relationship blossoms. Amma still feels very happy running her kitchen and her home. I feel grateful there is someone who takes care of me and others. Actually no one wants to feel excluded. Now that I have become a mother in law it is role reversal time but the same principles apply to include her into the family."

In Essence, what would be your thoughts about Acceptance?

"Everybody has skills, understanding, and capabilities all in varying degrees. The conflict arises when we expect everybody to be equal to us or almost equal to us in all these. So, if we drop that lens, and be willing to change location and see the same from different standpoints, acceptance emerges. We have to also add the 'aerial view' as well as 'worm view' to get a holistic perspective. It doesn't matter who teaches you. There is a teacher in everyone. I have to accept that I am not perfect but I can always aspire to become better."



Acceptance gives us a tremendous sense of fulfilment and space. It gives us the opportunity to learn, adapt and change. There is enjoyment with over 101% involvement. Acceptance comes with responsibility and accountability.

Let's explore in the next sequel, the bond that forms through Responsibility in relationships.

—Dr Kalpana Sampath

FOR THE LOVE OF WORDS

In 1988, when Geeta founded Katha, she sparked off a revolution that would go on to touch the lives of nearly 10 million children.



Geeta Dharmarajan has a rather interesting take on books. “A good storybook is like a piece of chocolate that you just love,” she says, “And in our culture, when we have something good, we share it. Stories are a bit like that.” In a nutshell, that’s also the story of how the founder and president of Katha started getting children to read. “Kids are curious and creative, and know a good thing or two when they have the opportunity to explore,” Geeta adds.

In 1988, when Geeta founded Katha, she sparked off a revolution that would go on to touch the lives of nearly 10 million children. But given that she began writing from the 1970s, that number could well go higher. “Children need good books in their native languages,” she says, “And that is what Katha provides.” Since its inception, the NGO has published nearly 400 titles, across 21 Indian languages and 12 foreign tongues. “Books need to be fun and wrapped in gorgeous colours and alluring language,” says Geeta. “If my books reach even a handful of kids who end up getting hooked to them, I am happy.” By her own admission, Geeta gets a kick out of seeing a child who cannot take their face off a book.

But for an NGO who got children to read more, Katha is now getting ready to infuse a whole new set of ideas through books, apps and websites. The target, Geeta says, is 300 million school-going children. “According to present estimates, it would seem that than 50 percent of our children cannot read at grade level,” she says, “I would like, with like-minded partners, to ensure that good, colourful, fun e-books reach as many children as possible.”

That’s why the NGO will launch over 60 titles this year, alone, for children who Geeta describes as “diffident readers” and run the “risk of dropping out of school”. Given that reading is perhaps the greatest skill there is, academically, Geeta thinks it will stay that way well into the 21st Century. “Whatever the profession the child chooses, technology — especially mobile technology — is our lever for reaching out to more and more children who would love to read but presently do not get good books at school or in their homes,” she says. The organization has set itself a timeline of three years to achieve this.

Getting this done involved launching an app, and the first of Katha’s apps had a hundred stories tested on

10,000 families. “From these learnings, we brought out our gender app,” says Geeta, “Now we are working on a more ambitious digital project through the Katha Digital Lab or the KADL.”

Today, releasing titles in Hindi is Katha’s priority. “With 45 million children in the Hindi speaking belt, this is our first priority,” says Geeta, “We have published in Hindi since 1988. The other language we publish in is English. The Katha English Language Arts for India (KELAI) is a whole educational framework for teaching English to children who do not grow up with much spoken English. This is something I have honed at the Katha English Academy, since 2001.”

Katha has started releasing books in Telugu and it plans to move to Bangla and Tamil in the next two years. “But culture-linking is important for children,” says Geeta, “Katha translates stories from 21 Indian and foreign languages. I believe strongly that translation is the non-divisive force for nation building for young Indians, to link diversities, forge identities.”

So, what is the main focus of Katha in the next few years? Does it involve increasing the number of children it reaches out to, or releasing more titles than it has

I would like, with like-minded partners, to ensure that good, colourful, fun e-books reach as many children as possible.

today? “It’s our 300 Million Challenge,” replies Geeta, “India has 300 million children in schools today. Of this, 150 million.

children can read, while the other 150 million can’t. So, we bend over backwards for children, be it in publishing for or taking good content to children living in poverty through libraries, schools, public spaces. The Katha App will enlarge the reach in the next few years, making books and enhancing the joy of reading for all our children.”

But the real game-changer, Geeta says is access — access to good books. “Over the more than four decades that I have worked with and for children, I find most children are plagued by five poverties — social poverty like caste, class, colour; personal leadership, intellectual and imaginative, cultural and environmental poverties,” she says, “They need the knowledge and the skills to find their own SPICE Route out of poverty. Katha books enhance that moment of self discovery — helping readers think, ask questions, discuss and act — for themselves and for their community.”

Katha’s focus is to get all 300 million children reading for fun and meaning through an ECTC (Each Child Teach

a Child) approach. “Hence the Katha Libraries — Community Owned and Operated Libraries or COOL, as we like to call them,” says Geeta, “We now operate in over 60 under-served communities in many states, including Jammu and Kashmir.”

The main challenge that Katha contends with, though, is inequality. “Lack of kindness to people and planet,” as Geeta explains. But there’s a way to get around it, and that’s imagination. “We in Katha dream of our children being GEEKs in the very large sense of the word. Our books celebrate kindness and equality for girls and planet earth,” says Geeta before adding, “We talk of global climate change, population genetics, empowered girls and kind hearted boys who like animals and who are not scared of crying.”

Presently, with about a lakh of volunteers — children, youth, women — Katha is ringing in three decades of existence. “Continuing to help children to grow up to be reader-leaders, ethical, social and tech entrepreneurs who live fair, free and fearless lives, helping bring their families and communities out of poverty, is what we will strive to keep doing,” Geeta signs off.

SOCIAL VALUE – WHY ARE WE FORGETTING THE PLANET?

The increasing interest in ‘social value’ has led to an expansion of the social economy, big corporates rushing to show their ethical credentials and public sector organisations publishing their policies and new procurement strategies for social impact.

But a swift review of these actions shows a worrying trend – we are starting to overlook the environment.

In England and Wales, the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 requires public bodies to consider how the services they commission and procure might improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area.

What is not widely known is that social value originated in response to environmental sustainability policy and practice. Indeed, in construction, the concept of sustainability has been ‘business as usual’ for many years.

I believe that in 2017 there is now a pressing need to focus on the places where people live, the environment around us and the resources that we use. Increasing population causes waste, uses natural resources and creates global warming. Whilst politicians pull away from arguably ineffectual climate change agreements, the impacts of human activity on our planet and people expand in scale and depth.

We have already seen global warming rising by over 1 degree, and climate change is now leading to increasingly severe impacts – from rapidly melting sea ice at the poles and 50-degree heat waves in India, to floods in Bangladesh and drought in California. The UK is seeing dramatic impacts too – with severe flooding in almost every region and country in the UK in recent years.

In Manchester air pollution causes over 1,000 premature deaths each year. Local authorities spend billions of pounds each year dealing with waste. Fly tipping is on the increase. Energy costs are spiralling. Green belt land is being sacrificed to build homes.

I originally trained as a landscape architect and learned about how to create a ‘genius loci’. Gardeners such as Capability Brown created spaces where people wanted to be and felt happy; a sense of place that makes people feel good. It’s not really surprising that the happiest place to live in the UK is the Outer Hebrides. Away from all that pollution so common on the mainland, in a beautiful landscape, with renewable energy schemes and pride in the local environment. But even this idyllic life is under threat from sea level rise.

So, if our planet is suffering, and our people’s health and wellbeing is at risk;



In England and Wales, the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 requires public bodies to consider how the services they commission and procure might improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area.

how can we reverse the trend of ‘social value’ being only about jobs, training and doing local business? (Surely these are really economic factors anyway?)

Instead of ‘socio-economic’, should we be thinking about ‘socio-environmental’? We may be helping

people to access employment, but are they physically and mentally healthy enough to stay in these jobs?

Perhaps it’s time for a renewed look at ‘think global, act local’ – many little things done near to home can make a difference. But we now need more of the difference to be made closer to home as well as for our planet.

If ‘social value’ must include environmental benefits – as the legislation states – then using the Social Audit Network’s (www.socialauditnetwork.org.uk) social accounting methodology is one way to prove the positive benefit that you can have on the environment; to manage and improve your performance; and be accountable for this to your stakeholders – and the planet.

SAN resources include a simple ‘green office checklist’ and tips on how to calculate your carbon footprint. There are many simple online tools available for tracking environmental measures.

Being accountable for environmental measures is a compulsory element of the

SAN methodology. We have been challenged for this. Why should an organisation which is set up for a purpose such as providing training opportunities for young people have to report on its environmental impact?

The answer is because the organisation might use natural resources and energy, create waste or pollutants, employ staff who travel; and because those young people might be living shorter lives affected by air pollution, in an unpleasant and dirty neighbourhood, unable to afford to heat their homes. AND because we are heading for a climatic emergency – over 3 degrees warming – and we all will need to do everything that we can to protect humanity from catastrophic levels of climate change.

–Anne Lythgoe,
Social Audit Network, UK

FREEDOM IN-STEP WITH PROGRESS

“An individual can do well in any sphere of life, if only he/she is given the freedom of choice to do what they desire in life,” says Dr. Ravi S. Kumar, CEO and Managing Trustee of ‘Freedom For You Foundation’, based in Navi Mumbai. It is with this belief in basic human dignity, inclusivity and holistic, sustainable personal/societal development that the organization was first established, in 2004-2005. Dr. Ravi S Kumar says, “During my 35 years of working in social welfare sector, I have seen well-funded welfare organizations being inconsistent with the delivery of their services, switching their focus from one program to another, chiefly because their leadership was constantly changing.” This, he believes, led to many communities still remaining poor, disease-prone and unprotected from disasters even after being visited by one or more of these organizations. In order to ensure consistent support to the communities served, a group of like-minded people began pooling in their resources and started offering medical diagnostic camps at urban slums in Mumbai and its suburbs. In 2010 this was formally registered under the Bombay Public Trust Act, in the name of Freedom For You Foundation. Since then, they have been supported by MNCs and social impact agencies alike.

Freedom For You Foundation works at three levels: the personal level, helping underprivileged and distressed individuals find help and resources to pull themselves off their current predicaments, the community level, providing welfare facilities such as health-check ups and skill-building programs, and at a “Big Picture” level, working on environment conservation, disaster preparedness and sustainable development. Their interventions are largely designed around AET or “Awareness, Education and Training”. “Freedom4U creates awareness programs, Educates and imparts necessary training to the target beneficiaries in the focus areas of Health & Wellness, Safety and Security, School and College education, Disaster Preparedness, Relief and Rehabilitation, by conducting capacity building and skill development programs,” says Dr. Ravi.

Bal Niketan Vidyalay is a playschool in Rabale Slums in Navi Mumbai that offers early education programs to children aged 2-5 years. These being children of rag-pickers and daily wage labourers, the play schools help take care of the children while their parents are away at work. “Children need to enjoy childhood by playing in groups, learning language, math and numerical skills, intuitive skills, etc. There should be a balanced mix of ‘play and learn’ activities in the early childhood education to develop their physical and mental faculties for holistic development.” Says Dr. Ravi. Through the SHEP project (School Health, Hygiene Project), Freedom For You



Foundation provides basic educational infrastructure (drinking water, toilets, Science labs, Computer Labs, lighting/fans, play equipment, library etc. in the Zilla Parishad schools and other private schools in impoverished rural and urban areas.

The Women Empowerment Program includes health and wellness check-ups, skill-development program, microfinance and rights-based education. The highlight of this program is the proposed establishment of the Human Milk Bank, expected to open this year. It will help save lives of newborns, especially under-weight/preterm babies by procuring mother's milk from the bank.

The Freedom Kala Vikas Kendra are skill-development centres located in several locations in Navi Mumbai as well as in rural Maharashtra. Currently tailoring and bag-making is being taught to women in these areas as an alternative livelihood option.

“More than 200,000 people die every year of sudden cardiac arrest only in MMR region (Mumbai, Thane and Raigad regions),” quotes the Freedom For You Foundation website, adding that “First-Aid in ‘Golden Minutes’ of an accident is almost absent due to untrained bystanders, as they are unable or unwilling to help the casualty.” The organization creates awareness on the importance of first-aid and encourages people to initiate immediate assistance if they encounter a person in need of it, out on the streets.

Freedom For You Foundation makes “Disaster Preparedness Education” a priority. They conduct capacity building training for disaster preparedness, first

responder training, orientation in disaster relief and rehabilitation measures, and effective communication & coordination with various agencies at the disaster sites. They currently have an ongoing relief and rehabilitation team working in Kerala after the recent floods. Previously, teams had been sent to assist survivors of earthquakes in Nepal and Bihar, in April and May 2015 respectively, as also to help with the December 2015 Chennai floods.

In health-services, they have recently piloted a mobile medical van in the streets of Navi Mumbai, as recently as this month. They hope to expand the number of such mobile clinics in the months to come. They offer menstruation and reproductive health awareness programs, along with distribution of sanitary napkins. Their “Restore Dignity” camps raise funds for providing custom prosthetic limbs for persons with disabilities.

Freedom For You Foundation's environmental conservation includes working on social forestry; large scale planned tree-plantation, watershed programs, rainwater harvesting, building aquifers, wells, check-dams and other type of simple dams to store water in valleys and ravines. On the energy front, they promote solar and wind energy, and are currently in talks with the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) for simple energy solutions for rural students.

The CSR activities of this foundation include sharing of know-how through their bespoke CSR solutions program. Freedom For You Foundation provides consultancy/advisory services on the design and implementation of CSR

projects for various corporate organizations. They work on employee engagement programs, safety and emergency response training and disaster preparedness.

One of the guiding principles of Freedom For You Foundation is that, “Modern society MUST recognize the existential value of all beings in creation. Modern economy thrives at the bottom of the pyramid. A strong and empowered base can make super-powers of nations”

“The foundation serves as a one-stop shop for Corporates and grassroots NGOs alike for assistance with implementing specific projects in pointed geographical regions in fulfilment of their larger sustainable development goals. Indeed the footprint of the Freedom For You Foundation expands from Navi Mumbai, to several districts of rural Maharashtra, Goa and Karnataka even,” says Dr. Ravi.

—Archanaa Ramesh



Walking Beyond Tokenism

The link between Fair trade and climate change is complex but interconnected. By subscribing to the former, you help alleviate the effects of the latter. Pushpanath Krishnamurthy has taken 30 million steps in support of climate justice and the fairtrade movement. Read about his remarkable journey so far.

I am so moved by the heart wrenching impact of climate change across the globe, where women were hit first, worst and hardest.

It made me question my own personal responsibility. I was, as always inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, as to what he said about “being the change you want to see in the world.” Much like his famous “Salt March”, in the winter of 2009 as the world leaders were assembling, yet again, this time in Copenhagen to agree on a global climate treaty, I decided (a regular guy), to walk to the conference. Of course, as I did not live locally, this meant from Oxford to Copenhagen, a total of 595 kilometers.

My job at Oxfam at the time was as a global Campaigner and a popular mobilizer. For the purpose of this walk, I had managed to convince the management in Oxfam that I will take my annual leave to do this walk.

“I will gate crash the summit if need be” I thought, as I walked on the frozen, windswept, sunless days. I have walked before and have gate crashed meetings, I believed, like Gandhi, that I have a right to serve and I don’t think anyone can take that away from me.

I walked, slipping and falling periodically and at times, I was lost and felt scared, reciting the powerful poem by Tamil/Indian poet Bharathi, “Even if the big blue sky falls on your forehead, walk fearlessly, fearlessly, fearlessly” to keep my spirits high.

Originally, I was just thinking I would be walking and would hopefully meet a few people, but I could not believe how much of an impact it has had, with many others deciding to take action themselves. I was also so blessed with the friendship, support, generosity of communities, all that a product of historical goodwill that Oxfam had garnered and which, I shamelessly harvested in good faith as I was sheltered, fed, connected and cared.

The power of stories that I carried collected through Hearings, came in handy as I connected from parliamentarians and priests to postwomen and passenger train drivers.

My mobile was called from across the world: India, US, Africa, East Asia and even Iceland! I had by the virtue of this walk, gone from being an unknown to a global climate campaigner.

This first walk led me to think that I now needed to connect to significant growers, business entities and different societies. A thought that I took to Oxfam and moved to India, working for a small outfit like “Central For Social Markets”.

A partnership with a very large Growers Federation led to me to undertake my next walk and the



mobilization of all stakeholders, business, and policymakers, the national/state government and across sections of the Western Ghat society.

The movement is led by the grower’s leadership and the effort is a work in progress. As many experiments on adaptation and mitigation is undertaken along with efforts to Brand the Coffee.

As the world leaders were discussing in 2015/2016, yet again, in Paris, for a FAB (Fair; Ambitious; and Binding) deal, a last ditch effort by Obama and the European leadership, with big players like China and India coming to the table willingly, I was walking furiously on the red earth soil kicking up a shower of vermillion up to my body. As always my power walk (to show time is running out) left the handful who managed to keep step, gasping while we left behind scores to saunter at their own pace.

This 450 kilometers walk along the seashore, across the plains of Tamil Nadu and up to the Mountain from the union territory of Pondicherry to the peak of the Blur Mountain, could not have happened without the marvellous support, energy and inspiration of the first generation business leader, Anjali Schiavina, of the famous Mandala Apparels.

It was also very surprising and poignant every time I set out to walk, the climate and the weather seem to wreak havoc at the starting point. This time, the

South Asia’s first Fairtrade town was born and is flourishing now. Furthermore, the movement towards sustainable production and fair trade is slowly blossoming in India (e.g. tea, coffee, groundnut, cotton) is encouraging. Furthermore, schools and consumers are taking a prolonged, robust interest. In addition, fashion revolutionising activities are leading to innovative collaboration. In my opinion, the single most important outcome was the widespread influence the walk had on workers, housewives, school children and of course, farmers who swamped me wherever I went.

I have taken 30 million steps and have met approximately quarter million people. People say it is worth a book! Almost all of this, I have done within my own small pension, to carry on the good work, a small donation would be most appreciated. But for me, more people joining and making a fairer, sustainable world is far more vital. My one ask, to all readers, cynics and supporters alike, is that fair trade is definitely one way we can make a sustainable business. The link between Fair trade and climate



city of Chennai (formerly Madras) was under a deluge of unprecedented proportions. My wife and elderly parents in a ground floor apartment slowly swallowed by rising water, but everyone including them still supported me to continue the walk with my fellow walker, Natesa Iyer!

This walk felt so complete because it was the initiative of businesses joined by household consumers, professionals like doctors, farmers, lawyers, organic growers, mothers, teachers and students. I met more than 8000 people directly and easily a couple of million through Radio, Broadsheet, TV and social media.

Since the walk, the idea of making

change is complex but interconnected. By subscribing to the former, you help alleviate the effects of the latter. Growers, consumers and businesses all have their combined role to play, to make a significant impact for a sustainable world.

Please visit my blog: www.gopushgo.co.uk and support me with your words and experience too, donate via the portal and do invite me to speak at your events to raise awareness in your organisations

—Pushpanath Krishnamurthy, Global Consultant and Campaigner



Acceptance



A man took great pride in his lawn. Once, on his return from a trip abroad, he found a large crop of dandelions in his lawn. He tried every method he knew to destroy them. Still they plagued him. Finally he wrote to the Department of Agriculture. He enumerated all the things he had tried, and closed the letter with the question: "What shall I do now?"

In due course the reply came: "We suggest you learn to love them."

Explicit Learning

- A. Cribbing about a weakness becomes another weakness.
- B. Learning to accept a weakness in itself a strength.
- C. What you resist persists.

Introspective Learning

- A. How do I respond to the dandelions in me?
- B. Why do I fail to understand that what I resist only persists?
- C. What is the nature of 'Acceptance'?

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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.

For more information, please visit our website www.csim.in

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

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“I wake up every day feeling alive to my responsibilities.”

M. Mahadevan shares with Marie Banu his journey as a social entrepreneur

M. Mahadevan, fondly called ‘Hot Breads’ Mahadevan, has been in the hospitality and catering business for over three decades now. Hailing from Udumalpet, a simple town in Tamil Nadu located 65 kilometers from Coimbatore; Mahadevan has also served as a teaching professor at the University of Madras. Both his parents are doctors.

His passion for food led him to start Oriental Cuisines Private Limited (OCPL) in May 1994. He set up the first Hot Breads outlet in Chennai in 1989 and in Dubai in 1995. ‘Hot Breads’ success has been replicated and has now grown to over 30 locations in India and more than 40 abroad.

Mahadevan works with more than 252 partners across 18 countries, 476 eateries and more than 5,000 employees. He runs three banners — Oriental Cuisines, CC Fine Foods and B&M Hot Breads. The brands that he manages with his global partners are Benjarong, Sera, Ente Keralam, Wang’s Kitchen, Teppan, French Loaf, and Planet Yumm. Besides, he has set up 42 bakeries and restaurants in the USA, Middle East, Africa, Canada, France and London.

Mahadevan has also been helping create entrepreneurs by starting Winners Bakeries to help young bright people set up their own outlets. There are five in Chennai and four in Coimbatore. He also teaches bread making to prisoners in Chennai’s Central Prison at Puzhal. Writer’s café, his third venture on the social front, rehabilitate survivors of domestic abuse, acid attacks and fire accidents. A philanthropist, a social entrepreneur, his charitable deeds are endless.

In an exclusive interview, Mr. M. Mahadevan shares with Marie Banu his journey as a social entrepreneur.

What was the driving force for you to move from teaching to becoming a Food entrepreneur?

This was a journey I took to make money; there was no other motive.

I started my career as an Assistant Professor in the University of Madras in 1979 and taught Marketing Management and Accountancy to students. But, my fierce ambition was to be a part of the hotel industry and this drove me to satisfy my urge.

I took up a part-time night job with a hotel in the city where I started working for four hours at night to learn more about the industry. I juggled with many roles; from being a trainee, a bellboy, and receptionist - to almost everything. So, while I worked as a professor during the daytime, I also moonlighted as an apprentice with a hotel in the evenings.

At the hotel, I witnessed people who came and threw money on fancy dinners and drinks. They were spending my one-month salary on their one night dinner. Here came the fire in the belly to become rich and that made me work hard to become a food entrepreneur as I had a passion for food.

I left my teaching job and moved to the F&B sector full time in 1982. I studied deep into the food and beverage business and acquired enough knowledge to go on my own.

About your entrepreneurial journey in the restaurant space?

My first step was a Chinese take-away at a restaurant in Chennai, which I launched along with a partner who I met in the hotel where I was working. We served food from 5pm to 11.30pm and it was the time when people had a craze for Chinese food. I took advantage of that!

Once, a customer of mine asked if I would be interested to set up a restaurant in a commercial tower that he was constructing. That’s how I launched ‘Cascade’ where we served Chinese, Thai, Malay and Japanese cuisines as well.

Some three years later, in 1989, I launched ‘Hot Breads’. This was a turning point! The idea was born during one of my trips to Singapore where I went to source ingredients like Chinese sauces. The dinky looking bakeries caught my eye and I decided to launch a similar one back home. Not many of my friends encouraged my move. They thought that I was crazy, but I had my own ideas. It was not just the bread and bakery that I was looking at!

I created some exciting concepts. For instance, we made curry bun and filled chicken tikka inside a croissant. I got the idea after seeing what the Japanese did to their bakery items. This was a huge hit! People used to crowd in our Hot Breads outlet at Alsa Mall in Chennai. From day one, we started to make profits as the concept was unique and our products were tasty. We broke even in the first year and since then we never looked back.

After three months or so, people from Kochi and Bangalore approached me to start Hot Breads units in these cities. Soon, I came to be known as ‘Hot Breads’ Mahadevan!

I opened my first international outlet in Dubai in 1994, and recently launched a south Indian restaurant in Melbourne, Australia.

You have been setting up several ‘Social Enterprises’ like the Give Life Cafe, Winners Bakery, and Writers

Cafe, Freedom bakery at Puzhal Prison, and Eddies Pop Corn. What has been the inspiration?

When I landed in Chennai searching for a job, I have stayed without food and proper roof over my head. With sharing accommodation, sharing food and going hungry I know what life without resources is!

When I had enough money, I remembered my mother’s brief talk on living and giving. She used to say: “If the Lord bestowed you with more than what you need, the extra he gives you is for the society and not for you.” Her advice and my struggle to conduct my day-to-day life in early Chennai days taught me to share what I have with the needy people.

Money is only a tool to live; it is not life. I began to see the poverty around me and realised that the more I expand my business, the more jobs I would be able to create for people. I wake up every day feeling alive to my responsibilities. I have earned enough money and am now in a position to give back.

I also believe in sustainability in Charity Projects and always had a clear vision — “I should never give fish, instead should teach them to fish.” This planned approach gave me all the above social enterprises, which provides empowerment to the poor people and takes them out of poverty by teaching them a skill.

Which of the social issues are you passionate about?

Two social issues are of highest priority for me — Home for the destitute men & women; and empowerment of abused & poor women.

My mother has been my instrumental force. If I am inclined towards women empowerment, it is because of her. She ensured that my sisters got a degree in either law or medicine and believed that when you educate a girl, you educate the family.

You have been organising Battle of the Buffet event in Chennai to raise funds for NGOs. Can you tell us about this?

Battle of the Buffet event is organized as part of India’s largest festival of giving — ‘Daan Utsav’, a unique fundraiser that supports worthy NGOs in Tamil Nadu.

I cannot BELIEVE that this idea of mine is a decade old, even my wife discouraged me (when I spoke to her in the first year) saying that no one will pay 5000 rupees for an evening of dinner and entertainment.

It is a fun-filled evening with great food, fantastic music, and the coming together of like-minded people — all for a social cause! Chefs of leading 5 star hotels and their teams put together a delightful buffet showcasing their culinary talent and throw it open to the people of Chennai, to raise funds for close to 100 NGOs across Tamil Nadu. The restaurants, the chefs and their teams cook up and serve this feast as their “act of giving”. Close to 3000 Chennaites are expected to attend the event by donating (Platinum -Rs.15,000 or Gold -Rs.10,000 or Silver -Rs.7,500) to an NGO they care and support.

The event organized by Chennai Mission, United way of Chennai, and CIOA, gives NGOs a lot of visibility among donors. It also networks various donors with newer and deserving NGOs. The registered NGOs will be present in person to share and show case their expertise and projects, thus providing a great platform for public interaction on social causes and action.

Here we are from 81 lac (for 32 NGOs) in 2009 to 6.7 crores that was raised last year from collective donation by over 75

NGOs. Now, it’s time for me to handover this event to a larger organization, as in 2018 we have over 100 NGOs participating and have fixed a fundraising target exceeding seven crores.

