

# Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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## FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

While businesses are consciously aiming at sustainable development, a new-gen 'Hero' has emerged. We call them "Social Intrapreneurs."

Social intrapreneurs are entrepreneurial employees who start initiatives within existing institutions — corporate, education, public, or non-profit — that create social and/or environmental good, while moving the institution's mission forward. They use existing infrastructures and organisational capabilities as levers to deliver social value on a large scale. For them, social issues might be related to the financial, nutritional, environmental, or educational wellness of their community and the entire planet as a whole.

Social Entrepreneurship and Social Intrapreneurship are certainly related, but with an important distinction: while social entrepreneurs establish separate enterprises to create social good, social intrapreneurs create that social good from inside an existing entity.

Presently, traditional business models are under pressure from disruptive technologies, low growth in established markets, and challenges in developing and emerging markets, and some companies see social intrapreneurs as one way to stay competitive. Social intrapreneurs help their employers meet sustainability commitments and create value for customers and communities in ways that are built to last.

Intrapreneurship opens the doors to entrepreneurial thinking for all employees. It is important to an organisation because it allows employees to use their skills to benefit the company, as well as themselves. It gives them the freedom to grow within the company and to be innovative for the company's gain.

Having a group of intrapreneurs is good, but having an entire organization with an entrepreneurial mindset is golden. It projects a company's ability to innovate to an unprecedented scale. Intrapreneurs always strive to make work meaningful for themselves and their organizations. They are the future because they intuitively understand what it takes to adapt to a rapidly changing environment.

Researchers are proving that innovation and growth are the key driving forces behind the adoption of Intrapreneurship. In order for organisations to turn their businesses into a success story, they must embrace Intrapreneurship.

CSIM has launched the Social Intrapreneurship training programme. Enrol and master the art of Social Intrapreneurship!

Marie Banu

## EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh  
Marie Banu

# Conversations with Shri Ramana Maharishi

Miss Umadevi, a Polish lady convert to Hinduism, asked Sri Bhagavan: I once before told Sri Bhagavan how I had a vision of Siva at about the time of my conversion to Hinduism. A similar experience recurred to me at Courtallam. These visions are momentary. But they are blissful. I want to know how they might be made permanent and continuous. Without Siva there is no life in what I see around me. I am so happy to think of Him. Please tell me how His vision may be everlasting to me.

**M.:** You speak of a vision of Siva. Vision is always of an object. That implies the existence of a subject. The value of the vision is the same as that of the seer. (That is to say, the nature of the vision is on the same plane as that of the seer.) Appearance implies disappearance also. Whatever appears must also disappear. A vision can never be eternal. But Siva is eternal.

The *pratyaksha* (vision) of Siva to the eye signifies the existence of the eyes to see; the *buddhi* (intellect) lying behind the sight; the seer behind the *buddhi* and the sight; and finally the Consciousness underlying the seer. This *pratyaksha* (vision) is not as real as one imagines it to be, because it is not intimate and inherent; it is not first-hand. It is the result of several successive phases of Consciousness. Of these, Consciousness alone does not vary. It is eternal. It is Siva. It is the Self.

The vision implies the seer. The seer cannot deny the existence of the Self. There is no moment when the Self as Consciousness does not exist; nor can the seer remain apart from Consciousness. This Consciousness is the eternal Being and the only Being. The seer cannot see himself. Does he deny his existence because he cannot see himself with the eyes as *pratyaksha* (in vision)? No! So, *pratyaksha* does not mean seeing, but BE-ing.

"To BE" is to realise - Hence I AM THAT I AM. I AM is Siva. Nothing else can be without Him. Everything has its being in Siva and because of Siva.

Therefore enquire "Who am I?" Sink deep within and abide as the Self. That is Siva as BE-ing. Do not expect to have visions of Him repeated. What is the difference between the objects you see and Siva? He is both the subject and the object. You cannot be without Siva. Siva is always realised here and now. If you think you have not realised Him it is wrong. This is the obstacle for realising Siva. Give up that thought also and realisation is there.

**D.:** Yes. But how shall I effect it as quickly as possible?

**M.:** This is the obstacle for realisation. Can there be the individual without Siva? Even now He is you. There is no question of time. If there be a moment of non-realisation, the question of realisation can arise. But as it is you cannot be without Him. He is already realised, ever realised and never non-realised.

Surrender to Him and abide by His will whether he appears or vanishes; await His pleasure. If you ask Him to do as you please, it is not surrender but

command to Him. You cannot have Him obey you and yet think that you have surrendered. He knows what is best and when and how to do it. Leave everything entirely to Him. His is the burden: you have no longer any cares. All your cares are His. Such is surrender. This is *bhakti*.

Or, enquire to whom these questions arise. Dive deep in the Heart and remain as the Self. One of these two ways is open to the aspirant.

**Sri Bhagavan also added:** There is no being who is not conscious and therefore who is not Siva. Not only is he Siva but also all else of which he is aware or not aware. Yet he thinks in sheer ignorance that he sees the universe in diverse forms. But if he sees his Self he is not aware of his separateness from the universe; in fact his individuality and the other entities vanish although they persist in all their forms. Siva is seen as the universe. But the seer does not see the background itself. Think of the man who sees only the cloth and not the cotton of which it is made; or of the man who sees the pictures moving on the screen in a cinema show and not the screen itself as the background; or again the man who sees the letters which he reads but not the paper on which

they are written. The objects are thus Consciousness and forms. But the ordinary person sees the objects in the universe but not Siva in these forms. Siva is the Being assuming these forms and the Consciousness seeing them. That is to say, Siva is the background underlying both the subject and the object, and again Siva in Repose and Siva in Action, or Siva and Sakti, or the Lord and the Universe. Whatever it is said to be, it is only Consciousness whether in repose or in action. Who is there that is not conscious? So, who is not realised? How then can questions arise doubting realisation or desiring it? If 'I' am not *pratyaksha* to me, I can then say that Siva is not *pratyaksha*.

These questions arise because you have limited the Self to the body, only then the ideas of within and without, of the subject and the object, arise. The objective visions have no intrinsic value. Even if they are everlasting they cannot satisfy the person. Uma has Siva always with Her. Both together form *Ardhanariswara*. Yet she wanted to know Siva in His true nature. She made *tapas*. In her *dhyana* she saw a bright light. She thought: "This cannot be Siva for it is within the compass of my vision. I am greater than this light." So she resumed her *tapas*. Thoughts disappeared. Stillness prevailed. She then realised that BE-ing is Siva in His true nature.

Muruganar cited Appar's stanza: - "To remove my darkness and give me light, Thy Grace must work through ME only."

Sri Bhagavan mentioned Manickavachagar's: "We do bhajana and the rest. But we have not seen nor heard of those who had seen Thee." One cannot see God and yet retain individuality. The seer and the seen unite into one Being. There is no cogniser, nor cognition, nor the cognised. All merge into One Supreme Siva only!

Source: Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi





# ABANDONED TO ADOPT



The streets in our society form a unique intersection of lives and classes. They are home to millions, young and old, abled disabled, orphaned or otherwise. While reasons are a plenty, landing on the streets inevitably makes this population extremely vulnerable and are readily exploited for many reasons including cheap labour.

Children in particular, are exposed to every kind of danger and deadly habits, ensuring that they don't lead a secure life that a child living with family may experience. Abandonment deprives a child of all his fundamental rights. "In case of mentally challenged and abandoned children, they go through a big cycle of insecurity and mistrust that they are scarred for life. We strive to rescue and rehabilitate such children because their lives matter and are in no way lesser humans," says Mr Iyyappan Subramaniam, Founder of Sri Arunodayam Trust in Chennai.

Iyyappan was always interested in the holistic rehabilitation of differently abled persons and therefore pursued a Diploma on the subject soon after finishing school. "The course was an eye opener. It prompted me to see beneath the ice. There was no dedicated institutional care for abandoned, mentally challenged children. In 2003, I launched a Home with one child, in a rented house in Kolathur, Chennai. All I had was a strong inner drive. I wasn't aware of the challenges but was sure that these could not be excuses," he says emotionally.

Iyyappan's subject knowledge and the new experience with inmates

compelled him to prepare himself to institutionalise a sustainable effort. "I had to equip myself but had no clue about how or where I would do it. I came to know about CSIM from a friend in 2003. CSIM not only honed my skills, but also prepared me to foresee future of these special children," he shares.

*"CSIM not only honed my skills, but also prepared me to foresee future of these special children."*

"Planning and vision are fundamental to any institution. To me, they mean the future of special children. Exposure and guidance from experts who shared their struggles and their experiences helped me shape my work. One incredible management lesson that I will always remember and share with others too is – it is never too late to go back to the drawing table. As long as you are able to see your own pitfalls, you will be able to handle any obstacle. All these learnings kept driving me to think about what would happen in the lives of these special children and that introspection led me to plan better for the institution," says

Iyyappan, underscoring the long term dependence and responsibility that comes in with every rescued child.

2009 was a big milestone for Sri Arunodayam as their first institutional grant came through to fund all their interventions. At once, Iyyappan focussed on strengthening his human resources to make sure that qualified therapists were available.

As children grew older and were able to learn new skills, Sri Arunodayam gave room for vocational training. Prayatna, the vocational training centre for children above 18 years was established in 2012. From paper bags to sling bags, shopping bags, candles and others, a range of products were attempted with enthusiasm. "All these skills came in very helpful during the Covid pandemic. Our children stitched 10,000 reusable cloth masks and distributed them among the poor, old and abandoned people on the streets who could not afford to buy them. This was a big achievement for us! We believe that timely care and opportunities is all that we need to turn these special challenged individuals productive," says Iyyappan.

Sri Arunodayam presently shelters 115 children and has employed 50 full-time staff. A home for boys was inaugurated in 2011 with a capacity of housing 80 boys and another home for girls is under construction at at Korattur Village, Kallikuppam.

"In our 10th year our boys' home was established and the girls' home will come up in our 20th year. We follow organic planning exercises periodically

to decide on our next interventions and internally evaluate compliance, achievements and concerns. I owe it to CSIM for making me realise the importance of governance in NGOs and meticulous planning, irrespective of the size and impact of any programme. Besides this, donor support is our back bone. Engaging and retaining donors is an expertise and my training at CSIM helped me in this area as well. CSIM taught me everything from the scratch and I also followed suit. The result is an efficient team at Sri Arunodayam that dreams together for the future of our special children," he says proudly.

With all this work, is Iyyappan content? He declines instantly. "The issue of abandonment is on the rise, in spite of increasing awareness. Providing institutional care for special children throughout their lives is not easy. While we certainly intend to work on after-care; employment and community reintegration is impossible without a responsive society," worries Iyyappan.

Having seen the children learn every new skill (from distinguishing right from left), personal care and vocational skills, he feels that adapting to differences is a one-sided responsibility, completely borne by the mentally challenged children.

"I look forward to the day when society as a whole comes forward to adapt and accommodate the needs and abilities of differently abled persons."

*Shanmuga Priya.T*



# CHANGING HUES: Awaken the Queen within

## Perseverance, the inner drive

“Good evening Aunty!” the chirpy voice came from the porch. Bright faced and grinning, Reena walked into the house. Padma was standing at the door. Manju stood there with a duffle bag, all dressed up. “Hi, Manju! Where are you going? You look beautiful and bright in these clothes,” said Reena. “Manju is a quick learner and always wants to be the best,” said Padma, giving an appreciative pat on Manju’s shoulder. Manju was grinning and seemed excited to receive all the compliments. “I am going to my village to meet my mother and attend my nephew’s wedding. I will be back on Monday morning,” Manju said happily, picking up her bag and walking towards the gate.

Padma looked worried as Manju left in the cab. She knew the next 5 days would be tough to manage the household activities without Manju. “Reena, I am worried because Manju is a true housekeeper. She is good at what she does. She manages everything from water to electrical issues, prepping and organizing the kitchen, taking care of laundry and shopping lists, feeding and looking after the dogs, and everything else. With a sharp mind, Manju is the kingpin of this house and manages all her chores like child’s play,” said Padma.

Manju wielded her power and authority to decide her own work schedule and manage the gardener, maid, and security guard.

“Aunt, don’t look so worried. It is only a week, and Manju will be back. I think we should manage the house. That way, Manju’s arrogance and authority will be more balanced. She is sometimes too much of a dictator here,” Reena added quickly, looking at Padma’s worried face.

Padma looked into the distance, deep in thought, as she settled down in the recliner, indicating story time! “Reena, you are seeing Manju today. You must listen to her story and how she came into this house almost 16 years ago. She hails from a small village in central Karnataka, famous for its coffee estates. She is the third child of her mother who is the fourth wife of her father. The earlier wives died, and her father married her mother. But there was minimal support from the father to her family. He would visit them once a month, give some money to her mom, and bring sweets

*Every woman has it in her to get out of the life handed over to her and build one that she deserves. But it calls for believing in yourself and pursuing your vision with a single-minded focus.*



for her. As a small child, she would wait for those sweets but missed the love from her father.

Poverty gripped the family and they all had to work to make ends meet. At the tender age of 6, she was sent away to a rich man’s house to take care of an

elderly lady in the house who needed help throughout the day, as well as his four dogs. She was offered food and shelter and never knew what her salary was as her mother collected her pay. Manju slept in a tiny spot under the staircase, had just one meal and worked

throughout the day. Whenever she was starving, she would eat bits of the bread and buns that were given to feed the dogs. She was moved around from house to house till the age of 13, working and living in dismal conditions. Her only goal in life was to pacify her hunger and make sure she didn’t make any mistakes so she wouldn’t be beaten by the family she worked for.

After she matured into a young lady, her mother brought her back home and put her to work in a restaurant near the house. When she turned 18, she went to work at the coffee and pepper estates, slogging the entire day and making friends with the womenfolk. It was indeed hard work, and every paisa paid to them went into managing the household expenses. She was given away in marriage to a man who was an alcoholic. Coping with loans from money lenders for illnesses, festivals, and other household requirements in addition to taking care of two children became her life.

Manju was a beautiful young lady, so keeping the estate managers and owners at bay with their advances was a tough job. Her husband was extremely jealous when she would get attention, and would physically abuse her. She continued to suffer at home but developed a high level of assertiveness and leadership capacity at the estate.

She represented the female worker group and was promoted as a supervisor.

Reena interrupted, “Aunt, but where did you meet her and how did she come to stay with you? Seeing her now, I can’t imagine her working in the estates.”

Padma, with a sense of satisfaction in her voice, said, “Reena, it is like she has been reborn and given a second chance at life. She has been the symbol of commitment, consistency by following her vision with a steely focus. She was beaten up by her husband, starved, and threatened to be burnt to death one day. She noticed her children not attending school regularly and living in fear. It was then she decided to take charge of her life. She approached her sister-in-law in Bengaluru and sought her help to find a job. She went to the police station, filed a complaint against her husband, and remanded him in police custody. She left the village and boarded the bus to Bengaluru.

A friend who is a senior social worker knew her sister-in-law and introduced Manju to me. That was my blessing. I was looking for someone I could trust to take care of my children and parents when I travelled for work. She had the vision to see her children educated and build a life of comfort and joy. She was willing to work hard, be honest and sincere. I promised her the





possibility of such an experience. Can you believe, Reena, that she transformed herself, learned everything from cooking recipes, to our cultural and religious practices? She allowed us to guide her and her children's education. Her son studied up to the 12th grade, took up vocational training and is working successfully now. Her daughter has completed her college degree and is working too.

She watches every technician who comes home to repair or service

appliances like the washing machine, water filter, etc. Whenever a tiny problem occurs, she is happy to open it up and fix it. She has learned to use a smartphone, google and WhatsApp - all through images, and voice recordings! She has developed negotiation skills and is a people manager too. She has a single-minded focus to work, earn her salary,



not waste a single paisa, and use it for education, assets, and deposit for the future. Her perseverance and tenacity to leave her past and build a new life in this large city is phenomenal. She now takes care of her mother and sister, too, back in the village. She does not yield to temptations and short cuts at work."

Reena nodded in agreement, adding, "I have always seen her own up her work and this house as her own. She has a high level of belongingness. I have seen her not allowing criticisms and feedback to affect her morale but take it as a learning point to evolve into a better person. Imagine, if she had access to education in her young age, she would have turned out to be an excellent leader in an organization."

"True, Reena. Let me share with you a touching anecdote. When she met me at the bus stand, she initially mistook me for a very dear childhood friend in the village. She had lost her whereabouts after her friend had left for town with her family. But, when she came to know the truth that I am not her long lost friend, she decided she will consider me to be her best friend for the rest of her life. She met my father and decided to take care of him as her own which she had missed in her life."

"How beautiful is it for someone to see in others what they don't have!" Reena said, tearing up.

"Reena, today in her entire family,

she has become a role model. Initially, no one in her village believed her. They suspected her morality and ways of living after watching her transformation. But now that her children have respectful jobs, they believe in her."

"Every woman has it in her to get out of the life handed over to her and build one that she deserves. But it calls for believing in yourself and pursuing your vision with a single-minded focus. She has plans for her old age too now, which she keeps sharing with me."

Reena added, "I admire her resilience for changing, learning, and evolving. As a single parent, she has given her best to her children. The mother in her will not let anything come in the way of her children growing up. I do wish they would understand her struggles in life and respect her for that in her old age. I am happy you shared this side of Manju's story. My respect for her has gone up! She has not just secured a job but has built a life for herself and her children."

"Thank you for the value-adding evening, Auntie. I am going to reflect on what kind of a life I want to build for myself and how much I need to persevere to follow my vision. See you later, bye!" Reena trotted towards her house, humming her favorite tune.

**Dr. Kalpana Sampath**  
Illustrations by **Ritu Rathore & Prathiksha P**

## Opportunity



A fisherman cast his net and caught a little fish. The little fish begged him to let him go for the present, as he was so small and to catch him again later on, when he was bigger.

But the fisherman said: "Nay, I would be a simpleton to let go of a good thing I have got and run after a doubtful expectation."



### Explicit Learning

- We should not let go what's in hand in anticipation of something better in future.
- The present is here at hand, the future is only a promise.
- A bird in hand is worth two in the bush.



### Introspective Learning

- What does 'opportunity' mean to you?
- How do I deal with the present?
- How much am I willing to risk the present for the future?



# ADAPTING TO EXCEL



Since its inception, Lotus Petal Foundation has benefited the lives of 12,000 children and other people through various programs. The Sahyog Project has undoubtedly been one of the foundation’s most successful ones till date. The organization has taken up the initiative of adopting government schools and giving their facilities an updation. “Under Project Sahyog we upgrade the infrastructure of government schools in terms of classrooms, toilets, drinking water, lights, fans, computer labs, STEM labs and provide teachers based on the teaching gaps of the students. We also deploy permanent housekeeping staff,” says Kushal Raj Chakravorty – Founder & Managing Trustee Lotus Petal Foundation, “We have adopted two government middle schools in Haryana. We plan to extend this programme to over a hundred

schools. This will have an impact on over 10,000 students, in total.”  
The onset of the pandemic forced Lotus Petal Foundation to adapt, and adapt well. “The pandemic came as a serious disruption to the academic and extracurricular activities of Lotus Petal. Being a non-profit we were especially taken aback by the situation. However, we had invested in technological advancements by way of a digital learning platform for students which we had started using three years ago, which we then remodeled to an online learning platform,” says the founder of the organization.  
What ensued was a challenging transformation from textbooks to digital learning platforms. While the transition was particularly grueling on those running the show, generous aid from donors

helped ease the burden on Lotus Petal Foundation. “Although difficult, we transitioned the entire academic set up to the online platform. Seeking help from our donors, we supplied our children with tablets, refurbished laptops and desktops,” Kushal adds, “We provided data packs and headphones. Today, we have reached a point in our school where classes, workshops, seminars are all held with regularity online. We have also conducted inter-house competitions and various celebrations online with great success.”  
Lotus Petal Foundation’s ability to go digital has been aided by the foresight to invest into technology at earlier times.  
“In 2016 we partnered with the Government’s National Digital Literacy Mission. All the rules mandated by them were followed in our efforts

towards digital literacy,” says Kushal. “Over 1000 people have benefitted from the efforts of Lotus Petal and are now digitally literate. In the current circumstances it is more important than ever to have at least basic digital knowledge, in this way, our partnership has been extremely fruitful.”  
Given the circumstances the organization has been confronted with, it comes as no surprise that Lotus Petal Foundation has attached a high value to health and wellbeing. Hence, the pre-existing project focused on boosting basic health and immunity was more valuable than ever.  
“Arogya Wellness is the programme which measures the health status of our children. The objective of this programme is to create a foundation of basic health and immunity. Under Arogya, we provide freshly cooked breakfast and lunch every day. Also, students learn to grow their own food, make a compost pit and understand the nuances of gardening through the in-house urban farm. This creates an interest in nutrition and enables them to make better food choices,” explains Kushal.  
The organization maintains a detailed list of the health parameters of each child. Kushal conveys “Benefits of the food and nutrition programmes have been evident with slow but steady improvement in the nutritional status of the children, regular checkups by a doctor who would visit the campus for a weekly OPD were a norm. Now, with the pandemic raging, the health parameters are chronicled online. Under our nutrition and food programmes, we have served 6.66 lakh meals till date.”  
Providing relief during COVID-19 is high on the priority list of Lotus Petal Foundation. “Our short-term goals are all aspects of relief work during the pandemic. In this crisis we started our community feeding programme, helped migrant workers in nearby areas and distributed PPE kits to various hospitals.”  
“Retention of students was the goal behind the transition to online school so that our children’s education remains uninterrupted,” says Kushal, “We are assisting with our programmes like Blue Khoj where we provide jobs to the parents of our school children who lost their job during this pandemic. This will help them rebuild their households which have been detrimentally affected by the pandemic.”  
There are long-term goals too like the plan to achieve transformation in the lives of children through education, equal opportunity and exemplary academics. “Not to forget nutritious meals, free healthcare and skill development to the children of the urban poor in India,” adds Kushal, “Provision of an ecosystem for people all across the world to contribute towards the cause of education with their skills, time and money is equally important.”  
At the end of it all, the organization is aiming to build new modules of education and skill development, even as it hopes to expand its beneficiary base by ten-fold. This could help Lotus Petal Foundation reach as many children as possible, which could well end up being a glowing testament to the work it has done.



***"Lotus Petal Foundation's ability to go digital is largely due to investments in technology and adapting the same to cater to children in slums."***



# POPSICLE SHOP BY DAY, AND SHELTER FOR THE HOMELESS BY NIGHT

*When a bakery and snack shop turns into a shelter for the homeless, an inspired community responds.*

"In Manila, many eateries offer 'unli' rice, which means 'unlimited' rice. That's what we call Camille now, because she feeds us without limit," shares Tatay Ayo, a street dweller.

Camille Dowling Ibanes is the owner of Popburri, a small bakery and snack shop in East Kamias, from Quezon City in the Philippines, that sells special popsicles, burritos, and other snack items. When COVID-19 forced Metro Manila to enter a lockdown, Camille was moved to open her heart (and snack shop) to the homeless.

According to a Reuters report in 2018, there are about 4.5 million homeless people in the Philippines, a country of about 106 million people. An estimated 3 million homeless are in Manila, possibly the most in any city in the world.

"With a curfew as part of the lockdown, it became illegal to be out on the streets at night. But what about the homeless? They can't stay off the streets at night, the streets are their home. I had to do something," says Camille.

She goes on to share, "I know what it feels like to be invisible to the world, I know what it feels like to yearn for a helping hand during tough times. So I have decided that anyone needing refuge for the night would find it at Popburri."

Besides providing a roof over their heads and a safe space for rest, Camille also provides free food, a bathing facility and sleeping mats for the street dwellers. Soon, over 70 people were sheltering at the cafe each night.

The shelter was open daily from 6pm to 6am, serving dinner and breakfast. On its first night, guests were treated to a meal of Mexican chicken, rice, melon, bangus (a local fish dish) and popsicles.

Tatay Ayo shares, "My family would reach the cafe at around 5pm. Once inside, we washed, ate and slept well.

This was not the first time Popburri has offered shelter. When Typhoon Kammuri, dubbed "Tisoy" by locals,



aged in December 2019, Popburri also offered shelter and free meals to those who were stranded due to the lack of public transportation.

## SHUTTING DOWN DURING LOCKDOWN

Popburri's shelter was a hit, with friends and strangers alike donating food and other supplies in support. Says Camille, "We were lucky. And then we got too lucky."

As the line of people seeking shelter grew each day, so did the number of complaints of safety protocols being violated, even though Camille and her team took precautionary measures as best as they could.

Eventually, the shelter was ordered to close after an official alleged that the establishment failed to follow quarantine protocols against COVID-19, a claim that was intensely debated in the media and online.

In the face of criticism, officials set up a temporary shelter elsewhere. However, less than half of the guests at Popburri agreed to go there, as it was too far to be a viable alternative. Many of them preferred to take their chance on the streets.

"I wish the outcome was different. But I'll keep finding ways to make a difference," shares Camille.

The Popburri shelter may have been ordered to close, but the team continues to provide services to the homeless. Every day, they deliver food to over 200 homeless people.

## A COMMUNITY OF HELP

"Sometimes, all it takes to turn a life around is the acknowledgement of your pain, and a helping hand from a fellow human being," shares Camille.

The heartwarming response from the public to the shelter was nothing short of inspiring for Camille.

Customers and neighbours have donated cooked food for the guests, mattresses, toiletries, as well as cash. Even their barangay councillors have also been supportive of the initiative and have lent a hand to help out with guests' medical needs. Camille's goal now is to build a permanent shelter at Popburri to house the homeless and provide them with employment opportunities.

Says Camille, "We are working with the officials to ensure that we are able to help feed and house about 70 people each night. We also want to connect them to mentorship and job placement programmes because finding them employment is the only way to break the cycle of poverty."

She adds, "Maybe I'm too hopeful. But I know from experience that hope leads to amazing things."

*A story by Our Better World  
(the digital storytelling initiative of the  
Singapore International Foundation  
([www.ourbetterworld.org](http://www.ourbetterworld.org)))*



## Centre for Social Initiative and Management

### Contact Persons:

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

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

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# NEW SKILLS FOR CONTINUOUS GROWTH



Ever since the lockdown began, sufferings and hardships of migrant workers have haunted the country. It highlighted several issues and how they faced the brunt of an unequal society.

Migrant workers go to different states looking out for jobs due to lack of employment options where they lived. Life as a migrant worker is not easy. They are overloaded with work, not paid enough and are discriminated amongst local workers.

To generate employment and scope for livelihood, Dr. Moumita Ghosh Bhattacharya, CEO of Aaradhya Foundation aims to train the women and youth in several courses to make them independent and develop skills that can help them find work locally.

Aaradhya Foundation, based out of Jalpaiguri District, West Bengal took genesis in 2010 which emphasized on skill development, digital literacy, bringing awareness on social issues, and focussing on school drop-outs in Jalpaiguri, Kalimpong, Darjeeling districts and Indo Bhutan Border.

Dr. Moumita, during her PhD Studies interacted with the locals of the village and identified the reason for the drop-outs. Most children were first generation learners and didn't have family support and guidance on the importance of schooling. Children whose families were Below Poverty Line (BPL) drop out at 4th and 5th grade to join their parents in farming or taking up menial jobs to fend for their family. This came as a shock to Dr. Moumita that children at such a tender age have to shoulder such a huge responsibility and lose out on education. Hence, she made this as one of the main aims of Aaradhya Foundation. The training programs provided by the foundation includes tie up with NIELIT (National Institute of Electronics & Information Technology), Vocational Training, Soft

skills, Basic Computer coaching, Handicrafts Training for Government Homes of Jalpaiguri District in Association with District Child Protection Unit, Tailoring classes, etc. This training runs along the Indo-Bhutan border by identifying youth who have the potential and talent to master in technology.

Considering the unemployment of the youth in North Bengal and the estimate of employment in the Electronics industry to grow phenomenally, Aaradhya Foundation is promoting the Central Government scheme for Skill Development in ESDM for Digital India for people of age 18-35. This programme focuses on students/unemployed youth, ITI, Diploma, Non-engineering graduates, etc. to increase their employability to work in 'Manufacturing' and 'Service support' functions. Some of the students who completed this course are now self-employed, and run their own repair centres for Electronic devices.

Sharing the success journey of female beneficiaries trained by Aaradhya Foundation, Dr. Moumita says, "Ten of our beneficiaries trained in tailoring course are currently self-employed and have formed their Self Help Groups with our organisations support. They stitch Kurtis, Palazzos, Blouses,

Petticoats etc."

"Using the computer skills effectively, Pushpajit and his batch-mates, trained under us in 'Computer hardware' are now self-employed as Computer hardware technicians, and also being the sole bread winner of their respective families. This has helped them pave paths for growing in the technology driven world," she adds.

Over the years, Aaradhya Foundation has been a part of Remedial Coaching for Scheduled Caste, Scheduled tribe and the Minorities. These children are mostly wards of Tea Garden labourers.

Mr. Ajoy Roy, an eminent member of the Foundation, and former KLO (Kamtapuri Liberation Organization) activist has been a huge support to motivate these children towards attaining Remedial and Spoken English classes. Mr. Ajoy Roy was imprisoned for more than 4 years during the Kamtapuri Movement (1980s- 90s). Since inception Aaradhya Foundation has paved the path towards mainstreaming KLO leaders like Mr. Ajoy Roy and currently he owns his Bought- Leaf business Aaradhya Foundation has established bridge course centres and campaigns through village development centres, partnered with other organisations to generate awareness on Women Empowerment

and Anti- Human trafficking.

The COVID Pandemic has put life on halt for everyone, and has led to the worst unemployment rate in 45 years. With lakhs of people losing jobs around the country, this phase hit the migrant workers the hardest. Dr. Moumita says, "During the initial days of lockdown, we provided people with dry ration kits and essential supplies to families who couldn't afford. With the present unemployment issue, they have no future plans as to how to sustain. So as an organisation, we decided to step into organic farming and provide them with a long-term sustainable goal."

The foundation acquired 4 acres of barren land from local families to cultivate organic farming. This gave an opportunity for the locals to work in their own state and stay close to their families. A crop when planted, usually yields fruits in a year or two, and the cycle runs for 20-25 years. This provides the locals with a steady income through organic farming.

Adding to the future plans of the organisation, Dr. Moumita says, "Our main aim is to make people self-sufficient and economically independent. Organic farming provides a platform for the locals here. If this proves to be a success, we plan to expand the land area for organic farming and increase the yield in the coming years."

Dr. Moumita sighed off by saying, "For women empowerment, we want to hire young women in tailoring units for mass production of clothes so that they have a permanent job. We plan to build a market chain and keep these women employed all year round. It is very important that women are also independent and confident to stand up on their own leading to decision making ability."

Aatika Kouser



# COVID-19 AFFECT ON MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

**M**SMSE sector in India is the second largest employment generator after agriculture, and contribute to almost half to our overall export. This sector acts as a breeding ground for entrepreneurs and innovators; including considerable support in strengthening business ecosystem, policy advocacy, streamlining supply chain mechanism, etc.

The estimated number of MSMEs in India is 63 million and employs 110 million individuals. Indian MSMEs produce more than 6,000 products for local and global consumption; it also plays an important role in local and global value chain systems. According to DGCIS data, the value of MSME related products in India is USD 147,390.08 million and contributed to 48.56% of total export during 2017-2018. MSMEs are exposed to higher level of integration with global value and supply chains and play a critical role in global trade systems.

Data from 2019 shows that this industry contributed 29% to overall GDP; which is more than agriculture (15.96%) and less than services (54.4%). Contribution of Agriculture sector in Indian economy is much higher than world's average (6.4%). Contribution of Industry and Services sector is lower than world's average 30% for Industry sector and 63% for Services sector.

Various reports, researches and surveys have proved that this sector acts as a catalyst for socio-economic development of the country. All this becomes more important with our Government's new mission of achieving USD 5 Trillion economy target by 2025. With this target, the role of MSME sector is going play an important role, with expected contribution to GDP above 50% mark. The potential of Indian MSME sector is still untapped and that is one of the reasons why government policies are now more convergent towards building resilient ecosystems.

## Challenges Faced by MSME Sector During Pandemic

### April 2020

The announcement of country wide lockdown dragged MSME owners, employers and external stakeholders in unexpected times, where no one had experience to handle this kind of situation. At one point of time, economist and market experts expected that more than half of enterprises will shut down if lockdown persist for more than 6 weeks. Extended lockdown had negative impact on supply of finished goods, procurement of raw material and availability of employees to work in production and supply processes. All this have impacted cash flows of an enterprise, whether large or small. During April to June 2020, this sector faced cash outflow challenges related to



debt repayments, wages/salaries, statutory dues, etc. All this with zero to minimal cash inflow and pulling enterprises into state of deep cash crunch, with ambiguity on business recoup in near future.

### June 2020

Survey reports have shown that disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted MSMEs earnings by 20% to 50%, and micro and small enterprises faced the maximum heat, mainly due to liquidity crunch during lockdown. Enterprises in essential commodity business were better off in terms of interrupted but predictable cash flows. Some enterprises innovated their ways by shifting focus from non-essential commodities towards essential commodities; like production of hand sanitisers and toiletries, PPE kits, reusable masks, etc. and were able to survive in these tough times. MSMEs present in remote areas also faced lots of difficulties due to interrupted supply chain systems and intra-state lockdown provisions.

It is not only the enterprise which faced challenges; even consumers were left with lower disposable income. This sector is also facing shortage of skilled and unskilled labour, due to local quarantine rules, red zone areas, social distancing and reverse migration. All these had negative cascading effect over consumption as well as expenditure. Many enterprises laid-off their workers because of inability to pay salaries, vacated their offices due to recurring expenses and halted their production due to lack of orders.

Ambiguity in future trade and bouncing back to 'new normal' is keeping financial institutions at bay for extending financial lending or to cover potential risk. This all-round uncertainty needed a push by government, to boost market confidence and bring back regular cash flow in economy.

### Steps Taken By Government

COVID-19 pandemic brought mixed news for growing economies like India,

where crisis and opportunities struck together. Economic slowdown along with border tensions, had again dragged us to focus back on self-sustainable values, the 'Swadeshi' dream. Increasing trade deficit with China was one of the major trigger for some long-term strategic decisions taken by Government of India.

The Mission Atmanirbhar Bharat was launched by Shri. Narendra Modi, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, in May 2020, to address two burning issues simultaneously; one being boost to MSMEs and the other to be less dependent upon foreign nations for purchase of raw and semi-finished goods, including China. This mission is one more step towards making India a bigger and more important part of the global economy. The mission was launched with a special policy amendment and financial package to boost MSME sector.

Broad changes were brought in the form of changing definition of MSME, allowing FDI in defence, increase in private sector participation, market linkage of local products and digitization of processes. Out of 15 relief measures declared under this package, 6 were entirely focussed to empower MSMEs. These 6 measures are:

1. Definition level change for MSME – After the launch of Atmanirbhar Bharat mission, manufacturing and service units are also accommodated within MSME ambit. The new definition segregated MSMEs on the basis of investment and turnover. Units with investment up to Rs 1 crore and turnover of Rs 5 crores (micro-unit), investment up to Rs 10 crores and turnover of Rs 50 crores (small unit) and investment up to Rs. 20 crores and a turnover of Rs 100 crore (medium unit).
2. Credit and Finance Scheme – Government allocated Rs. 3,00,000 crores for providing collateral free loans to MSMEs. Here, Government will act as guarantor and no guarantor fee will be charged. Banks and NBFCs were directed to lend at least 20% of their credit portfolio to MSMEs, with 4-year tenure and 12 months moratorium period on principal payments. Enterprises with up to Rs 25 crore outstanding credit and Rs 100 crore turnover are eligible for taking these loans.
3. Allocating Fund of Funds for Equity Participation – Government created a corpus of Rs. 10,000 crore (to be further increased to Rs. 50,000 crore) to support MSMEs in exposure to equity markets. This step is expected to support MSMEs in lowering down their cost of

capital through equity investment.

4. Relief in Non-Performing Asset – The economic downturn effected more than 2 lakh MSMEs, possessing NPAs. Government has allotted Rs. 20,000 crores as subordinated debt to support these entities, this amount is expected to be used as equity support.
5. Clearing off dues to MSMEs – Towards releasing liquidity pressure, government decided to clear all pending payments to MSMEs within 45 days of announcement made. This step will be further supported by strengthening digital payments and digital market initiatives.
6. Disallowing Global Tenders - Emphasising more on boosting local MSMEs, government had disallowed any foreign company to participate in government tenders upto Rs 200 crores. This move is in convergence with 'Make in India' initiative.

## Way Forward

Global Chief Economist at Dun & Bradstreet, Mr. Arun Singh mentioned that recovery of MSME sector may take 7 to 8 months. Recovery time is dependent on sector of operations; like online education, telecommunication, gaming and digital space need less time if innovations are accepted among consumers. While sectors like FMCG, automobile, retail, real-estate, jewellery, etc. might take longer than expected. Other sectors related to supply chain and storage might also take 3 to 4 quarters to bounce back to full scale.

Ministry of MSME is taking steps towards making these enterprises global and improving the overall business environment, by making it more conducive and transparent for all stakeholders. The herculean task of achieving USD 5 trillion economy is not possible without increased participation of MSME sector. The sector also hold answer to critical questions like unemployment, local economy development, fiscal deficit, trade balance, financial sector development, SDG alignment and so on. Private sector engagement in various bottlenecks of value chain and supply chain system is critical for success of various policies announced by the government.

Enterprises in India are facing issues related to procurement of raw material, credit need, market linkages, quality, standardization, pricing, business turnaround time, lobbying and many more. New steps taken by government are expected to act as a catalyst for the sector, not only to come out of pandemic related shocks but also to get prepare for brighter future.

*Dr. Agyeya Trippathi*



# LEADING CHANGE IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has become an integral part of society and is here to stay. Although mobile phones and internet access have reached into the remote corners of the country, there is still a huge gap in how people access necessary information. Recognising this, Change Initiatives, a Kolkata-based NGO have designed their programmes around widening access and training in ICT tools, with a gender-equity focus. We spoke with Suryatirtha Ray, Co-founder of Change Initiatives to learn more about their work.

Ray and his wife, Jhumpa Ghosh, started Change Initiatives in the year 2002. With him being a media professional and her being a community-mobilizer, they resolved to take technology to the grassroots and build solutions to the most pressing problems of the day. Says Ray, “18 years ago it became very apparent that everyone must know to use computers, else they would fall to the back of the line in terms of opportunities. Today there is so much digital content available, we feel that everyone should be able to access it.”

In the early years, with the support of UNESCO, Change Initiatives established three ICT centres in rural West Bengal, in the North 24 Parganas district. There they trained local women to search for and gather information on health and livelihoods. They developed a local information network whereby the women would be able to access the computers and internet services for free at these centres, and in turn go back to their communities and disseminate information so obtained. This project turned out to be hugely successful, winning the top prize at the World Summit on the Information Society held at Geneva. Their work was also cited by the prestigious media arts competition, Prix Ars Electronica.

Next was a multi-stakeholder project called Tele-support which involved two-way knowledge sharing through the internet between farmers in Kerala and West Bengal and agricultural experts and knowledge hubs in the India, UK and the Netherlands. The project was supported by the European Union. Change Initiatives also did a project called More and Better ICT-based enterprises in collaboration with the University of Manchester with the support of DFID — in which ICT-based enterprises for women were incubated. A Government of India project called K-yan in collaboration with ILFS Education & Technology Services was also launched. “K-yan is a computer with an inbuilt-monitor that allows learning content be shown magnified on any large surface such as village wall. K-yan is used in more than 200 schools in West Bengal and Assam.

Entrepreneurship development programmes and training for BSNL Gram Seva Kendras in West Bengal and Sikkim was also coordinated,” says Ray.

“Overtime, we realized that something had to be done for the



recurring issues in the communities we were working with,” says Ray. Things that came up were: after-school support and remedial classes for school children in Nadia District, located 65-70 kms away from Kolkata. “These children were severely lacking in access to extra-curricular activities such as dance, music and drama, so such sessions were also held in these villages to help nurture their creativity. An interesting project we did was ‘School In a Bus’ with the Sarva Shiksha Mission where a passenger bus was turned into a mobile classroom and taken to five slums in West Bengal. In addition, we did lots of environment awareness programmes against use of plastic bags of less than 40-micron thinness, sound pollution during Diwali, disaster management workshops in schools, campaign against Ganga pollution,” he adds.

Four years ago, in accordance with the National Digital Literacy Mission, and in partnership with CapGemini, a Digital Inclusion training programme was begun. In the slum areas surrounding Kolkata, Change Initiatives conducted a 20-hour digital literacy training on how to access social media (Facebook, WhatsApp) and e-services such as booking railway tickets, filling out job applications, college admissions online along with writing e-mails. The training also encompassed mobile literacy on how to use apps and how to communicate through whatsapp including one’s business needs. More than 5,000 individuals were trained in digital literacy through this program. Change Initiatives was even recognized by CapGemini with an award for Fastest Implementation of a Development Programme. The programme runs on a Hub-And-Spoke Model, where a main center offers training to various community institutions such as schools, clubs, municipalities etc.

The most recent programme of Change Initiatives is “Women In

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Studies have shown women taking up courses in STEM subjects not pursuing their studies at post graduate level or taking up STEM careers because of societal pressures which consider STEM careers as too demanding for women who will also have to run a family. This despite the fact STEM careers offers a higher pay than other professions. Together with the American Centre of Kolkata, Change Initiatives has designed a mentorship program for women STEM students of local colleges. The students are handpicked through a rigorous selection process over a two-month period. They are then mentored by experts on career pathways, leadership development, gender and reliance,” says Ray.

“There are two kinds of speakers at our programmes,” explains Ray, “Those who are very well established and highly successful, and those who have just started out. While the former can be inspiring to our students, the latter provide a sort of peer-to-peer connect that is so important. This program has since expanded to cover colleges in Guwahati as well, besides Kolkata,” he adds.

Due to the pandemic, initially the Digital Literacy Centre in Kolkata had to be closed, and the Women in STEM programme in Guwahati had to be put off for some time. However, the organization quickly rose to the occasion and started distributing relief materials across six districts in West Bengal and to 15,000 people.

Ray says, “In West Bengal the challenges of the lockdown intensified after the devastating cyclone Amphan. The amount of destruction caused by this cyclone is unprecedented. Most significantly, several million trees have been uprooted all around West Bengal, particularly the mangrove forests of Sunderbans which is a global bio-

diversity hotspot. We will plant 50,000 saplings by October with geo-tagging. In our Covid-relief work we have reached out to some of the more marginalized groups in society, including sex workers and LGBT community. An online drama festival was organized in the US and the proceeds were used to meet the needs of theatre staff who found themselves out of work during the pandemic.”

Due to their relief work, Change Initiatives has gained more visibility in recent times. Ray says that there have been some silver linings to this pandemic situation. Our STEM sessions with the Guwahati students are going on in full swing through the webinar route. We are hopeful things will improve by the end of the year and we will be in a position to do some sessions in the Guwahati colleges. The goodwill that we have generated through our relief work means many local communities have invited us to set up digital learning centres. We plan to set up 4-5 centres. We have already set up one centre in South 24 Parganas where the classes are taking place observing full social distancing protocols. We are hopeful of our Kolkata main centre opening up after the Durga Pujas in October.

When asked what are some of their key-takeaways in their journey so far and what his vision for the future is, Ray says, “There has been a lot of learning especially in the past five to six years for us. We are taking an evidence-based approach to poverty-alleviation, and applying Behavioral Economics theories to finding solutions. We see ourselves implementing projects at a huge but sustainable scale. We are currently a grant-based organization. We would like to become more entrepreneurial, with a risk-return framework.”

*Archanaa Ramesh*



# “Education is the most powerful tool for social change.”

## Aravindhan IPS tells Marie Banu how he uses technology in his work

**S**hri. Aravindhan IPS is an Indian Police Service Officer of the 2010 batch belonging to the Tamil Nadu cadre. He holds an engineering degree in computer science from BITS, Pilani. He won the sword of honour for being the ‘Best Outdoor Probationer’ at the National Police Academy. Tamil Nadu cadre won this award after 34 years through Aravindhan. During this tenure as the Deputy commissioner of Police – T.Nagar Chennai, he installed the FaceTagr app on the phones of 500 Police personnel in T. Nagar police district. This Mobile App is a first kind of initiative in the Tamil Nadu police department and helps to scan the faces of suspects and search for them in a database of known offenders.

Aravindhan is also a motivational speaker and an avid fitness enthusiast.

*In an exclusive interview Shri. Aravindhan IPS tells Marie Banu about how he uses technology in his work.*

### What inspired you to join Indian Police Service?

While I was pursuing my Computer Science Engineering at BITS, I realised my passion to get into a job that would connect me with people directly. I was also inspired by the tsunami relief programmes undertaken by various government agencies including that of the District Collector in my native place Cuddalore.

### Can you share your experience tackling the community clashes in Virudhunagar while you served as Superintendent of Police?

Virudhunagar has a history of communal violence. In 1996, there were communal undertones in many hamlets and villages.

I found that in most of the cases youngsters belonging to the age group of 18-24 were influenced by the communal and caste outfits to suit their personal gains. Hence, we introduced various community policing initiatives. I also involved the youth in sports activities and weaned them away from the caste outfits.

On the other hand, I also re-opened long pending criminal cases against the active rowdies and brought them to trial. On the run up to the assembly elections in 2016, we identified sensitive villages and trouble mongers. The trouble mongers were bound down under various provisions of The Code Of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), and their activities were closely monitored. We witnessed a visible change in terms of reduction in number of communal clashes. Similarly, we clamped down on illegal sand mining

which was a predominant source of income for the rowdies in this district.

### Having rejected a corporate job and shifting to civil services out of passion to serve the society, can you tell us which of the social issues you are passionate about?

As civil servants, we can be an agent of social change. The constitution provides equal education to all. But in many villages, especially in Thiruvallur District, child marriages still happen and dreams of young girls are nipped at a very early age. Education is the most powerful tool for social change. My passion lies in children and I focus on social issues like child marriage, education for all, etc. which when addressed ensures empowerment of the marginalised sections of our society.

We have introduced Student Police Cadet (SPCs or Kutti police as we say colloquially) in all Government schools in Thiruvallur District and have enrolled 20 students from each school. The students are taught basic traffic rules, child rights, and awareness on sexual abuse. These SPCs serve as eyes and ears of the police in the villages.

We have also setup vigilance committee at village level which constitute the Panchayat President, ward members, local school headmaster or teacher, and respectable villagers along with a police officer. Issues such as child marriage, school drop-outs, drug abuse, sexual harassment,

etc are immediately brought to our attention through these village vigilance committees.

### What is the outcome of the face recognition app you developed to track criminals?

Facetagr, the face-recognition mobile app was developed in 2017 and this application has helped police officials to identify and catch criminals in the state.

Once the scanned face is tracked, the database of the app lists out every known detail about the offender - from their background to previous criminal records - along with names of police stations where cases were lodged or pending against the person. We have a database of 60,000 criminals along with their background stored in this app.

The app has been installed on all the police officer's mobile phones and is app is user friendly. Any policeman with limited knowledge of mobile phones can use this app effectively.

The application has helped Chennai police to resolve many pending cases. Facetagr has been installed in most patrol vehicles and helps police verify credentials of any suspect detained at any location in the city.

The Chennai City Police has presented the app before the National crime records bureau (NCRB) who are now taking steps to implement the face recognition technology nation-wide.

### What other plans do you have to use technology in your work?

While I was working as Deputy Commissioner of Police in Chennai, I conceptualised another application DIGICOP along with Shri. Shashank Sai,

IPS (presently DC Mylapore) and developed it with Think Infinity, a company. This app was useful in reducing the incidence of mobile snatching cases in Chennai and we were able to recover many stolen and lost mobile phones.

The Koyambedu vegetable market was shifted to Thirumazhisai temporarily due to an increase in COVID cases. In order to maintain social distancing among the vendors, I introduced a device IRIS (Instant responder to improve social distancing). This device was installed in three crowded shops in the market and was very helpful in tracking social distancing violations. This IRIS device has been appreciated by many, including the Honourable Chief minister of Tamil Nadu.

### Any interesting case in your career so far?

I had to investigate a sensational case of kidnapping as Superintendent of Police, of Virudhunagar. A twelfth-standard topper was kidnapped from her home two days after the results. The accused man- aged to lure her family claiming that he is a press reporter and that he came to arrange financial assistance for the family. Through extensive analysis of CCTV footage and by setting up informants, we were able to rescue the girl safely within 48 hours of abduction.

Also I had the experience of working with Greater Chennai Corporation in implementing the pedestrian plaza in Pondy Bazaar when I served as Deputy commissioner of Police (Traffic division). The trials were conducted successfully and the pedestrian plaza is now one of the major centers of attraction in Chennai city.

### Your advice for IPS aspirants?

My advice to all civil service aspirants is to focus on fundamentals. It might even take two or three attempts to clear the examination, but if you focus on strengthening your basics and fundamentals the prelims and main examination will be a cake walk. The civil service provides a large canvas for you to innovate and implement novel ideas in all fields. It is one of the few careers where you are given a leadership role at a very young age. Therefore, youngsters should definitely consider this as a career option and become a part of the nation building.

