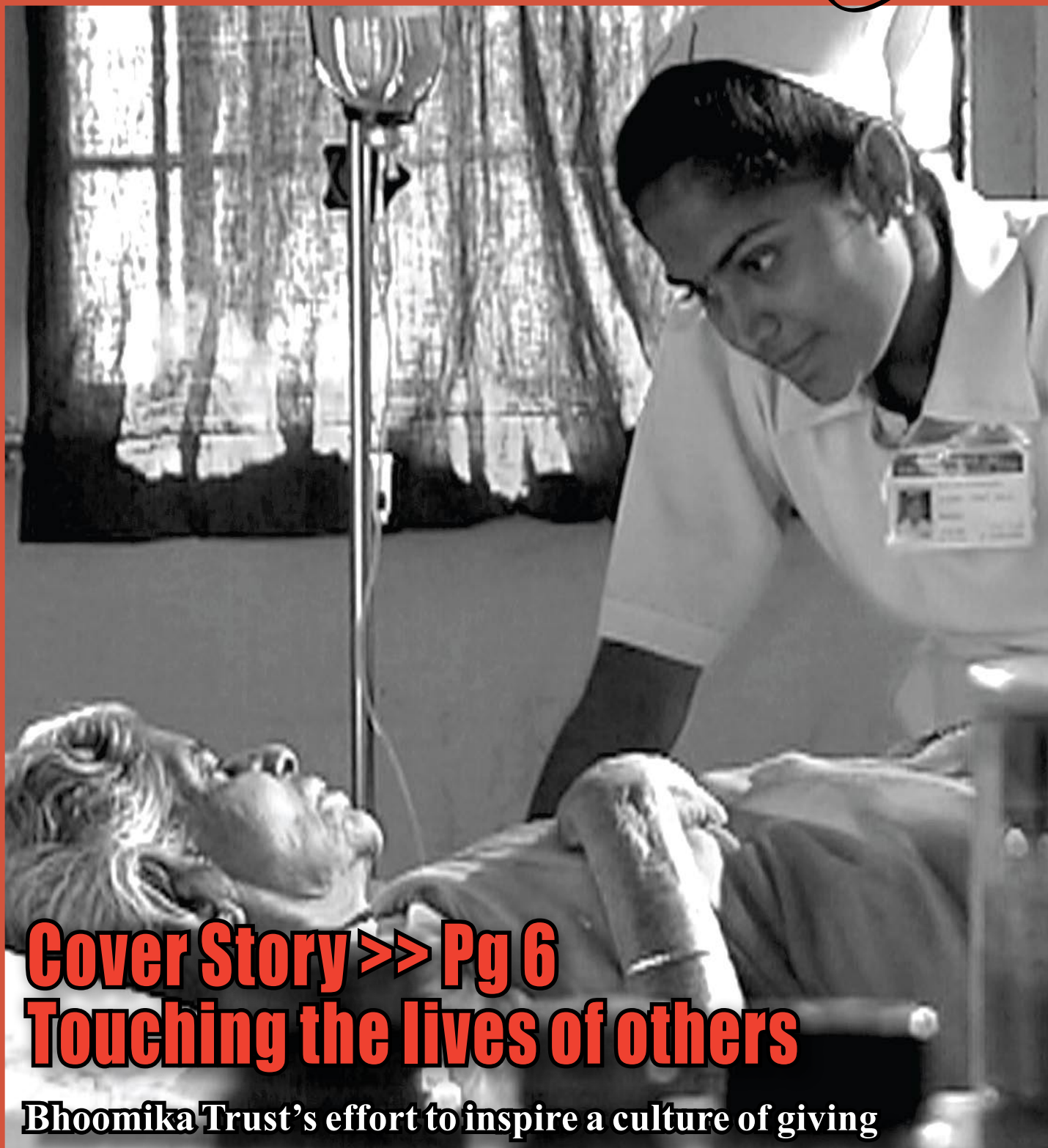


Conversations

A Chronicle of Social Currents

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Cover Story >> Pg 6 Touching the lives of others

Bhoomika Trust's effort to inspire a culture of giving

From the Editor

Dear Friends,

India's potential demographic dividend is its "youth" population as over 60 percent of our population are below 40 years of age. They are going to be the drivers for development for the next few decades. They need to be trained and sensitised in ways and means

to balance economy, ecology, and equity in all their development and growth strategies.

In this edition of *Conversations*, we have featured few youth who have already started this trend. These social change makers have used their talents and resources in a prudent yet powerful

way and have succeeded in changing the lives of many disadvantaged people.

Let us all start focusing on giving a helping hand to these inspiring youth and join them in their mission of social change!

P. N. Devarajan

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Turning over a New Leaf

The eleventh batch of the Post Graduate Diploma in Social Initiative and Management (PGDSIM) at CSIM Chennai, commenced on August 1st, 2011.

22 prospective Social entrepreneurs enrolled in the course. Mr. Shankar and Mrs. Anuradha Shankar, Founders of Tribal Society were the Chief Guests for the inauguration. Mrs. Malathi Srinivasan, Principal of Devi Academy School, Valasaravakkam, Chennai was the Guest of Honour.

Mr. Rajesh, an alumnus of CSIM and coordinator of Siva Shakti Homes was also present.

Of the 22 students, 7 are NGO founders, and 7 are NGO staff, and the rest aspire to start their own NGO on completion of the course.

—Latha Suresh

ADD SPARKLE TO THE SEASON WITH A
TOUCH OF THE ORIENT AT **China Town**
A SIP OF SCINTILLATING SPAIN AT **Zara**
A TINGE OF EXOTIC THAILAND AT **Benjarong**
A MESMERISING SENSE OF NORTH INDIA
AT **COPPER CHIMNEY** A SPLASH OF COASTAL FRESHNESS
AT **Kokum** A MÉLANGE OF SPICES AT **ENTÉ KERALAM**
AND VEGETARIAN GOODNESS AT **Cream Centre**

“The CSIM course helped me realize that social entrepreneurship thrusts upon revenue generation models that prove to be an effective catalyst for social change.”

Experiments to Observe and Contribute

Opportunities may be hard to recognize, but not for Karthikeyan Vaitheeswaran, National Consultant–Livelihoods, FAO, who found one in every kind of circumstance. He first embarked on a wine shop to learn about business and was marveled by the amount of money flowing in. “There was so much money that one can’t sit and count. It was all packed in sacks and dumped in the godowns”, he said.

Intrigued by the potential to earn money Karthikeyan carried out a string of experiments with a grocery shop followed by a cement shop. During these stints, he observed that the ability to earn money through small businesses apparently had a visible impact on the standard of living of people. His experiments did not end here. While in college, he started a poultry farm and also tried his hands at goat rearing and mushroom cultivation. “All this while I gradually understood that businesses could help one to earn for self and contribute to the public good as well”, quipped Karthikeyan.

He found it hard to believe that there was a Department of Social Work in his college, Bishop Heber College, Trichy. “How can one be trained in social work? Wasn’t that supposed to be rooted in passion?” he exclaimed. With more such observations and his volunteering experiences showing the way, Karthikeyan pursued his post-graduation in NGO Management at Centre for Entrepreneurship Development, Madurai Kamaraj University.

He joined South India Producer Associations as Program Officer, where he got an opportunity to travel extensively in spearheading the fair trade business model across NGOs. On being identified by the Tamil Nadu Rural Development Department as a Trainer for organizing capacity building programmes for NGOs, Cooperatives, and SHG Federations, he left no stone unturned in exploring the principles and intricacies of rural marketing.

“This is when my network expanded. Interaction with the foreign buyers made me more curious about the developed world and the mechanisms by which formal and informal economies were integrated,” he said.

With a want to experience the ambience of the developed world first hand, and to delve into the principles of For-Profit organizations, he pursued his MBA from Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia. Multiculturalism being the most intriguing part, his volunteering experiences here opened a volley of questions pertaining to livelihood issues back home, and the concept of sustainability. “Awareness at all levels mark a huge difference between the developed and the developing countries,” opines Karthikeyan.

On return from Melbourne, he engaged himself with the Tsunami rehabilitation efforts by providing market based skill development programmes for the Tsunami affected people, especially youth and women. Since then, promotion of sustainable livelihood became his prime area of concern.

In 2005, he joined as Project Officer, International Labour Organisation in Chennai. He organized several skill training programmes on



Karthikeyan receiving the Australian Alumni Excellence Award for Community Service from Senator Hon Chris Evans, Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations, Australia

livelihood development and facilitated social dialogue between various stake holders to reiterate the significance of livelihoods, skills and entrepreneurship development within the realm of policy making.

“Appropriate training programmes play a crucial role in establishing sustainability in the informal economy. There is a lot that the government can learn from the NGOs in this aspect,” said an enthused Karthikeyan.

“Appropriate training programmes play a crucial role in establishing sustainability in the informal economy. There is a lot that the government can learn from the NGOs in this aspect.”

Having worked with NGOs, government departments, international bodies one would want to know what the non-profit sector can learn from the government. “This is a tricky question! Quick deployment of resources and the scale of operation in situations that demand swift action is something we have to learn. NGOs are largely

governed by mandates that affect their response to situations,” he added.

Involved with different institutions at various levels on the issue of livelihood development, Karthikeyan began to understand the scope and significance of social entrepreneurship. He enrolled at CSIM and pursued the Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Programme. “Social Entrepreneurship is very simple, yet a vast concept. The course helped me realize that social

entrepreneurship thrusts upon revenue generation models that prove to be an effective catalyst for social change,” he explained.

“There is a very subtle difference between a social worker and a social entrepreneur. The lack of knowledge amongst NGOs about funding organizations, training programmes, and relevant

job openings does have an impact on the reach of the project undertaken”.

“The numerous projects undertaken certainly need visibility”, said Karthikeyan, who is also an Advisory Board Member for CIOSA—Confederation of Indian Organisations for Service and Advocacy.

Being part of CIOSA, Karthikeyan initiated the Tamil Nadu Development Dialogue—‘a monthly series of dialogue where socially committed citizens from different strata of the society come together and interact with representatives from organizations that are actively working towards social change’.

In recognition of his achievements, Karthikeyan was awarded the ‘2011 Australian Alumni Excellence Award for Community Service’ for his active involvement in Tsunami Rehabilitation Programme and for his association with several non-profit organizations and corporate houses in their community development programmes.

“The engagement between the government and NGOs must be comprehensive and complementary. This is where people like us come in”, said Karthikeyan, who strongly believes in social dialogue and networking.

Let’s wish him the best in his endeavours!

—Shanmuga Priya.R.

And Then, There Are Some...

“It is easily the most amazing time I’ve had, being in the company of world leaders, doing simulation exercises, working on an ‘Ideas-Lab’, listening to brilliant talks, and being a part of a cross-country documentary along with like-minded people.”



Visual artist and activist Anjali Chandrashekar speaks to her canvas. Her work is inspired by different schools of art ranging from surrealist to martial and she also loves to experiment with different mediums such as coal, shattered mirrors, LP records, etc. She converses with her art and from that dialogue brings out an essay of colours incorporating details which mere words cannot do justice to. “Art gives me a lot of joy,” she says. She took up her first painting brush at the age of four and started to seriously take up painting at the age of ten.

Of her childhood she says, “My grandmother Smt. K. Santhanalakshmi runs an NGO in Bangalore for children with multiple disabilities. Growing up amidst these children, I would often teach them art, mostly wondering how lucky I am to be blessed with good health and the right opportunities to do what I wanted. Thus my initiation into using my art for a greater purpose began.”

As Anjali grew up, her interests branched out to diverse social issues and she decided to create awareness and generate funds through art. She made visual campaigns for UNDP, UNICEF, WWF, UNESCO, FAO, and many other organizations at the global level. She also worked with Edward Lachman, Director-Cinematographer of the *Erin Brockovich* fame on a campaign for the International Diabetes Foundation. Meanwhile, on a parallel front she auctioned some of her art work to mobilize funds for different causes. Recently a painting of hers has brought in USD 5000, all of which will help in procuring insulin for children suffering from juvenile diabetes in 17 countries.

“I do not take money from these auctions for myself. The money generated is strictly used to fund the cause for which my work was intended for,” says a resolute Anjali who deems the issue of environmental consciousness as being closest to her heart.

Looking at her body of work, one would have great difficulty in suppressing the disbelief at how young this powerhouse of talent is. Having just finished her schooling at Padma Seshadri Bala Bhavan, Anjali is only about to start her graduation in Art at the Pratt Institute of Art and Design, New York. Already, some of the

most coveted opportunities and honors have been bestowed upon her. Anjali was recently awarded the Zonta International Women’s Award. She was the youngest Indian, and one of the youngest participants in the ‘British Council Global Change Makers’ Youth Summit held in August 2010 at London. Subsequently, she was among the youngest five members to attend the ‘World Economic Forum’ held at Davos, Switzerland, in January this year. Visibly excited about it, as if it all were happening right now, she says, “I could not believe my ears when I was told that I’d been selected to go to Davos! It is easily the most amazing time I’ve had, being in the company of world leaders, doing simulation exercises, working on an ‘Ideas-Lab’, listening to brilliant talks, and being a part of a cross-country documentary along with like-minded people.”

For a week before the World Economic Forum, Anjali and her friends from the Global Changemaker Program were trained to suit themselves to the rigour of the event. “We

even had a session that went on the lines of ‘What do you do when you meet Obama in the loo!’” she chuckles. True to the promise, luminaries such as Premiers of nations, Christine Lagarde, Chief of the International Monetary Fund, and A.R. Rahman were present. Anjali says that she and her friends felt transported in their intellectually stimulating company.

“I always knew that my daughter Anjali would make it to Davos” says a proud Anuradha Chandrashekar. She and her husband have never tried to force their children into doing anything against their interests. Says Anjali, “Although

my father is an IIT alumnus and I also happen to have a flair for Science, there was never any pressure for me to follow suit. My parents are a huge support!”

In true mother’s spirit, Anuradha keeps out a hawk’s eye for every little detail in her daughter’s life. “I am always behind her, reminding her of her deadlines, getting her to organize her time better and to take care of herself” she says. Nurturing two children who are both equally talented and accomplished, Anuradha faces the challenges of striking a balance and not letting fame or fortune dictate her children’s lives. Her son, who is the elder of her two children, is a prodigal scientist now studying Engineering at the prestigious University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Both her children are national awardees and comparisons abound. However, the family maintains a careful understated normalcy in its lifestyle.

“We are very simple middle class people. We cannot easily afford the kind of education that our children deserve and face challenges at every stage. However, I do believe I have been blessed with these two wonderful children with a purpose. I want them to be the best that they can be, but more importantly I want them to be good human beings. Only then can I look into God’s eyes with confidence of having done justice to His trust in me,” says Anuradha. With one child already pursuing his dreams and the next one to follow hers, this mother has every reason to be proud—her children and her family which serves as an example for all those who want to turn the seemingly ordinary into the extraordinary.

As for Anjali Chandrashekar, her ability to transform lives will yet be strengthened as the world will witness soon enough, the tremendous potential about to be unleashed by a truly well informed and enlightened global intellectual.

—Archanaa R.



Anjali

I do not take money from these auctions for myself. The money generated is strictly used to fund the cause for which my work was intended for.

”

Balancing Economy, Ecology and Equity in Growth

“If economic development is to be sustainable, it has to take care of ecology and should be internalised as part of our development exercise.”

- A Future Perspective

Economy is for achieving growth; results in value creation and net wealth creation in manufacturing and service sectors.

Economic growth results from effective utilization of resources through technology and science.

This requires ‘Capital’ of different kinds, viz., Financial Capital, Intellectual Capital, Human Capital, and Social Capital. Integration of the above ‘Capitals’ is a unique requirement in planning, execution, and management.

Economic growth can happen through Public Sector, Private Sector, and Private-Public Participation, and through several other vehicles.

The net increase in financial value terms is measured as gross income and net income, after providing for all expenses. Economically it is expressed as Return on Capital, Pay back period, Return on Equity Capital, etc.

But, the current practice does not consider ecological impact cost, and social equity angle and its cost. Ecology and Social Equity are important stake holders in value adding / wealth creation of enterprise. These are very important aspect of stakeholdership, besides Employees, Share Holders, Promoter, Supplier, Buyer, Government, etc.

Ecology is an over arching expression for all that concerns about protecting environment from degradation and destruction. Environment is all that is there in water, air, and land; and other living beings like animals, birds, vegetation, micro and macro organisms, and the likes.

In search of raw materials and feed stock, the economy is capturing, mining, harvesting naturally occurring resources in land, water, and air. These resources are not limitless, but depletable and regenerated by natural process over millions of years. Some are regenerated in a lower frequency, may be during climatic seasons in a year. Some appear inexhaustible and very few are renewable which have to be examined. Few resources are damaged beyond recovery and we have to live with these conditions and its consequences.

If economic development is to be sustainable, it has to take care of ecology and should be internalized as part of our development exercise. This is more often not done due to high development compulsion, more particularly in the developing country who are in a tearing hurry to catch up with developed economies.

Thus, economical development indicators have to be discounted by indicators on ecological loss for arriving at the true and

clear picture growth and GDP. The economy seen alone gives a different picture without negative impacts, or loss of ecology not being super imposed for arriving at the picture. It is globally impacted and it is for us to see ‘climate change’ as a clear signal.

Equity in the social context is a significant factor of the economy picture. Equity means ‘is it fair for all concerned?’. In business, the stakeholders are its Promoters, Equity Holders, Debtors, Government, Suppliers, Creditors, Consumers and Public at large, etc.

Therefore, for living in harmony, peace, joy, and ecstasy the balancing of the manifestation of Economy, Ecology, and Social Equity is a must in every country.

The chemical soup that has been made in products, services, waste, etc. is polluting the ecosystem relentlessly. These are seen in global warming, toxins in everyday objects and life. We see warmer temperatures, fierce hurricanes, fiery drought, rampant desertification, and relentless rain, Earthquakes, Tsunami, etc. These ruin the richness of our biosphere.

Does this stop there?

No, it pervades the social equity / societal ecology.

- 20 per cent less snowfall in Switzerland
- Biophenol A is released from polycarbonate drinking water bottle and mimics the Neurotoxic Actions of Estrogen in developing cerebellar Neurons
- One billion people of developed world are consuming 32 times when compared to the larger number of people in the developing and poor countries of the world
- Every product of services, even take-make-waste systems, and use and consume; what we need is Life Cycle Assessment on the society now and in the future. We have to start assessing them and disseminating the knowledge to consumers, people, society and the like by Radical Transparency for giving freedom of choice. We should not allow development to mask or hide the disastrous extinguishment that is taking place

We have to examine the development from an angle of what is happening concurrently by doing Life Cycle Analysis (LCA). Life Cycle Analysis is just not from Cradle (birth) to Grave (death). The way is to examine it is from Cradle to Cradle. This will reveal the dire need to near fully ‘Recycle’, arrive at ‘Zero Waste’, and give place to a new gospel of using minimal resources as feed (input) leading to a ‘no’ to overexploiting resources senselessly.

—P.N.Devarajan
Founder, CSIM

“Ecology is an over arching expression for all that concerns about protecting environment from degradation and destruction.”



Touching the Lives of Others



Bhoomika Trust was established in February 2001 with a focus to support the educational and livelihood needs of the underprivileged. Bhoomika Trust has also worked extensively with earthquake victims of Gujarat and the tsunami affected people of South India.

The education support program of Bhoomika Trust caters to the needs of deprived students by assisting them to complete their education. Presently, this programme is done in partnership with Gift a Future programme of Altuis foundation (www.giftafuture.org).

Gift categories

- Sponsor a child's education
- Sponsor aids and appliances for the disabled
- Sponsor an outing for special children
- Sponsor a special lunch for children living with cancer
- Sponsor a dialysis treatment
- Sponsor infrastructure /durables for NGOs

Visit truegiftsindia.org for more information



Shobha and Anand had a mixed culture marriage. The wedding was to be held in Chennai as Shobha's parents lived here while Anand's parents dwelt in Delhi. Both the families differed 180 degrees in their views on religion and rituals, and so the couple decided to handle the wedding arrangements themselves.

The *mandap* was beautifully decorated and both the bride and groom looked their best. After the wedding ceremony was over, the guests congregated to congratulate the couple. All of them had one thing in common—huge gift packets. Some of them took over an hour to get their turn to wish the bride and the groom.

"I think we would need two cars to transport the gifts that you received today. It is going to be tough for me to sort this out," remarked Anand's mother Manju.

Exchanging smiles, Shobha and Anand replied in chorus, "No worries! We shall help you out."

The guests were getting disbursed after lunch and Manju ensured that each of them collected their return gifts.

After the rituals were over, the couple seated themselves amidst the gifts and took turns to open each one of them. "Can I open the first gift?" requested Shobha. She grabbed the packet near her and spent the next five minutes to unwrap it. "It is a wall clock! We can put it in our room," she expressed. Next was Anand's turn. "I have a wall clock too!" he mumbled.

After sorting out over half a dozen of wall clocks, many sets of cutleries, picture frames; and others, Shobha found an envelope that caught her eye. She paused for a moment and not wanting to make any more wild guesses, opened it.

Noticing Shobha turn quiet, Anand caringly asked, "What happened to you? What did you find in that envelope?"

Pausing a moment, she replied, "There is a gift certificate for a free eye surgery that has been given to a visually impaired girl to mark our wedding day."

"It must be Visu. He is known to make such gifts for occasions," he said cheerfully with an attempt to bring back the smile on his wife's face.

Holding back her tears, she quipped, "It is a lovely way to start our life together. I never knew that you had such wonderful friends."

Both Shobha and Anand were immensely pleased that their wedding has made a difference to someone whom they never knew.

Two years passed quickly for Anand and Shobha. Having purchased an apartment in Chennai, they were now planning to organize the housewarming ceremony. "I hope we will be able to manage this event. Guess I should ask my friends for help," said Anand.

Shobha remembered the gift that Visu gave for their wedding and said, "Yes! I would need your friend's help. Not to help in organizing the function per se, but to help us in sharing the gifts that we would receive."

Anand could not comprehend what Shobha's thought was. Sensing this, she clarified stating, "There is an organisation called Bhoomika Trust that coordinates gifts for people who are in need. It was through them that Visu had made the donation towards free eye surgery for a child on our wedding day. Let us invite the Trust representatives for our function. We can request our guests to share their gifts through them to those who are in need of."

"This is a brilliant idea. Let's do it!" said Anand.

Shobha was mightily thrilled that her suggestion was accepted. They started to work on the event invites and included a subtle note: 'If you wish to gift, we will give you an opportunity to share it with someone who would

value it more than us.'

The day of the housewarming arrived bright and clear. Shobha and Anand welcomed their guests with a warm smile. After lunch, Shobha announced to the guests: "We have Bhoomika Trust representatives here with us. They have set up a stall for 'True Gifts'. This is an initiative that coordinates gifts for those who are in need. You can gift to one among fifteen organisations that are listed with them. The minimum value of a gift is Rs. 200 and you have the option of choosing amongst 100 types of gifts. Please do visit them before you leave."

Guests were curious to find out what gifts they could offer. Few were eager to be the first to make the gift. After the guests had made their choice of gift and made the payment towards it, True Gift volunteers issued a gift certificate so that they can present it to the intended recipient of the gift.

The guests thanked Shobha and Anand for having given them an opportunity to know about such a wonderful initiative to share their gifts, and disbursed with a sense of satisfaction.

"It was interesting to see the guests quickly browse through the options they had, and spontaneously offer their gift for a cause they chose. I was at first apprehensive if this idea would hurt the sentiments of my friends, but was wrong. We had over 200 guests who chose to donate to 10 organisations. Few of them have even said that they would like to do this at the time of their next domestic function," said a proud Shobha.

Jayendra, Founder, Bhoomika Trust (www.bhoomikaindia.org) said, "Not knowing what to gift someone on a special occasion is a dilemma that people often face. With this in mind Bhoomika Trust set up 'True Gifts'—an initiative that links donor contributions with

needs of NGOs. Through a careful selection process NGOs are enlisted in this initiative and their needs are included in the True Gifts Wish List".

"The gifts encompass various categories such as education, health, differently-abled, women, children, and the elderly. Sample gifts include sponsoring an outing for special children, gifting a dialysis treatment, supporting the cost of milk for one day for spastic children, sponsoring a special lunch for children living with cancer, supporting a child's education, etc.," he concluded.

Through True Gifts, occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries and remembering loved ones can be made more meaningful by touching the lives of others.

Come, it is now our turn now to share a gift!

—Marie Banu



Achala Pani is a youth with a difference. She graduated in Advertising from Chittrakala Parishath and lives with her family in Bangalore. Her family includes three Dogs—Gundu (5), Shali (11), and Browna (5) who are the heroines of this story.

Her Father, Late Sri. M. Baladhanda Pani, a Business Man; mother, Dr. B. Vijaya Kumari B, an Ayurvedic doctor; and her sister, Poornima, an Art teacher—all of them adored animals. Her mother is her pillar of support who encouraged her to work towards the cause of Indian Dogs (Achala opines that the term 'Stray Dogs' is derogatory and therefore the correct term to indicate them would be 'Indian Dogs').

"There are many animal lovers, but there are hardly any who support the cause of animals with passion," says Achala.

Animal work interested Achala right from her school days. She volunteered for many NGOs who were associated with animal welfare. It was during her first year of Pre-University that "Empathy for Indian Dogs" became her possessive passion. Thanks to the puppy that got injured in her college campus, that she nursed herself. It dawned upon her that if she could help one dog, she could help the entire Dog kind. This incident inspired her to become an activist with dogged vigor and today, Achala runs an independent lifeline for homeless Indian dogs.

Achala serves as a foster parent for homeless Indian dogs until she finds an appropriate home for each of them. Till date she has managed to get 1200 puppies a good home and provide them a better life.

Achala did not stop here. She convinced her educational institute to allow her do a project on Awareness and Adoption of Indian dogs during her final year of graduation.

In April 2009, Achala registered her office 'Let's Live Together' to impart awareness on adoption of Indian Dogs. Her motto was to restore

the image of Indian Dogs which make a brilliant companion to mankind. She also established a helpline to connect the foster parents of Indian Dogs with their prospective wards.

As charity begins at home, Achala wanted to see people in and around her house accept her work towards this cause. While the neighborhood had largely turned more compassionate, the occasional obstacle did keep turning up in the form of insensitive people continuing to hold on to their unfounded fears and biases against dogs. However, Achala was convinced that this stigma will be overcome and that she will drive her passion with the precision of six sigma. She believed that every societal road block will be overcome through better social citizenry and she was relentless in her mission.

There are still large areas of the country where parents teach their children to stone Indian Dogs to keep them away. Achala opines that anger cannot be an answer and that agitated mood and any aggressive sermonizing will only worsen the situation.

"If people were genuine animal lovers, why would they prefer only exotic breeds? It defies rationale!" asks Achala.

Breaking the silence she responds saying, "When pedigree pups require more space, more maintenance cost and many of them are unsuited to the Indian environment, Indian dogs are a better option. Since dogs are meant to be man's best friend, it is ironic that people can think of buying them. A true friend or companions can never be

bought with money."

"It is for the reason of hunger, or fear of being run over by a vehicle, or longing for its partners that prompts few Indian dogs to bite people. If the society wants to be freed from the scourge of dog bite, then it is the people who need to take an initiative. If dogs are cared for, they will reciprocate the affection and will not attack people. If vaccinated, they are free from diseases, and their aggression level is reduced when sterilized. All this would happen only when people show consideration on them. To solve a problem people have to take the first step to form a solution", aptly surmises Achala.

Achala's journey has been far from smooth. In a world where there is a shortage of people who speak for their fellow men and women, it takes a special kind of courage to speak out for animals, particularly a 'reviled' one like the Indian dog. Achala, with her perseverance has taken the challenge head on, and is not bothered about the societal bites as she is saving them from the so called dog bites.

From one single foster parent, a few years ago, she has revolutionized the whole adoption movement and created an army of foster parents. She attributes her successful journey largely to her Mother, and Mr. N.G Jayasimha, a



Volunteers at a Camp

fellow animal activist who mentored her patiently in this difficult transition.

Her Passion is not centred around rewards, but it comes sans her asking. She is the recipient of the 'Young Achiever 2010' awarded by Brigade group and has gained one-year fellowship by Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) to further and farther the espousal of Indian Dogs.

Let us pride our INDIAN DOGS and forget the mindless pedigreeing which has spoiled not only our pet keeping habits but also our education system. Let's hope for many more people like Achala so that we may attain harmony with our animal brothers and sisters.

—Vijaya Madhavi. M



Achala

Appropriate training programmes play a crucial role in establishing sustainability in the informal economy. There is a lot that the government can learn from the NGOs in this aspect



Adding Life to Every Minute

“While we may not be able to come to terms with Euthanasia just yet, we must recognize that it is a basic human need to die with dignity.”



Volunteers at a public awareness programme



Health check-up being conducted for the in-patients at the centre



Dr. Republica Sridhar addressing the women at an awareness camp



Counseling session in progress

Palliative Care is a relatively new medical specialty, especially in India. It involves providing clinical, physical, social, spiritual, and even emotional support to those who are living with the advanced stages of a disease. In these last stages, curative medicine or treatment has no effect. A patient may reach this non-curative stage either through old age, late reportage of symptoms, degeneration of organs, or poor bodily response to treatment. At this point in time when disease is beyond cure and distressing symptoms prevail, it is highly important to put in place support systems to assist in the peaceful and dignified transition of the person in question.

We take the help of Dr. Republica Sridhar, a pioneer in her own right in the field of Palliative Care, to understand the subject in layman's terms. “In India, until recently, palliative care was thought of as being necessary only for cancer-patients whereas there is a whole gamut of other conditions such as geriatrics, oncology, renal and cardiac failure which also necessitate this kind of care” she says. Dr. Republica founded RMD Pain and Palliative Care Trust in Chennai which has been providing in-patient, out-patient, home, and hospice care services to the most deserving of candidates for the last six years.

“In my years of practice as a commercial doctor I have come across people from most poor economic backgrounds and was deeply moved by their plight when it came to seeking medical help for their loved ones. So, I decided that I would start a Trust that would take care of all the medicinal expenses and provide them treatment at a cost they could afford.”

“India is lagging far behind in palliative care,” says Dr. Republica as she substantiates her point by saying, “Singapore based Lien Foundation's Economist Intelligence Forum commissioned the first ever Quality of Death index among the nations of the world in 2010. In this index, India ranked 40th among the 40 nations that were considered for ranking.”

“It is disheartening to say that we have to sometimes turn down some patients because of our limited admission capacity, but if we were to go by WHO statistics our country needs about 80,000 beds for the terminally ill. In our centre we currently have the capacity to cater to 80 patients, including 25 beds in our hospice. We are also into training students in Palliative Care so that more manpower is added to this branch of medical practice,” says Dr. Republica with determination.

When asked to elaborate upon the psyche of a terminally ill person, Dr. Republica states, “Everybody wants a painless death,” adding that, “there is no difference in the way a rich person feels from that of a relatively poor person. As for the families of the rich, it becomes highly ironic that even though they are willing to spend heaps of money, their loved ones cannot be prevented from dying. For the poor, there is mounting pressure for them to cope with the fact that they cannot afford fancy treatments which in anyway would not guarantee a cure. The truth in both cases is that the disease is advancing and life is limited and we can do nothing about it, except maybe try and keep the patient as peaceful and comfortable as possible, which is a daunting task in itself.”

When thinking about the immense trauma of the patient, the conversation naturally veers towards the ever debatable topic of Euthanasia. She goes on to cite examples wherein patients have pleaded to her to relieve them of the pain by merely cutting off their life-saving supplies. “They promise not to talk about it to anybody else. It is not only illegal in our country, but it also takes a toll of us who are in this profession to cope with the pressure of their suffering. What's more, over 90 percent of our patients have asked to be killed at some point in time or another,” she says earnestly.

“While we may not be able to come to terms with Euthanasia just yet, we must recognize that it is a basic human need to die pain-free and with dignity. The future of such patients may be even more peaceful who have the right to ask not to be resuscitated, in case of an extreme emergency. At RMD, we will soon have an End of Life Care Room. This project, called Moksha was started with the realization that when a person has reached the end stage of disease, others living in the hospice feel traumatized. Also, there isn't much privacy for the patient in question and for his/her family members who want to be beside the patient at that crucial moment.”

With conditions as terrible as these, this is definitely among the most difficult of professions to be in. Dr. Republica says how her team of doctors, paramedics, and assistants cope with it. “Yes, our job is an extremely demanding one. Therefore we place a very high emphasis on communication skills while hiring our staff. We have monthly meetings to discuss issues with transparency, and have mutual understanding across our board. I see

to it that at least once in every two months each staff gets a holiday to visit their family. Even when I am nursing some distress, I tell my colleagues that I won't be able to take a peer group session or anything that is stressful. We all have to accept the sad reality that although life-expectancy is increasing every passing year, the quality of life, and the quality of relationships and social support systems which our society enjoyed

about 30 years ago is no longer prevalent. In fact, people are losing sight of the immense healing power of touch. We are all becoming islands unto ourselves. We will need to face dire consequences if we do not mend our social skills right now.”

One cannot help, but agree with her insight. Talking about the future plans of her centre, she resumes her zeal and says, “My vision is to set up a hospital with 50 exclusive beds for Hospice care alone. We are already working towards realizing this dream. We have acquired about three grounds in Amarambedu village near Gunrathur in Sriperambudur for this project. We are also waiting to see many more hospitals across the country opening up hospices and palliative care units in their premises.”

As our conversation draws to a close we thank Dr. Republica Sridhar for sharing her remarkable journey with us and in the process of making palliative care a part of our everyday vocabulary from now on. We join her in envisioning an India which will boast of a high quality of dignity and pain-free life as well as death for all.

—Archanaa R.

My vision is to set up a hospital with 50 exclusive beds for Hospice care alone

Simple questions but Profound answers by Sri Ramana Maharishi

A question was asked as to Sri Ramana Maharishi on the nature of happiness.

M.: If a man thinks that his happiness is due to external causes and his possessions, it is reasonable to conclude that his happiness must increase with the increase of possessions and diminish in proportion to their diminution. Therefore, if he is devoid of possessions, his happiness should be nil. What is the real experience of man? Does it conform to this view?

In deep sleep the man is devoid of possessions, including his own body. Instead of being unhappy he is quite happy. Everyone desires to sleep soundly. The conclusion is that happiness is inherent in man and is not due to external causes. One must realise his Self in order to open the store of unalloyed happiness.

A question was asked by a monk (*sannyasi*) about how to prevent the mind from being distracted.

M.: You see the objects on forgetting your own Self. If you keep hold of your

Self, you will not see the objective world.

Someone enquired: Why is it said in scriptures that the Sage is like a child?

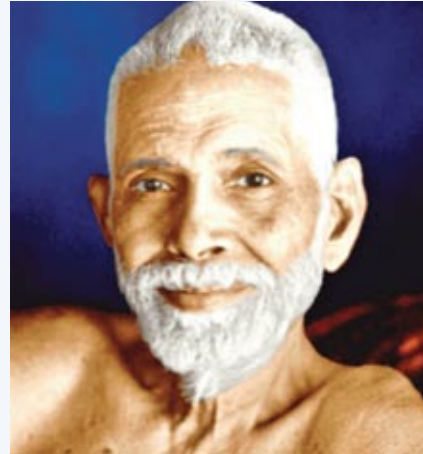
M.: A child and a Sage (*Jnani*) are similar in a way. Incidents interest a child only so long as they last. It ceases to think of them after they have passed away. So, it is apparent that they do not leave any impression on the child and it is not affected by them mentally. So it is with a Sage.

A man asked the Maharshi to say something to him. When asked what he wanted to know, he said that he knew nothing and wanted to hear something from the Maharshi.

M.: You know that you know nothing. Find out that knowledge. That is liberation (*mukti*).

A question was asked about the Upanishadic passage, 'The Supreme Spirit is subtler than the subtlest and larger than the largest.'

M.: Even the structure of the atom has



been found by the mind. Therefore the mind is subtler than the atom. That which is behind the mind, namely the individual soul, is subtler than the mind. Further, the Tamil saint Manickavachagar has said of the specks dancing in a beam of sunlight, that if each represents a universe, the whole sunlight will represent the Supreme Being.

An educated visitor asked Bhagavan about *dvaita* and *advaita*.

M.: Identification with the body is *dvaita*. Non-identification is *advaita*.

"What is *Karma*?" asked someone.

M.: That which has already begun to bear fruit is classified as *prarabdha Karma* (past action). That which is in store and will later bear fruit is classified as *sanchita Karma* (accumulated action). This is multifarious like the grain obtained by villagers as barter for cress (greens). Such bartered grain consists of rice, ragi, barley, etc., some floating on, others sinking in water. Some of it may be good, bad, or indifferent. When the most potent of the multifarious accumulated karma begins to bear fruit in the next birth it is called the *prarabdha* of that birth.

When one of the present attendants came the first time to Bhagavan, he asked: "What is the way for liberation?"

M.: "The way already taken leads to liberation."

—Excerpted from Sri Ramana Maharshi teachings

Synergizing social entrepreneurship efforts

A Series on Growing -Reflections for Deep Change

Sustaining social entrepreneurship vision – issue of trivialities

Every great initiative begins with a vision in the mind of the social entrepreneur. There are many invisible roadblocks for sustainability of that vision. One such block is the myriad amount of activities that may be required day in and day out to be done in the journey towards the vision. In each of these activities sometimes it becomes very difficult to distinguish between a critical activity and non-critical activities. One of the ways in which most social entrepreneurs respond is to follow the necessities. So, everything looks critical and over a period of time the entire team is caught in the trivialities. The social entrepreneur's mind is still focused on thinking about the larger picture and the team slowly moves towards focusing on the everyday functioning of the office. This functioning of the office and administration issues will occupy most of the time and it will seemingly make the group very busy and active while the actual journey that is required to move towards the vision remains only in one or two minds.

The priorities have to be set right; or there would be crisis every time creation of the path forward has to take place, and the feeling that we are thinking of crossing the bridge only when the bridge is visible will become a constant existential reality. In all this, the true journey which needs to be done may be lost; like the parable below:

A man was dying from a poisoned arrow. His relatives rushed a doctor to his side, but he refused to have the arrow taken out unless he had the answers to three questions that was very vital to him:

- Was the man who shot him white or black?
- Was he a native or a foreigner?



- Was he tall or short?

He was so adamant about getting his answers that the arrow could not be removed on time and he died. (*Sampath. J.M. story 69 Discovery—3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998*)

When an NGO turns into a so called 'professional organization', one of the largest issues that occupies time are human issues—issues relating to hierarchy, compensation, power and influence, recruitment, working comforts, conveyance, reporting structure and protocols, leave issues, reimbursement issues, and so on. This is one of the nightmares of the social entrepreneurs as well. As long as the group is of a size that can enable focus on the vision and things can be settled through dialogues, it is fine. The minute the group grows and there are more requirements, that individual attention need to be paid for it, then the trivialities come into existence. Also, if the vision is not clearly laid out and responding to the context becomes the way of functioning, then too trivialities can occupy the time. Further, within the operational

functioning there would be certain activities that are critical to sustain and grow the vision; there would be other outcome oriented activities that are of immediate value; but the team needs to effectively prioritize the choices keeping the vision in focus.

It is important for the social entrepreneur's dreams to be realized, but it is equally important for it to be well thought out and strategised. That, which will sustain the journey is equally or more important. This has to be identified very clearly keeping all the stakeholders and societal context in view.

The situations in which vision is lost and trivialities will take over could be:

- When the team has not spent enough time to gain clarity on the vision. The path is unclear and in the name of evolution of the path, the journey continues day to day.
- When the team that is formed has multiple agenda within themselves as well as amongst themselves while stepping into the vision. When the activity of shared vision has not been created and therefore the team is not aligned.
- The purpose of each activity that emerges is not articulated clearly and in depth. Each member proposes an activity and the same is given importance not because of the activity but to sustain the motivation of the people and team.
- When the principles on which the team will function is unclear for the members. Decisions are taken case to case and there is less clarity on the path forwards.
- When the team is pulled in multiple directions to learn as well as deliver

simultaneously. Either one is focused more than the other.

- When the intervention that is planned by the social entrepreneur and team is itself new and/or there is high resistance to accept the intervention. When the path forwards are not clearly laid out by the social entrepreneur and core team to deal with that resistance.

Caught in the need to prove, establish and sustain, every move of the social entrepreneur and their team is critical. It is easy to begin with an idea and get people to support the same. But, it is challenging to sustain and let the evolution of the idea happen. Realizing and focus on priorities is a continuous journey.

Points for Reflection:

- What is the extent of time I spend in articulating the vision, purpose, and the path within myself and the team? What is the extent of shared vision?
- How clear are the milestones and to what extent do I facilitate the movement of the team towards those milestones?
- How clear are the operational principles to myself and the team? What clear actions are initiated to understand and internalize the principles?
- How much time is spent on looking into priorities? How much have we empowered the questioning of priority within the team?
- What makes me adamant on the trivialities and its resolution while being a part of the team?

—J.M.Sampath & Kalpana Sampath

Food For Thought



Recently, there was a news item that was reported in a leading daily that really touched my heart.

It was about a woman and her daughter who was run over by a lorry. The mother who was riding a two wheeler was to drop her daughter at a school in Pattabiram. This reminds me of an actual incident that happened at a traffic signal that I would like to share with Conversations readers.

Few days ago, while I was waiting at the traffic signal in Alwarpet, a lady with her daughter came hurried in a two wheeler, overtook those who were waiting ahead of her, and continued to ride although the red signal was still on. I heard her daughter asking her anxiously why she had not stopped at the signal to which she replied furiously, "Shut your mouth! I am already late. I

need to go back home after dropping you off at school to prepare food for your father." The good-natured daughter replied saying, "You will be more late if the police stop you for jumping the signal, or in case you meet with an accident."

The mother had no other option but to listen to her sensible daughter and wait for the signal to turn green.

Is this not a good food for thought to all of us?

Let us follow rules and make our state and city a safe place to walk and drive our vehicles. Every day in India we have 45 persons who lose their lives and 200 persons who get permanently injured due to road accidents.

—Rtn. Narasimhan Rajagopal

Information provided by the Commissioner of Police, Chennai for the month of August 2011

Number of road accidents - 490
Loss of lives due to accidents - 57

Number of cases booked for

- Traffic violation - 124,149
- Signal violation - 12,873
- Wrong side driving - 480
- Over speeding - 4,063
- Violation of one way rules (No entry) - 3,332
- Violation of no free left - Nil

Dear Editor,

I went through the August edition of Conversations, page by page and found every article worth the read. It was a great opportunity to know how much so many organisations are doing for the community.

Your articles were very well presented and that's the reason it made easy and interesting reading. Do accept our heartiest congratulations from Madhuram Narayanan Centre.

Looking forward to knowing more about many others doing much good work,

Yours sincerely,
Jaya Krishnaswamy

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

The August issue of Conversations was a piece of good work. The visuals were very catchy and content highly readable.

Do convey my appreciation to all the members of your team responsible for creating the news letter.

Regards,
Girija Kumarababu

Dear Editor,

Greetings!

Congratulations for your efforts to make a contribution towards a good society.

Regards,
Joseph Raj,
Secretary,
Messo India, Cuddalore

Dear Editor,

I enjoy reading the articles in *Conversations* every month. Each of them are in its own way an inspiration in itself.

Best wishes to you and your team!

Regards,
Dr. K. Prabhakar
Dept. of Management Studies
Velammal Engineering College

Editorial

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu

White Knight

Dr. J Radhakrishnan IAS shares with **Marie Banu** his experiences working for disaster relief programmes and his views on social issues

Dr. J Radhakrishnan IAS is an officer who qualified for the Indian Administrative Service in the year 1992 by securing the 7th rank at all India level and was allotted to the Tamil Nadu cadre. He has held several positions in the State Government of Tamil Nadu and has the experience of serving as Collector and head of four Districts—Salem, Sivaganga, Thanjavur, and Nagapattinam.

He was one of the youngest Commissioner of Chennai Municipal Corporation in the year 2000 and 2001. He has also served in the Secretariat, Government of Tamil Nadu as Deputy Secretary, Joint Secretary, Additional Secretary, and Special Secretary to the Government in the Finance and Education Departments, and also served as the Commissioner Prohibition and Excise department.

In March 2009, he joined the United Nations Development Programme on deputation from the Government, as its Assistant Country Director and is the Head of the Disaster Management Unit.

In an exclusive interview with Marie Banu, Dr. J Radhakrishnan IAS shares his experiences working for disaster relief programmes and his views on social issues.

Being a veterinary doctor by education, what inspired you to join Indian Administrative Service?

Treating animals has its own charm. After completing my Veterinary Medicine Degree, I worked for a short time as an Assistant professor in Kerala Agricultural University. Along with teaching and research I had a lot of time. I had the interest to pursue civil services after reading various competitive magazines.

The challenging assignments and the accompanying responsibilities given to civil servants at a very young age inspired me to make an attempt for civil services, especially Indian Administrative Services.

I continue to love veterinary profession and whenever I get an opportunity I do visit colleges and hospitals.

You are known to be a compassionate person. Which of the social issues disturb you?

Two issues disturb me—female infanticide and foeticide; and care of elderly.

Female infanticide and foeticide is a challenge in many parts of India, especially in the District of Salem in Tamil Nadu. When I was serving as Collector here, I was involved in the revival of the cradle baby scheme, and activities that were connected with eliminating and reducing female infanticide and female foeticide.

It was very disturbing to see girl

children being given away under the cradle baby scheme and it was unfortunate to see cases of female infanticide. This was not due to economic reasons, but due to social problems which of course has been drastically reduced now. When I read about such incidents in Haryana or Rajasthan I still get disturbed.

Similarly, although there are a lot of social protection measures available, care of elderly is becoming a challenge not only for the poor people, but across various sections of our society. Many people do not practice what they preach!

The government is involved in a lot of welfare measures and so are the NGOs. Still, there is a dearth of social issues that needs to be addressed. What according to you should be the effective strategy that government and NGOs could adopt to address these issues?

The ultimate solution for all social issues is to empower people and address the grass root challenges by putting systems in place. This perhaps would be an effective strategy. In most cases, we do not have any single solution for social issues. Depending on the type of issue, we may have several facets within the same issue. We may have to tackle one facet of the social issue differently in each area.

Concomitantly, we need to ensure that the required regulations are in place. Government and NGOs should not only implement, but also monitor their programmes. The bottom line is that the communities need to be at the centre of all the efforts, and the Government and NGOs should work along with the communities to ensure that the regulations and awareness bring about change in the behavior of people.

As the district collector of Nagapattinam, you have gained national as well as international media attention for your efficient administration of the Tsunami Relief Rehabilitation Programme. Was this encouraging else was it a hassle to tackle media?

In the aftermath of the disasters, media was constructive in its criticism and positive in its appreciation of the good efforts of the Government and the NGOs who were active during that time.

Actually, the scale of two tragedies—Kumbakonam school fire accident in July 2004 and the tsunami in December 2004—led to large scale media attention that continued from the relief to the recovery phase.

Media needs have changed rapidly in recent times when compared to the time when I joined service in the early 90's. At that time there were no 24x7 news media, many number of national, regional print or regional media, or social media. In the changing times, if the right information is not shared at the right time with the media, then incorrect information or perception may go. So, I always used to take it as part of our responsibility to ensure that right information is shared.

Given the tsunami experience, do you think that India is now competent to handle future disasters?

India has always been having a fairly excellent response system. The challenge for India is that close to 60 percent of land is vulnerable to earthquake; 70

percent of the land under cultivation is prone to drought; almost 40 million hectares are prone to floods; and 8,000 km of coastline is vulnerable to tsunami. Surprisingly, the Disaster Management (DM) set up in India has been growing in learning along with the disasters. What has happened is that there is a paradigm shift on the response centric approach for each of these disasters to a more holistic approach addressing all phases of DM, namely Prevention, Mitigation, Response, Recovery, and Reconstruction.

I feel that while a lot has been achieved, there is still a need to ensure that there is a greater community level awareness efforts coupled with robust early warning systems and connectivity till the last mile, so that the people in the habitations are able to respond effectively in the event of a disasters, i.e., the grass root villagers should be able to access information about predictable disasters.

In addition, as already initiated in many cases, specific mitigation projects have to be taken up to ensure that the effect of disasters is mitigated. More importantly, we also need to mainstream disaster risk reduction in the regular development programmes. Already, the Government of India and the State Government and the Non Governmental organizations involved in DM are taking up a number of such projects to address these issues.

You were invited to Washington to deliver a lecture at the United States Department of Education on tsunami-related issues. Can you share your learning with us?

The Department of State has a programme through the US Embassy called as International Visitors (IV) programme. I was invited to be part of IV programme which exposed us to the issue of responding to natural disasters and how it is being handled in the US. It also provided an opportunity to share our learnings from the tsunami relief and rehabilitation programme in Nagapattinam with persons who were handling the tsunami response programme in other countries.

The exposure visits and sharing of mutual experiences helped in expanding my knowledge and vision about the way in which disaster management is handled in various places.

After handling several portfolios in the government, you have now moved on to UNDP on secondment. Will you return to serve as an IAS officer?

I have always maintained that I would come back to the state, once my present three-year secondment ends in March 2012. My present assignment as Head of Disaster Management (DM) with UNDP India has provided me an excellent opportunity to use the experiences and exposure to DM in implementing and overseeing the joint programmes which we implement with the Government of India and the National Disaster Management Authority on Institutional Strengthening and Capacity Building for Disaster Risk Reduction and Urban Risk Reduction.

I am sure this exposure and experience would be extremely useful, when I come back to the state to serve in whatever capacity I am offered at that point of time.



“The exposure visits and sharing of mutual experiences helped in expanding my knowledge and vision about the way in which disaster management is handled in various places