

Conversations Today

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FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

“Poverty is a state of mind” – Bernard Hare

Poverty has been a curse since time immemorial. It is a continuing outrage to our sensibilities, our moral principles, and our very humanity. But, things are changing now. With technological advances, successful developmental programmes, and political will – poverty is being eliminated in several pockets of our society, in particular aiming to end extreme poverty.

We can learn from other countries across the globe that have succeeded in this fight from the strategic choices they have made, the policies and initiatives they have put in place, and the priorities they have established.

Many recent successful poverty reduction efforts have been fuelled by rapid and sustained growth together with the rise of an entrepreneurial class. But, would growth alone suffice?

Today’s global growth is taking a heavy toll in the form of environmental degradation and we are approaching or even overstressing our planetary boundaries. This has profound significance for both present and future generations, especially the poor, who are the dependent on nature for food, livelihoods, energy, security and health. The poor and the disadvantaged are also the most vulnerable to the negative consequences of climate change.

Poverty is also about vulnerability, humiliation, discrimination, exclusion and inequity. In India, the income limit for households for qualifying as a beneficiary under the BPL (below poverty line) list has been pegged at about Rs. 27,000 per annum. We should never forget that extreme poverty is not just about living on less than Rs 32 for rural India, Rs 47 for urban India per day. It is about much more than being hungry, ill-housed, and lack of healthcare and access to education.

It’s easy to say that “life is about choices” — but it’s misinformed. It’s easy to think that the homeless man had a choice awhile back that put him into the position he’s in. It’s easy to say that a struggling single mother didn’t have to have children. And it’s easy to say that those who are impoverished are there because of poor life decisions. But, it’s difficult to try and understand all of the implications our society puts on the less fortunate that put them into such situations.

Marie Banu

EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh

Marie Banu

HAVING A HUMAN MOMENT



Intentionally paying more attention to someone may be the best way to encourage emergence of rapport. Listening carefully, with undivided attention, orients our neural circuits for connectivity, putting us on the same wavelength. That maximizes the likelihood that the other essential ingredients for rapport— synchrony and positive feelings—might bloom. – Daniel Goleman, from “Social Intelligence”.

In today’s world, full attention is impacted by multitasking, self-absorption and preoccupations. As a result we are less able to notice other people’s feelings and needs, let alone respond with empathy. In the absence of full attention, we have many lost opportunities for human moments!

The power of understanding creates an opportunity for a human moment. Understanding others does not mean that one has to agree with the other’s feelings or point of view. Instead, it means that one recognizes the other’s point of view, and accepts that it is different.

Having a human moment is possible with practicing attunement. “Attunement is attention that goes beyond momentary empathy to a full sustained presence that facilitates rapport. We offer a person our total attention and listen fully.” We seek to understand the other person rather than just making our own point.

Two keys to manifesting attunement and causing a human moment are: physical presence and emotional and intellectual attention. Listening well and paying attention to as many cues as you can notice. It’s easy when someone else is talking to be preparing your response to what they said. Practice just listening, asking for clarification of any points you don’t fully grasp. Then, consider how to respond. By just listening, you’ll gather more information than if you’re busy developing what you want to say.

Put down your electronic device or note pad, look at the people around you, notice who talks to whom, and how people respond to each other. What expressions are on their faces? Does the group atmosphere feel tense, relaxed, or bored? Who speaks more often? Who rarely speaks?

Yours Energetically

Ms. Bhuvaneshwari Ravi is trainer, facilitator and coach of the Positive Energy (PE) program. She is a spiritual seeker with a vision of transforming her own energy state from surviving to being. In this journey she has gathered deep insights and is continuously working towards creating a pathway for more seekers. With years of exposure to spiritual practices like yoga, reiki, and personal development interventions like coaching, she is working in the Organization Development and Leadership Development space.

She can be contacted at bhuvaneshwari@teamthink.co.in for arranging Positive Energy training and Coaching sessions.

Aspirations and Right to Life

Right to life is a constitutional right and its interpretation within the frame of socio-economic rights has brought to fore many concerns that were earlier unknown. One such concern is the notion of minimum wages. The idea behind setting a benchmark such as minimum wages is to ensure that human labour is no longer sold at prices that disregarded protection of the said constitutional right. However, the limits observed leave much to be desired, highlighting the situations of survival which may go unnoticed in the larger frame of human development indices.

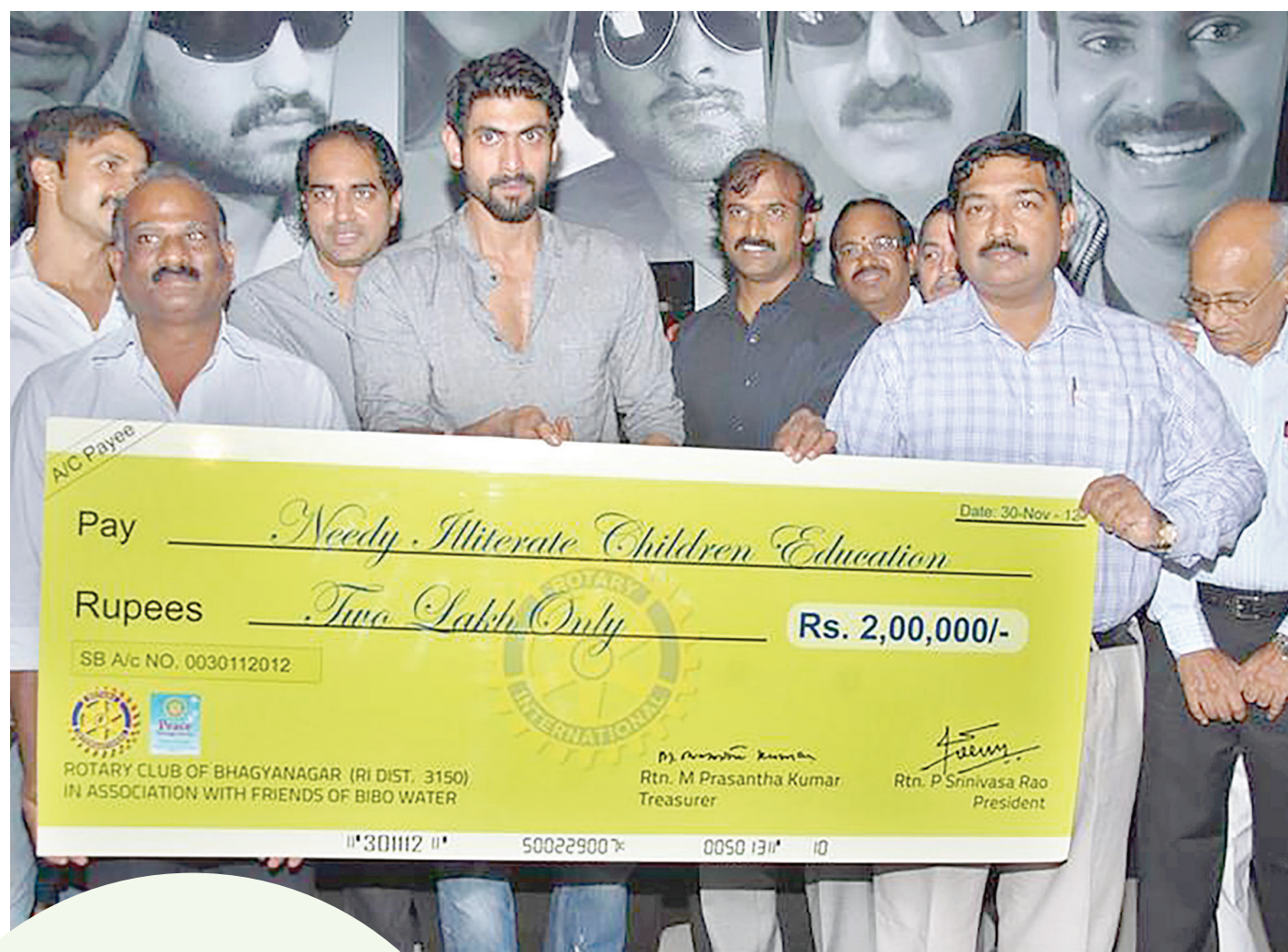
Mr Purna Chander Rao, Secretary of NICE Society in Hyderabad grew up witnessing circumstances that jeopardised right to life. He could not comprehend why some sections in the society spent their lives struggling to survive. "Their children will follow and the vicious cycle will continue. That is the inter-generational poverty which longs for a fresh perspective. There is a need to check how appropriate the current benchmarks are," says Rao.

Brought up by his widowed mother, Rao always knew the significance of labour in poor households. It was her hard work that met his education needs. However, he could not afford other activities and skill training programmes that would have provided a better start for his professional front. Soon after graduation, Rao joined a private company in Hyderabad. He was shattered to learn what his colleagues earned. "Some earned a meagre amount that wasn't enough to meet the sustenance of even one person. To me, this was injustice and complete disregard for one's right to life. Why isn't everyone paid adequately? I couldn't see my co-workers working hard to earn such low salaries, hence I quit this job," admits Rao.

Now comes the volunteering phase in Rao's life where he was associated with CRY for five years. "I began to see the value of working for a cause. Although it was a challenge for me to meet my day-to-day needs, I somehow managed to cope," says Rao who could not accept organisations who spent their funds more on non-programme expenses or administration.

Rao began to nourish the dream of establishing a good quality residential school to provide free education to orphan, semi-orphans, and other needy children. Having experienced the life of a poor child and the growing quest for transparency, accountability in non-profit institutions, he pursued his dream to demonstrate the value for human aspirations at all levels.

He founded NICE – Needy Illiterate Children's Education in 2002 with the support of individual and corporate donations in Guntur district. NICE is a



CSIM's approach prepares to unlearn many things that not only help in running a non-profit organisation, but also prepares one to lead a sufficient and resilient life at a personal level.

residential school affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education, Government of India, and is the very first CBSE school in the country that caters to orphans and semi orphans. Building his dream project brick by brick, he diligently chose his team members. "As they are going to be an integral part of my dream, I was very careful about whom I chose. Of course, qualification and passion were equally important. I employed staff from poor neighbourhoods that lacked social support. I promised myself that every staff would be paid well enough so that they are able to plan a secure future for

themselves," said a determined Rao.

Beginning with ten children in 2003, the school is now home to 250 children (140 boys and 60 girls) studying from fifth to tenth standard. The lowest employee at NICE is paid 11,000 rupees, which is much ahead of the threshold that is set in place by state and central governments. NICE also provides food, accommodation and health care services to all its staff and their children. "They no longer have to spend their entire lives struggling to survive or worry about their future," Rao heaves a sigh of relief.

A team that lives and eats together with the children, collectively dreams for the future of these children. "A happy staff, we share our passion too. Commitment and loyalty in them sets an example for the children. They see these principles unfold as they grow up. They also learn the social and economic worth of labour," says Rao who continues to handle administration single-handedly and efficiently, only to invest more in children and staff. Rao's association with CSIM dates back to 2005 as the school received support from Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani's Dal, Oil and Sugar (DOS) scheme for over four years. "That is when I learnt about CSIM and it benefited social enthusiasts like me," he recalls.

Rao feels that connecting like-minded individuals and helping them move forward is a great task that CSIM has been carrying out very effectively. He appreciates the efforts taken to stay in touch with the alumni and learn about their progress to further motivate new batch of students. Most of all, Rao feels that CSIM's approach prepares to unlearn many things that not only help in running a non-profit organisation, but also prepares one to lead a sufficient and resilient life at a personal level. "CSIM has strengthened my resolve to retain administration expenses under five percent of the total budget. Timely preparation of balance sheets and sharing them with all our donors is an incredible exercise for us, allowing us to plan any development well ahead and within our limits," shares Rao, reiterating how CSIM helped him structure his values alongside NICE's routine operations.

Twelve batches have passed out so far without failure and over ninety percent of the children have passed with first class. Few alumni are now chartered accountants and software engineers and earn a decent salary. Their juniors will follow suit and eventually, Rao hopes to see labour and wages as factors enabling pursuit of aspirations.

—Shanmuga Priya. T

Leader & Leadership Matters...

19. Learning Orientation: King of Leadership Attributes



Meaning of Learning in leadership:

“Learning is the willingness to be open to the input that comes from the environment, with a commitment to apply one’s mind to understand this input and passion to stay with the understanding long enough to be able to derive one’s own insights. This followed with conviction to integrate one’s own understanding and insights into real life contexts, makes learning a meaningful process.”

— JM Sampath

In the previous articles we had discussed over 18 attributes and four orientations that enable excellence in Leader and Leadership. Though all the attributes are equally important and critical for Leadership, Learning orientation is the King of all attributes. An imbalance or lack of any attribute is taken care of, if the Leader is a learner. If the Leader has challenge in learning, it will be the first area of focus for development.

To discuss the Learning Orientation in depth, I chose to speak to Dr. JM Sampath, PhD who is also the author of the Life Orientation Instrument which is base for drawing the Leadership attributes that we have been deliberating last 18 months. He has been an avid learner and continues to explore and experiments on various management and behavioral concepts and tools. He is fellow of Ashoka and a social entrepreneur most well known in his field for last 3 decades (www.arpatha.com)

Dr. Sampath, can you share your meaning of the often used word ‘Learning’? According to you, what role does learning play in Leadership perspective?

“Learning is the engine that allows someone to move forward. The day you stop learning you stagnate. Learning will allow a leader to grow and a leader not learning will only stagnate the person. Learning doesn’t mean that you have to accept everything that has been told to you. Learning means you have the humility to receive what has been told to you, examine it objectively and pick what is worth and leave the rest.

Learning means you have an unconditional commitment to examine all that comes to you with an open mind and a commitment to see what is valuable in it.

Dr. Sampath, from your own life experience, can you give me an example?

Dr. Sampath shares – “I want to share the birth of one of my tools which was called value profile instrument earlier and currently called LOI – life orientation instrument. A behavioural analytics platform is built over it. I used to do an exercise called value auction in value clarification workshops way back in early 90’s. I used to have 15 values and I would give notional 15000Rs to every participant. We would auction the values and a participant would bid for the values to buy. Finally the score board will have the name of the value, amount bid for and the person who has bought it. Discussion will be with the participants sharing why they wanted to bid for the value and pay what they paid. At the end of the workshop they would appreciate me for that exercise and share how they learnt a lot out of that. This went on for almost 34 workshops from the beginning. In the 35th workshop I was conducting for the Vivekananda Kendra life workers in Kanyakumari, one of the participants walked up to me while I was explaining the exercise and said ‘I don’t want to participate. I want all the values and in your game plan I will not be able to bid and get all the values’. Naively, I asked him what you want me to do. He said, ‘that is your problem. I know what I want to do.’ With great difficulty, I finished the workshop and I returned to Chennai. Next four days and nights I couldn’t sleep. I thought within myself that the participant was telling me something very important and I am not picking it up. But on the fifth day morning, I cracked the entire thing and came up with the principle that ‘No single value by itself is valuable; values are interdependent and one needs to understand this inter dependence in order to understand one’s own behaviour.’ That became the foundation to build the LOI and the way it has evolved over the last thirty years. Had I not been a learner maybe I would not have picked up this point. Actually the participant was more intelligent than I was but I was open and willing to learn. I was able to see objectively his point of view. In spite of having the record of previous 34 workshops gone very well with that exercise, I could move forward and I had realized something that was very meaningful and important.”

Dr. Sampath, there is an expectation of a Leader being aware, knowledgeable

and accomplished. How can a leader still hold that position and be an excellent learner learning from everyone?

“The universal truth, as well as a belief I hold about learning is that ‘there is nothing about which I know everything and there is something I know about many things and learning happens between what I know and what I don’t know.’ For a leader, particularly when he/she is leading an institution it is important to keep pushing the boundaries. You can keep pushing the boundary when you are in the place between what you know and what you don’t know. If you going to be in the comfort of what you know, the boundary will be minimized and you will not be expanding and growing the institution nor your own self.

So, as a leader it becomes very critical for him/her to constantly be at the edge and keep exploring to enhance the organization’s capabilities apart from their own capabilities.”

To push boundary, a Leader will have to take initiative and pursue learning continuously. But the Leaders have challenge to find time and space and how will this be possible?

“Most of us believe that learning needs a separate time and space in life. I personally believe that life itself is a school and you can continuously keep learning. All you need to have as a leader, is your ability to reflect on what happened, your ability to see things, connect dots, correlate them, contextualize them, create and contribute. If you took a decision, reflect on that decision for a few minutes, if you can realize what went right with that decision and what didn’t and what could have gone right, you have been learning.

The minute you move away from thinking learning is an activity to learning is as good as your breathing, it becomes a way of existence.”

Dr. Sampath, you have coached many leaders in last 3 decades. Can you share a couple of examples of leaders who have been great learners?

“There have been many who I have come across as great learners. But one who stands out among all of them is Mr. Vijay B Iyer. I have seen the kind of energy he has and the openness with which he listens to things; the multiple perspectives he brings about anything and the depth to which he goes being engaged in multi dimensions and is constantly learning. He learns from both his success and failure. He doesn’t blame anyone. He was working under a CEO who was extremely difficult. Yet he could see his perspective. He was willing to see how to understand and make meaning about

that perspective. He has now another CEO and he is willing to change the perspective and absorb the new dimensions. On my recommendation he went for a 21 day panchakarma process in Ayurveda. It was very difficult for him to find that 21 days. Yet, he found time, sunk himself into that process and I think he got the maximum benefit out of that and I have not seen many who come to that place get the extent of healing that he made happen for himself. When you are open as a leader you get the maximum of anything.

Another person in social sector was my mentor and teacher late Prof. T K Nair. I will never forget this incident though it happened long back. When I was quitting my job in 90's I had spoken to him. He said I shouldn't quit my job. I should continue to work because it is not easy to good another good placement. In spite of all his advice I quit my job and couple of months later I went to meet him in Chennai. We were having a conversation and he had absolutely no remorse or sense of discomfort because I did not listen to him. After a while not able to quench my curiosity I asked him 'you told me not to quit the job and I quit. Are you not upset about it?' He replied "when you asked me something I have to tell you what I feel and what my intelligence says. It is for you to decide what you want to do from what you hear from me. And I have no imposition of what I tell that you have to follow or not. That is left to you. As far as I am concerned, given my context and my thinking that was what I thought was the right decision. You may be giving another perspective which may be better than what I thought." I thought that was something very beautiful and till his last day he continued to keep learning, evolving, and helping others evolve.

I truly believe that if you want to be a leader and mentor, you have to be a better learner than the person you are trying to teach. This is very critical."

Usually, Leaders are confused between knowledge and ability to execute and be action oriented. So is learning the knowledge they hold or their actions?

"There was a time when knowledge

was power and google has dis-empowered everybody by giving whatever you want at a fingertip. In the context that we and the businesses are, we need more wise leaders than knowledgeable leaders. If you have information that can be traced in google or anywhere else, it is knowledge. If you are wise, you will be engaged in creating knowledge which cannot be found just like that. Wise people add value; they bring something more than what they see. Today as leaders you will have to create that value add in everything that you do.

These days there are a number of workshops on mindfulness. 20 years ago I created a process and concept of understanding mindfulness and mindlessness. We start with ignorance. Many of us don't even know we don't know. I call this conscious ignorance or true ignorance. When we know we don't know we acquire knowledge. We come to understand what we need to know. When we know, our immediate tendency is to apply that knowledge. Many of us are caught up in an activity mode. We don't understand and create a meaning out of everything that we do. Many leaders are doing what is popular and what everybody else is doing following the mob mentality. Take competency mapping or performance appraisals for example. How much do leaders understand why they are changing a system and what influences people actually to perform? What motivates people to perform? Did we understand what the source of performance in a person is? When we create systems and process without understanding, we end up being mindless rather than being mindful in our actions.

There is an anecdote that I remember where there was a person whose performance was dropping and the Boss was getting very upset and wanted him to be transferred to another department. I personally don't think there is any employee who is not a good worker. As a leader many tend to categorize them as non-performers instead of understanding what is naturally helping them not to perform. So finally when we

"If you and I don't think beyond what has been thought, this place will not progress"

– JM Sampath

went into understanding why the employee was not able to work efficiently, we realized that he had a major family crisis where his mother was going through a terminal cancer. He was very attached to her and he was disturbed. When there was help given to him to deal with that issue his performance improved. We don't make time to understand. We are so much in a hurry to label and put people into a box and seal that box for the rest of our life."

Dr. Sampath, we recruit leaders with high educational qualifications and exposure. But when they come into the organization we see them having a challenge to learn. How can a Leader be a natural learner and apply that learning in day to day life?

"I personally carry a strong belief that a knowledge that cannot be used in life is better off in the book rather than in my brain. Every knowledge is there to help a leader do something. There is no knowledge for the sake of the knowledge.

For example, one morning I was walking in Lalbagh, a botanical garden in south Bangalore. I saw this huge tree which is 200 years old and it was a fall season. There was a gentle breeze and a leaf was falling down gently and landed on the ground. As I was watching it I connected to my own life and said, wow! The tree has a shed a leaf and what have I shed today? Connecting to why

do the tree shed this leaf and I asked myself what is that behaviour that has become irrelevant to me and not letting me grow? How can I shed that?

I further asked myself what happens to the leaf that falls on the ground. Technically it decomposes and becomes a manure. So, I reflected that anything I shed is not completely waste; it decomposes and becomes a part of the manure to allow me to keep growing. Everything has a use at different parts of time in different ways. Do we really understand this? How do we constantly keep learning? Constantly keep connecting? Constantly keep correlating and make meaning? And start applying that in our life?

One of my request to leaders is 'Can they see every day as a new day?' Can you walk into your cabin saying that this is the new first day of your work? The minute it is the first day, the openness with which you see everything will be very different. Many of us within 3 to 6 months of joining a company believe 'I know this company'. We start taking decisions from our past rather than the present and shockingly, the quality of the decisions based on past knowledge suffers. It is important for us to have a fresh and open mind, to be looking at everything afresh and seeing them as an opportunity to learn something new and to add value to what you have been doing. Leaders should create meaning for organizations and self and to the others around them."

Thank you Dr. Sampath for these enlightening perspectives on learning. Is there a final say from your side to our readers?

Sampath smiles and adds, "Let knowing not stop us from knowing further!"

With this article, we end the series on Leader and Leadership Matters. I thank CSIM and the readers for giving me this wonderful opportunity to meet Leaders and share their perspectives and practices with you. I learnt a lot of valuable lessons.

**With Gratitude,
Dr. Kalpana Sampath**



Centre for Social Initiative and Management

Centre 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.

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

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A HOLISTIC

While education has been the backbone of Deepalaya's work, the organization concedes that it cannot be the be-all and end-all to self-reliance.



Good quality education. In a nutshell, that has been the key goal for Deepalaya ever since its inception. Providing this education to the needy to let them stay self-reliant has been the go-to strategy of the organization. "While we educate children, we also work with their family members, their siblings, community leaders and other stakeholders. We have designed different programmes to meet their needs, be it health, vocational skills or initiatives relating to women empowerment, inculcating a habit of savings, etc," says Jaswant Kaur, Executive Director, Deepalaya. "Our main objective has always been of

promoting self-reliance and ensuring a just and equitable society for all through our projects," she adds saying, "Deepalaya has come a long way over the last 40 years and has supported many lives. Yet we feel the urge to strengthen our projects, produce more effective and tangible results."

The focus at the organization has been on children and in the education sector. In fact, over 70 percent of the organization's expenditure is child-related. "We have diversified our activities into other sectors like women empowerment and health over the last more than two decades," she says, "Yet, our approach remains the same. We

have always started our projects visualizing a needy child. In fact, because of children, we have been able to start our initiatives in the states of Maharashtra, Telangana, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala as well." The NGO is now planning to expand to Rajasthan. The key beneficiaries however remain the same: children.

Deepalaya has been implementing various programmes in formal, non-formal and remedial education to underprivileged sections, through two formal schools and several learning centres in Delhi, Harayana and Uttar Pradesh. "We have been able to begin another project with South Delhi

Municipal Corporation to improve the quality of education in one of their schools located at Okhla water sewage treatment plant, Delhi," says Jaswant.

When the NGO expanded in Punjab recently, it adopted four government schools in Mohali. The organization has also created a niche in digital education with the help of an innovative programme called TABLAB which is being implemented in 26 government schools in Mumbai, UP, Telangana, Haryana and Andhra Pradesh. So far, these initiatives have touched the lives of 3.2 lakh students all of whom are socially and economically deprived, thanks to its affordability.

APPROACH

While education has been the backbone of Deepalaya's work, the organization concedes that it cannot be the be-all and end-all to self-reliance. The youth have been equipped with marketable skills so that they are able to earn a living. Deepalaya through different vocational programmes have enabled more than 13000 students to start earning for a living.

Community healthcare has been another focus area for Deepalaya. The organization has been conducted health education programmes, health camps, immunization programmes, eye check-up camps and cataract operations, tuberculosis and cancer detection programmes, and reproductive and child health services. "The services have been provided in several parts of Delhi, Haryana and UP to more than 7.5 lakh people. We have collaborated with renowned agencies like AIIMS, Cansupport, Delhi AIDS society, Pathfinder International etc. for conducting these activities," she says.

Deepalaya's next project has its priority on point: to develop a positive attitude among parents and the community at large towards those with physical and mental health challenges. "As on date, Deepalaya has reached out to over 4,200 children with disabilities. They have received services like Physiotherapy, Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy and Pre-Vocational and Vocational training. We have a special unit at Sanjay Colony, Okhla Phase-2 in Delhi, where children with various disabilities have been enrolled. Cases here are varied. They range from mild and moderate, to severe disabilities. Depending upon the type and severity of disabilities, the special children are given different kinds of treatment," she says. While progress has been varied from case to case, it has been encouraging overall. "Several students have taken up jobs in computer operations and tailoring after undergoing treatment," she adds.

To work towards gender equity, in which women become equal partners in taking crucial decisions that affect them and their families, Deepalaya conducts awareness programmes for men and women, capacity building programmes for women, specific economic empowerment programmes for women, establishing & managing income generation programmes through micro credit, national level workshops on topics related to gender equity. Till date, Deepalaya has formed over 1400 SHGs with more than 16000 members in 3 states of Delhi, Haryana and Uttarakhand.

In keeping with its focus on children, Deepalaya has also started a children's

home for boys and girls, registered under Juvenile Justice Act 2000, which provides for residential accommodation, education, vocational skills, healthcare, latent talent development and rehabilitation of street children, children of sex workers, children of life convicts, and mentally retarded children needing constant medical care in an institution.

"The key target/goal as of now is to align our projects with the sustainable development goals. Although, we are working on many of the SDGs, our main target is to adopt a structured approach and support the government in achieving these goals," she says.

Deepalaya has had a good mix of donors and partners that caters to its funding. "We have not restricted ourselves to donations. Over the last few years, we have been able to collaborate with the corporate for their CSR projects. We have been more dependent on indigenous funds than foreign funds. In fact, we do not have many government grants. This is one area, we need to improve upon. However, we are running our activities in government schools without financial support from the state governments," she says.

On the expansion front, Deepalaya has a policy of what Jaswant describes as "spiral growth". "Despite our wish to expand our activities in a similar fashion, one thing that has always played a crucial role is the financial support." With its foray into Mohali, the organization now wants to enhance its activities and strengthen projects in Punjab. "We are also exploring villages close to Jaipur in Rajasthan. But these are at a very preliminary stage," Jaswant signs off.



Seeking shelter, they found HOME

Since 2004, HOME has helped thousands of migrant workers in Singapore seek redress when things go awry.

After three-and-a-half years of volunteering for migrant worker rights group HOME, one encounter in particular remains vivid in Ivan Ng's memory. He recalls how he and fellow volunteers threw themselves into a case of a migrant worker, in what was ultimately a failed attempt to prevent his repatriation.

"He still came back to the office on the day he has to go back home. He just came to me and said, 'Brother, I know you have done your best. It didn't work out, but thank you.'"

Moments like this spur Ivan on to support the vulnerable, low-wage migrant worker group in Singapore — a cause so close to his heart that he has roped in his daughter, Astrid.

"[Through] these close encounters with workers, I started to understand what they go through, their troubles, and because of this awareness, I cannot be indifferent anymore. I cannot do nothing," says Ivan, who is retired.

A HOME OF VOLUNTEERS

At HOME — short for Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics — Ivan and Astrid volunteer as caseworkers helping migrant workers with salary disputes and work injury claims. "Migrant workers, face a lot of difficulties. The limited resources that they have...this imbalance of power, the employers always have the upper hand," says Ivan. "That's why this silent, invisible population need extra help to get back their fair treatment."

Founded in 2004, HOME assists migrant workers who have been abused or exploited by their employers. It also runs a shelter for domestic workers in need and an academy where workers can pick up vocational skills.

Each year, it helps about 2,700 migrant workers and domestic workers, with 1,600 domestic workers graduating from its academy.

Jaya Anil Kumar, Casework Manager at HOME, says volunteers are key to the NGO. "We have a very lean staff, so we rely a lot on volunteers to make sure our programmes are running smoothly," she says. "A lot of them work tirelessly in order to ensure that the well-being of migrant workers are met, purely out of the goodness of their heart."

She adds, "As long as the dedication and the commitment is there, anyone can come help... it's also heartening to know that the people who are helping [the workers] are Singaporeans, because we recognise the value of the work that they do in order to help Singapore grow."

Dedication isn't something Ivan is short on — officially, he goes to HOME's office twice a week, but he constantly keeps himself on "standby mode", ready to accompany a worker to



Ivan Ng
Volunteer
HOME

see a doctor, or help HOME at a fundraising event.

"I try to help all these workers, [but] actually, they are the ones who helped me become a better person," says Ivan.

Astrid says she is thankful to her father for "dragging" her down to HOME to volunteer. "I was just following him taking case notes. But then I started hearing the stories, that's when it started hitting me," she says.

A SHELTER FROM HARM, A SCHOOL OF HOPE

Yanti's journey as a volunteer began very differently — as a domestic helper, she found herself in the hands of an abusive employer.

"My former employer never let me call my family...my baby passed away and they never let me know," says Yanti. Turning to HOME for help, she stayed in its shelter for 14 months until her case was resolved. Now, she volunteers for its help desk on her days off, which includes picking up domestic workers seeking help at the police station or the hospital, and lending a comforting shoulder.

"HOME trusted me to be a leader," says Yanti. "They [the workers] always cry to me and tell me their story. So my heart feels, 'Oh, same like me.'"

Abusive employers are an unfortunate part of reality in Singapore. But there are also Singaporeans like Jaya Nathan

who feel passionately about respecting the foreign domestic workers entrusted to ease the loads of households.

"I understand how fellow Singaporeans feel, to bring a stranger to the house is not easy. But what I'm saying is, talk to them as a human. They're not slaves. We shouldn't treat them like that," says Jaya Nathan.

She has paid for her helper, Alma Terol Virtudazo, to attend cosmetology courses at HOME's Academy, equipping Alma with skills that may come in handy in the future. "I really owe Alma a lot. She deserves a good life and respect in my home. And she's not my helper, she's my family," she says.

Likewise, Alma says of her employer: "I have a lot of freedom here in the house, because I work hard and she trusts me. She treats me like a sister."

A DREAM OF GREATER INCLUSIVITY

"The migrant workers community is not talked about enough, but they form the backbone of our economy," says Jaya from HOME.

She adds, "Singapore was built with the help of migrant workers. Many of our forefathers were migrant workers. Let us work with them in order to make Singapore a better home for them and for us."

Ivan puts it simply: "We are all human beings, we have the same human

dignity, the same needs, the same aspirations. When more Singaporeans are willing to reach out to the marginalised, then we can truly say our society is inclusive, our society is gracious."

ABOUT HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION ECONOMICS

More commonly referred to as HOME, this non-governmental organisation was set up in 2004 to assist migrant workers and to advocate for their rights in Singapore. Typical problems include wage disputes, workplace injuries, poor living conditions, and physical, verbal and psychological abuse. HOME works closely with government agencies, civic groups, corporations and other regional partners to provide its services more effectively and to reach out to more people in need. HOME also runs a shelter for domestic workers and an academy, where workers can pick up vocational skills, such as baking, sewing and financial management.

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

Spark Ignites, Embers Fade Away

One of the oldest challenges that our education system has been facing is that of transitioning from rote-memorization to 'meaningful learning'. Rote memorization affects long term knowledge retention. Rote learning is essentially memorization that is based on repetition. The thought behind it is that the more one repeats information, the quicker that person will be able to recall the information when needed. Multiplication tables, the alphabet and some basic terms used in every subject for example, are taught by this method. Meaningful learning on the other hand focuses more on engaging with the subject matter, thinking critically and understanding how individual concepts work together. It follows therefore that leaning heavily on memorization often obstructs deeper learning; much of the information students learn this way is later lost. Unfortunately, in most schools, the lessons end before students can reach this level of deep learning. Surface learning may lead to passing tests and getting a good score, but doesn't lead to the creation of a knowledge base that will keep a student in good standing for a long time to come.

Combating rote memorization through innovative teaching-learning methods is Chudar, a Chennai-based organization that sets up after-school centers catering to underprivileged children. They develop innovative educational content in Language, Mathematics and Science to help improve children's learning. We got in touch with Padmini Sreenivasan, Director of Chudar Programs, to learn more about their work. She says, "Chudar was founded with the vision of eliminating rote memorization and ensuring that children, particularly first-generation learners from underprivileged backgrounds, attain the skills and confidence necessary to face the future by the time they graduate from high-school."

Chudar's founder Dr. Ravishankar has been working in the field of school education for at least 13 years now. An alumnus of IIT Madras and a Ph.D. from Carnegie Mellon University, USA, Dr. Ravishankar's passion for education has informed every aspect of his illustrious career. Previously engaged with AID India, he directed large-scale programs to improve quality of education. As a resource person with UNICEF and NCERT he was often invited to make presentations on the field of education at conferences in India and abroad. Later he was a full-time faculty at IIT Madras, before throwing himself headlong to work on his brainchild, Chudar. Some of his other achievements include holding three US patents from his stint at IBM.

While his earlier work focused on improving foundational literacy and numeracy, Dr. Ravishankar realized that rote memorization in higher classes was the main reason why children in Tamilnadu did not learn well. This problem has been confirmed in studies conducted by the NCERT which show that in spite of high enrollment and



infrastructure, Tamilnadu fares poorly in learning outcomes.

In response to the above, Chudar has come up with three programs:

- After-school centers across Chennai
- School-intervention program in 20 Government and Government-aided schools
- Block-level partnership with 25 schools in Thiruporur and Kattankulathur blocks

Chudar members were part of the recent curriculum revision exercise by the Tamil Nadu State Government and Chudar's input was recognized with a mention in the middle-school Math textbooks. Says Padmini, "As resource persons we have trained more than 1000 teachers through large-scale teachers training camps organized by the Government".

For middle and high-school children in the age group of 11-16 years, Chudar has developed unique content in Math, Science, and English. "Our methodology is synchronized with the state curriculum and it helps children assimilate concepts and skills quite easily" says Padmini. At present these programs have directly touched 4800 students and counting.

The programs of Chudar are based on a few key features:

- Focus on learning outcomes
- Fun and exciting activity materials and worksheets
- Technology aided education
- Community participation through melas and learning festivals

When asked about what they consider to be the success of their programs, Padmini says "We have measured the impact of our intervention through pre- and post-assessments conducted by teachers themselves and are happy to report a 60%-70% improvement in the



average skill-levels of children. Also at the end of every term, we conduct a declaration event for students to showcase the skills that they have learned. There have been several instances of students proudly demonstrating in front of a big crowd, brimming with confidence, surprising all their teachers and parents. Recently for example, a student from a municipality school in Alandur who previously had difficulty in Maths ended up doing all sums correctly, thus leaving his teachers pleasantly surprised!"

Recently Chudar has started helping students explore meaningful options post-school. Says Padmini, "We placed Shaveethira, a class 12 student from a

government school in Avadi, in Zoho University to train as a programmer after assessing her aptitude for it. The fact that she comes from a disadvantaged background, makes her achievement that much more remarkable."

Revitalizing education systems is by no means an easy task. Chudar faces its share of difficulties too.

Padmini shares, "Overcoming the rote-learning practice itself is the greatest challenge. The system only reinforces examination and marks, neither of which really reflects true learning. On the program front, impact largely depends on motivated teachers in government schools. Even when teachers are motivated, various constraints posed by the system or authorities makes it harder for them to be innovative in their work. In our after-school centers, we have community-based tutors who are also products of the same system and therefore it becomes that much harder to train them on alternative approaches. Also, like any other NGO, Chudar faces a dearth of funds and long-term commitments from donors."

Ruminating on the state of education systems Padmini adds, "Many parents, especially from underprivileged sections, believe that better education for their children is their passport to a better future. Schools should focus on imparting meaningful learning as opposed to rote memorization." As for Chudar, Padmini lays out their road map for the future when she says, "Our vision for Chudar is to impact 10,000 children in Tamilnadu over the next 3 years by working closely with the government at block and district levels. We hope that by working with the government, we can get teachers to internalize approaches to improve concepts and skills." A worthy cause to get behind indeed!

—Archanaa Ramesh

Conversations with Shri Ramana Maharishi

D.: Does the *Tantrik sadhana* bring about Self-Realisation?

M.: Yes.

D.: Which worship in *Tantra* is the best?

M.: It depends on temperament.

D.: What part does *Kundalini* play in bringing about Self-Realisation?

M.: *Kundalini* rises from any *lakshya* that you have. *Kundalini* is *prana-sakti* (life-current).

D.: Different deities are said to reside in different *chakras*. Does one see them in course of *sadhana*?

M.: They can be seen if desired.

D.: Does the path to Self-Realisation go through *samadhi*?

M.: They are synonymous.

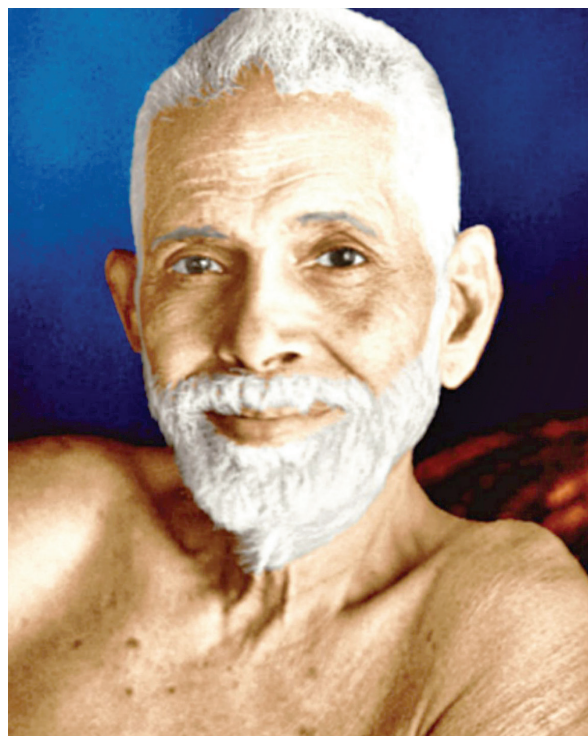
D.: It is said that the Guru can make his disciple realise the Self by transmitting some of his own power to him? Is it true?

M.: Yes. The Guru does not bring about Self-Realisation. He simply removes the obstacles to it. The Self is always realised.

D.: Is there absolute necessity of a Guru for Self-Realisation?

M.: So long as you seek Self-Realisation the Guru is necessary. Guru is the Self. Take Guru to be the Real Self and your self as the individual self.

The disappearance of this sense of duality is removal of ignorance. So long as duality persists in you the Guru is necessary. Because you identify yourself with the body you think the Guru, too, to be some body. You are



not the body, nor is the Guru. You are the Self and so is the Guru. This knowledge is gained by what you call Self-Realisation.

D.: How can one know whether a particular individual is competent to be a Guru?

M.: By the peace of mind found in his presence and by the sense of respect you feel for him.

D.: If the Guru happens to turn out incompetent, what will be the fate of the disciple who has implicit faith in him?

M.: Each one according to his merits.

D.: What are your opinions about social reform?

M.: Self-reform automatically brings about social reform. Confine yourself to self-reform. Social reform will take care of itself.

D.: What is your opinion about Gandhiji's Harijan movement?

M.: Ask him.

D.: Is it necessary to take bath if we touch dead bodies?

M.: The body is a corpse. So long as one is in contact with it one must bathe in the waters of the Self.

D.: If the *advaita* is final, why did Madhvacharya teach *dvaita*?

M.: Is your Self *dvaita* or *advaita*? All systems agree on Self-surrender. Attain it first, then there will be time to judge whose view is right or otherwise.

D.: Why do you not preach to the people to set them on the right path?

M.: You have already decided by yourself that I do not preach. Do you know who I am and what preaching is?

D.: Is the shaving of widows among Brahmins not cruel?

M.: This may be asked of *Dharma Sastris* or reformers. Reform yourself first and let us then see about the rest.

—Source: Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi

Wrong Learning



Nasruddin used to visit a saint everyday to seek knowledge, though the saint was silent and did not speak anything. One day Nasruddin asked him, "I have been coming to you again and again, expecting that you will say something, but you have said nothing. And unless you do, I cannot understand. So just give me a message for my life, a direction along which I can move."

So the saint said, "*Neki kar kuyen mein daal*: Do good and throw in the well." An old *Sufi* saying, meaning "Do good and forget it. Don't expect anything in return for the good you have done."

So the next day Nasruddin helped an old woman cross the road, and then pushed her into a well. "*Neki kar, kuyen mein daal*: Do good and throw it in the well."

 Explicit Learning

- A. Let us not get stuck to the literal meaning of words, but try to go beyond them.
- B. Do good and forget it immediately.
- C. Wrong learning at times leads to disaster.

 Introspective Learning

- A. What is the basis of my learning - words or the meaning behind them?
- B. Why do I fail to go beyond the literal meaning of words?
- C. How do I understand what I learn?

Social Enterprise: Do Promoters Plan for Exit?



Investopedia defines Social Enterprise as – “A business that has specific social objectives that serve its primary purpose. Social enterprises seek to maximize profits while maximizing benefits to society and the environment, these profits are principally used to fund social programs.” These businesses are specifically designed to innovate business models and create more value than a traditional private sector organization or any NGO, a mix of both worlds. This concept also holds in it a better future dividend in the form of Circular Economy designing, as the profits earned will again be ploughed back into the society making the model self-reliant and more optimal.

These enterprises are strategically positioned between profits and social benefits, although social cause gets leverage through long-term low-cost investment from philanthropists and social impact investors. Many researches show that social enterprises are helpful in creating jobs, give better solutions to community, solve social issues more effectively and remain sustainable and effective as well. In countries where markets are strong and consumers have more disposable income, the model fits in well to create more value for the producers of commodities.

Social enterprise is an important institutional framework in India too, as it takes care of many things. Different stakeholders have different benefits in it. Government look at it for creating large level employment in high return sectors.

Educated adults see it as an institution to remain relevant and effective in society and yet profitable in business. For individuals, where disposable income is high; service is a bigger issue than expenditure. For producers, these institutions create more value in realizing better price for their produce, which government is also interested in. Private market players also don't see these organizations as competition,

Many researches show that social enterprises are helpful in creating jobs, give better solutions to community, solve social issues more effectively and remain sustainable and effective as well.

rather see these as complementary value chain enablers in their business for linking with new producers, markets and suppliers.

Another side of the story, which comprise of large ticket size investors, policy makers, international

development organizations and NGOs is that these social enterprises create value under single or multiple Sustainable Development Goal fixed by UN for each country to be achieved within stipulated time frame. Hence, social problems gets more focused approach when the mission, vision, objective and value of organization gets aligned with larger SDGs. As the name suggests, sustainability is one of the important factor to dwell upon by the social enterprise promoters.

SDGs are important for any country and are helping them mobilizing resources for specific cause, specifically social cause which can be solved through some innovative, replicable and scalable business model. The whole business cycle becomes complete, as it starts with a social cause, its innovative solution, policy for strengthening ecosystem, donors, investors for putting money in these solutions, low cost of capital for solving social issues and after all acceptance by international community.

All this is a recipe for employment creation, innovative solutions for social problems, self-reliant institutions, less burden on state economy, attracting venture capital funds for social cause, leveraging private sector competency and executive professionals etc. The role of government can also be seen through MUDRA, Make in India, Atal Innovation Mission, establishing incubation centers, training of entrepreneurs etc. Government also created a separate ministry to address the

needs of new entrepreneurs and support them in different aspect from capital to competency to market linkage.

But, results show that only few of these enterprises are successful, reasons can be many and most of the ecosystem enablers do not have exact idea about why the success rate is low. Many will say that these are failed structures and will scrap the whole idea from scratch, But, with all due considerations the act is appreciable and is one out of many ways to move forward for country like ours, till the next better idea strikes.

One thing where I feel most of these enterprises miss out is their EXIT Strategy. Exiting from business, whether it is social or not is like telling someone to plan for death. This is tough for those who don't have adaptability and innovation in their business plan DNA. As Hinduism believes in incarnation, so do the social enterprises should imbibe in itself, to plan for change and adapt itself for new situation.

One thing all social enterprise promoters need to understand is – social problem needs to be solved, that's their success indicator and the reason for their existence. With this, they need to prepare and adapt themselves for the next relevant issue or present social problem and its potential solution. Long term goal of social issue resolution is a Myth to be busted. Long term social enterprise can be a reality if one can innovate and respond to new challenges of our fast-moving society.

–Dr. Agyeya Tripathi

“Common Services Centers helps to realise the ambition of Rural BPO in every gram panchayat in the country”

Dr. Dinesh Tyagi tells Marie Banu about Common Services Centers scheme and its mandate.

Dr. Dinesh Kumar Tyagi is the Chief Executive Officer of Common Service Centre e-Governance Services India Ltd., a Special Purpose Vehicle under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

Dr. Tyagi has had a distinguished record and belongs to Indian Administrative Services, which he joined in 1981 with Manipur-Tripura Cadre. During his tenure, he served as Secretary, Education, and Principal Secretary, Finance. He has also worked as Director in the Banking Division, Ministry of Finance. He was Custodian of Special Court, 1992 (Harshad Mehta Scam) in Ministry of Finance. He has been on the Boards of Syndicate Bank, United Bank of India and Indian Bank.

He also served as Director on the Board of various financial institutions such as Small Industries Development Bank of India.

In an exclusive interview, Dr. Dinesh Tyagi tells Marie Banu about Common Services Centers scheme, its mandate and how it is delivering digital and financial services to the last mile.

Can you tell us about the Common Services Centers scheme?

The Common Services Centers (CSC) scheme is an integral part of the Digital India Programme. Based on a unique business model that is rooted in the involvement of community and Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs), CSCs provide last-mile access to digital technology, digital literacy and host of G2C and B2C services in rural areas of the country. We have over 350,000 CSCs across the country, and 60,000 of these are managed by women entrepreneurs.

Who are the Village Level Entrepreneurs?

The Village Level Entrepreneurs or VLEs are the CSC operators. These entrepreneurs come from the community they serve. This provides a massive advantage to them as they are immersed in the context and know the community well with the ability to mobilize them in a campaign mode. This also enhances their credibility in the community significantly.

How is the CSC scheme connecting the rural masses to the digital economy?

I believe, Indians, inherently, have entrepreneurial skills and this untapped potential is being leveraged and channelized through the proliferation of digital infrastructure and a shift towards a digitally integrated economy. With grassroots penetration, CSC provides

access to education through e-learning; health through telemedicine; and financial services through banking, insurance and digital payments at a nominal cost.

How is CSC contributing towards digital and social inclusion of underserved communities?

Education is one of the main focus areas of CSC. We provide access to school, college and technical education for underserved communities. For instance, children and youth can pursue studies through National Institute of Open Schooling by enrolling and remitting the admission fee online, if they have had to discontinue schooling due to local, social or personal issues.

We provide online admission facilities and even provide support for admission tests for Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya. Over 25 lakh children enrolled for Navodaya Vidyalaya school admission last year. CSC also offers IGNOU courses and mock tests for banking jobs, police service, IIT entrance, and civil service examination. Recently, we have introduced an option for a student seeking admission in class 6 of Navodaya Vidyalaya to apply for a mock test by paying just 20 rupees.

We also do tele-medicine and have more than one lakh subscribers. We largely engage in providing homeopathy and Ayurveda consultations. Facilities for diagnostic and dispensation of medicine are also made available.

All CSCs are envisaged to be DBT - Digital Doctor, Digital Banker, and Digital Teacher. Haryana is a unique State where we have more than 450 services offered at CSC. Even taxes can be deposited here.

Any startup can access the CSC to deliver its product and services. We have evolved a policy to promote startups using our network and also encourage startups with rural innovations.

CSC is providing support for conducting the Economic Survey this year. How do you think it is equipped for this?

The 7th Economic Survey, covering 40 crore households, is being carried out by more than three lakh CSCs. For the first time, the Economic Survey (Census) is being carried out using mobile phone technology. This will be a paperless survey and the result of survey would be instantly available to stakeholders. We are proposing to the government to conduct Census at shorter intervals. The 6th Economic Survey took two years for compilation, but with 1.5 million enumerators trained and

certified in data collection at CSCs, we are certain that we can do it sooner.

The Census, if conducted through CSCs using technology, would cost less and will make available data that is current and of high value for making informed policy decisions. Rather than doing Census once in ten years, CSCs can help the Government in conducting Census once in two years.

Following the MoU with Ministry of Panchayati Raj, how is CSC planning to transform all panchayats into ‘digital panchayats’?

There are over 250,000 gram panchayats in India. CSC has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj to transform all gram panchayats into ‘digital panchayats’. CSC will act as a catalyst in promoting Rural BPO in every gram panchayat. Gram Panchayat Bhawans will host CSCs so that all government services and social schemes are made easily available to villagers. Ministry of Panchayati Raj applications and data for all schemes and programmes that are run by the Central and State governments will be entered by the CSC personnel / staff.

All gram panchayat records will be maintained in digital format, and CSC will serve as digital literacy centres for elected representatives of gram panchayats. Online services to Gram Panchayats will be offered.

We see this as a step forward in creating Rural BPOs in all gram panchayats.

What has been CSCs contribution in the delivery of financial and social services in rural areas?

Financial inclusion is an important area for us.

CSCs have actively participated in the Jan Dhan Yojana and opened about 50 lakh new bank accounts. About 30,000 CSC across the country are working as business correspondents and delivering various banking services to rural citizens. During financial year 2018-19, banking transactions worth Rs. 21,800 crore and insurance premium of all insurance companies worth Rs. 83,087.89 lakh towards premium have been collected by CSC. Pension products of PFRDA are also delivered. More than 50 lakh persons have been registered under PM-SYM and PM-KMY launched by the Government recently. CSCs will also support in extension of pension schemes to shopkeepers, traders and those self employed. Today, CSCs can help every person avail one or the other Government pension schemes and thus support the Government in promoting social security for all citizens.

We launched Aadhaar Enabled Payment Service (AEPS) with National Payment Corporation of India Limited (NPCI) which enables all CSCs to become inter-operable banking service delivery outlet. In this, any bank account holder can deposit and withdraw money, apart from checking balance. This has resulted in three lakh outlets providing financial services to unbanked and isolated rural communities and is probably the largest financial access point network in the world. There are a number of outstanding and inspiring stories that showcase how this initiative is bringing communities into banking system. For instance, there is a woman VLE in Haryana who disburses over Rs. one lakh in a day. Earlier, many rural people who got DBT (Direct Benefit Transfer) into their account had to visit bank located 10 to 15 kilometers away in order to check their account details. Now, they use CSC as this is more convenient. There are even cases where people have not visited their bank for over two years now and meet most of the financial requirement through CSCs.

