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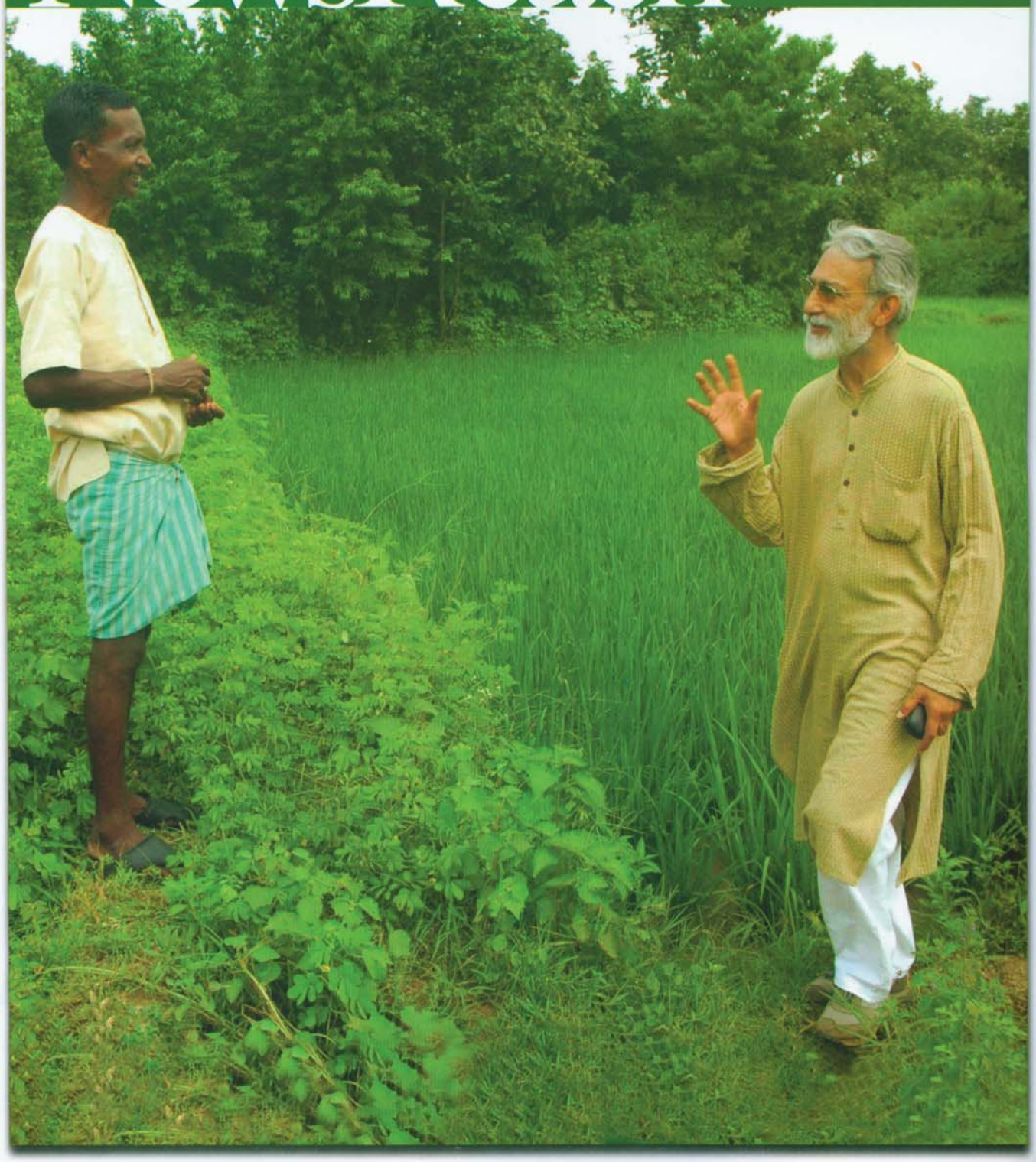

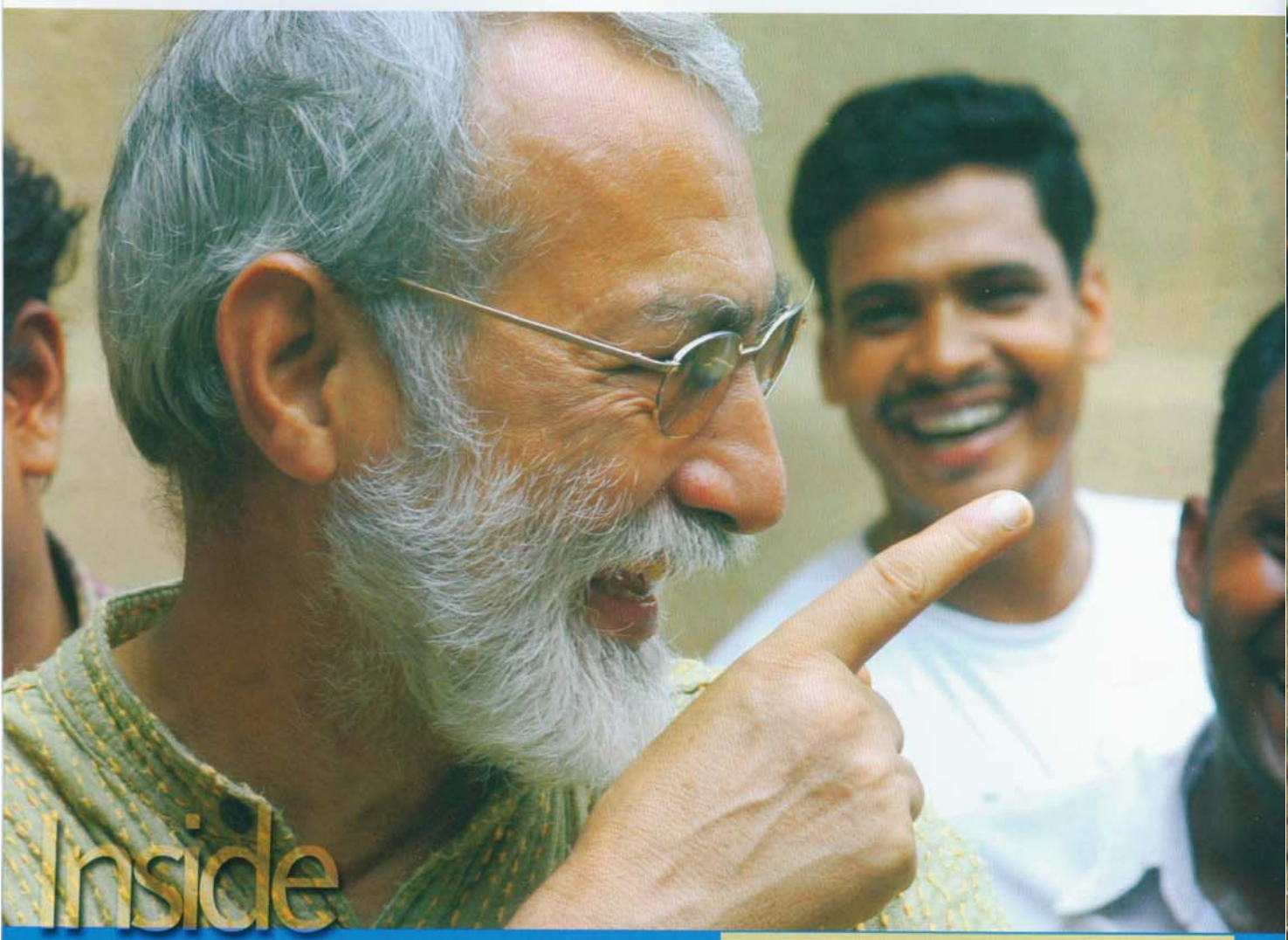

Inside

NewsReach *congratulates Deep Joshi for being conferred the Ramon Magsaysay Award for the year 2009 for his idea of bringing in individuals with "head" and "heart" for the transformative development of poor and disadvantaged communities. An embodiment of this philosophy himself, he has inspired hundreds of young professionals to branch away from the beaten path and join the development sector. The development institutions that he has founded and nurtured have been instrumental in benefiting the lives of many poor and marginalized communities.*

Modest to the core, Deep has been a friend and guide to all those who have come in contact with him. We wish him many more laurels in the years to come. We take great pride in dedicating this issue of NewsReach *to him.*

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Deep Joshi

Despite India's remarkable economic boom in recent years, poverty remains urgent and widespread in this vast country. Forty-two percent of India's population, or roughly four hundred million people, still live below the global poverty line. At the frontlines in addressing this problem is a huge civil society movement of a million non-government organizations, or NGOs. Yet, many of these organizations are small or ineffective. It is in the context of these challenges that Deep Joshi evolved his development work.

Deep was raised in a remote village in Uttarakhand in the Himalayas, where until today there are few motor roads. But this marginalization did not prevent him from earning a degree from the National Institute of Technology in Allahabad, a master's degree in engineering at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and a management degree from MIT's Sloan School.

Returning to India, he worked as a Ford Foundation program officer and accumulated experience in development work. Encounters in the field inspired him, in particular a visit to the US-trained medical doctors Rajanikant and Mabelle Arole, who were working on rural health in remote West-Central India. Deeply impressed by how the Aroles combined their sophisticated training with strong empathy for the poor, Deep concluded that if only more people equipped with both knowledge and empathy decided to work in the villages, India's rural society would be transformed.

This idea led him in 1983 to form, together with some colleagues, Professional Assistance for Development Action (Pradan). A non-profit organization, Pradan recruits university-educated youth from campuses across the country and grooms them to do grass roots work through a rigorous year-long apprenticeship, which combines formal training and guided practice in the field. "Professionalizing" development work is Pradan's mission. Joshi says: "Civil society needs to have both head and heart. If all you have is bleeding hearts, it wouldn't work. If you only have heads, then you are going to dictate solutions which do not touch the human chord."

Living and working directly with India's poorest communities, Pradan staff empower village groups with technical, project implementation, and networking skills that increase both their income-generating capabilities and their actual family income. Its staff, combining their professional expertise with local knowledge, also

trains villagers as para-veterinarians, accountants, and technicians, who support their fellow-villagers in building and sustaining collective livelihood projects.

In its twin programs of training development professionals and reducing rural poverty, Pradan has produced impressive results. It has reached over 200,000 families in over three thousand villages of India's poorest states. Over a thousand graduates have joined its apprenticeship program. More than three hundred professionals comprise its staff, most of them working in field-based teams across the country.

Pradan is not founder-centric. It is a decentralized, collegial body that has developed institutional space for second-generation leaders. Joshi is himself an exemplar of its strength and character as a professional organization, retiring at the policy-prescribed age despite the wish of his colleagues for him to stay on. Still, he remains deeply committed to Pradan, now working purely as an Advisor. Modest, deeply respected by colleagues for his integrity and intelligence, he has shaped the professional ethos of the organization.

"Civil society needs to have both head and heart. If all you have is bleeding hearts, it wouldn't work. If you only have heads, then you are going to dictate solutions which do not touch the human chord."

Deep began by asking himself: Why would engineers and management professionals, with degrees from universities like Harvard and MIT, choose to apply their brainpower to a small village irrigation project? For someone who did exactly that, the pressing question was what is stopping them? Deep desires to show that for people with the finest education, there are few intellectual challenges more worthy than addressing rural poverty. He says: "Development work is considered intellectually inferior to high science, industry, or diplomacy. We want to prove it is both a challenging and a noble choice."

In electing Deep Joshi to receive the 2009 Ramon Magsaysay Award, the board of trustees of the foundation recognizes his vision and leadership in bringing professionalism to the NGO movement in India by effectively combining 'head' and 'heart' in the transformative work of rural development.

Combining Head and Heart to Transform the Lives of Poor People: My Experience in Pradan

DEEP JOSHI

Speech delivered by Deep Joshi at the Magsaysay Award presentation ceremony on 31 August 2009, at the Cultural Center of the Philippines

I am grateful to the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation for the opportunity to be here to speak with you. Ramon Magsaysay was a humanist first of all and it is an honour to be here in his land during his anniversary week.

I am not much of a public speaker and as an essentially intuitive person, am most comfortable in interactive dialogue. What I say here is, therefore, to bring you on board with me, with my journey as a professional and my work so that we can have a dialogue, in which I hope you will participate. I will quickly share with you my early years before I share with you my experience of Pradan, the organisation I have had some role in fashioning.

MY IGNORANCE OF NGOS AND DEVELOPMENT

India has always had a highly evolved civil society. Formally incorporated non-profits, or NGOs as we call them, perhaps constitute its largest and most visible segment and may now number a million or more; no one has a reliable count. We have had laws enabling incorporation of non-profits or charities for 150 years. With that background, it may sound ironic, perhaps even untrue, that I had not heard the term, much less encountered an NGO until I went to review one at the age of 31 in 1977. It is doubly ironic that this single encounter should have changed my life and given it a purpose I never imagined existed. But that is how it is.

Of course, as a child, I knew of the independence movement of Gandhi and other stalwarts of our freedom struggle. There were freedom fighters among relatives, one of whom would tell us stories of how they would walk night and day to participate in a rally – often dozing away and subconsciously keeping track of the ditches on the road. My father himself was a fee-paying member of the Congress during the freedom struggle; he had the portrait of Gandhi engraved along with those of gods and goddesses on a wooden beam over the entrance to our house in the village. The buzz and glow of independence was still around when I was growing up as a child in a tiny village, up in the Himalayas. Yet, I had not a clue about what all this meant for my own life or career. Did I have a role in 'development' or in 'nation building', a phrase I learnt much later, I did not know.

I have seen dire poverty from close quarters as a child. Though my own family never had to worry about food, clothing or shelter, and all seven of us siblings were

sent to school and got college education, those who came to work in our fields were very poor and some lived sad lives. I remember a couple who had had 11 children, not one of whom survived even a year. Yet, I never imagined then that I would spend a good part of my life nurturing an organization that would work to improve the lives of such people.

I had my first encounter with what I later learnt to be 'development' when I was about eight. The government had recently begun the Community Development Programme. A development office called the Community Development Block had been created for a cluster of around 100 villages; in all there were about 5,000 such offices across the country. Headed by a block development officer, it had a team of technical specialists and village-level workers. One such village-level worker came to our village to teach us the technique of growing paddy nurseries on raised dry beds. While helping him lay out the nursery, I remember being amused to see an 'officer' in neatly pressed clothes and shining shoes working with a shovel. While nothing much came of the nursery, my father would periodically talk of this or that 'scheme' through which he would get new seeds, saplings of fruit trees, money for paving the walkway and building a bathing place in the village, etc. So, this to me was 'development' and was done by some government office, just as schools were run and roads built. And I never thought of working in such an office.

STUMBLING INTO A PROFESSION

Students good at math were expected to study engineering in those days – things, sadly, have not changed much – so I did, upon securing admission in an engineering college through a competitive examination. In a way, it was a prize earned for having done well in school rather than a choice made consciously. All I knew of engineers then was that they went around in jeeps, inspecting road construction, were kept in high esteem and seemed to have much authority. As I learnt more about what engineers did and became more conscious of my proclivities, I decided against choosing the normal occupations for engineers in government and factories. Since I had to take a job to support my siblings in college, I chose to teach engineering in my alma mater. Though I knew I would need a doctorate to get anywhere as a teacher, that would have to wait till my siblings finished college.

All I knew of engineers then was that they went around in jeeps, inspecting road construction, were kept in high esteem and seemed to have much authority

A few years later, I won a national scholarship to study abroad and landed up at MIT in the US, to get a doctorate in engineering. The contrast between the US and my own country was simply unbelievable, overwhelming. A small group of us from my country would often discuss this and I became increasingly drawn towards issues of poverty and development back home. I gave up the idea of an engineering doctorate, winding up with a masters, and would have liked to study economics but did not have enough time left in my scholarship. So I did an MBA from Sloan instead, to get some understanding of economics. Making full use of the flexibility at Sloan, I took some courses in development economics and returned home.

FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH AN NGO – DISCOVERING PROFESSIONALISM

Back in India I got a job in an organization that specialized in introducing management techniques and systems thinking in government, public sector companies, cooperatives and other development organizations. That was closest to my newfound interest in development though I still did not know what someone with my kind of education could do to change things in villages and how assisting the government would help. My first assignment was to conduct a review of a community health project run by an NGO in western Maharashtra and to design an organization to upscale it. This was my first experience of seeing highly qualified professionals — a couple, Mabel and Raj Arole — with MDs from Johns Hopkins, working in villages. In fact, this was my first experience of any professional working in a village, directly engaging with poor people. Professionals and other people of authority always supervised the work of less-educated subordinates, who worked in the field. The Aroles had set up a small referral hospital in a small town that served as the market for surrounding villages where they worked, focusing on preventive and community health. They had developed a new approach of using village women as community health volunteers. These women, trained by the Aroles, were mostly illiterate but well regarded in their respective villages and were chosen by the villagers themselves. The Aroles, who received the Magsaysay Award in 1979, had clearly transformed the public health scene in about 100 villages that constituted the sub-district of Jamkhed, where all parameters of public health were distinctly better than in neighbouring villages and the rest of the country. Nationally, we still have not reached the infant mortality rates Jamkhed achieved in 1977, and the overall nutrition status of children across the country is far worse even today than it was in Jamkhed in 1977!

What I saw in Jamkhed struck a chord, perhaps because I spent the first 17 years of my life in a village among poor people as part of my community. Perhaps that socialization, that sense of affinity with poor village people had not been overtaken by my education. It also gave an answer to the question doing rounds in my subconscious about the role of professionals like me in development, in transforming villages. What was different about the Aroles? After all, there were doctors working in other sub-districts in government-run primary health centres. The difference lay in the way they engaged with the people they served, with an obvious sense of oneness, of empathy. Yet, they steadfastly kept challenging what was irrational in existing health practices and behaviour in villages, having earned the right to do so through demonstrated interest and caring. It was this combination of knowledge and empathy – what I call 'head' and 'heart' – that I thought had led to their success. Professions are about using knowledge to serve a social purpose; that comes from the definition of the word itself. Societies are human formations, not mechanical assemblies. One obviously cannot engage with human formations except by being expressly human, by showing empathy.

A couple of years later, I had an opportunity to work in a watershed project in a cluster of villages. Headed by an unusual government scientist, PR Mishra, the project was trying to induce inhabitants to conserve their watershed, promising in return higher productivity through more availability of water. The project had a strong technical

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component concerning little dams, soils, plants, irrigation, etc. But it also required bringing together people with conflicting interests, changing established practices and norms, introducing the notions of equity and organizing people to take responsibility for management; it required human transformation. We were able to achieve these because Mishra displayed the same qualities as the Aroles, of oneness with village people we were working with, despite our clearly different situations. The successful experience here further reinforced what I had learnt from the Aroles, that knowledge is needed but it does not go far in dealing with human contexts, especially the contexts of the excluded and marginalized, without bonding, without empathy. The question for me no longer was what professionals could do to change villages but how to get more of them to villages and create mechanisms by which they would be effective.

THE BIRTH OF PRADAN

The opportunity came when I began working with a foundation in the early 1980s and had the responsibility to develop a programme to strengthen grassroots NGOs. I travelled to a large number of NGOs across the country. While most tended to be initiatives by individuals or small groups deeply concerned about poverty, rarely did any have professionals on board. And they had marginal impact on the lives of the people they wanted to serve and who were always welcoming of them. Interestingly, every one among the NGOs was keen to have professionals working with them and all were willing to pay them reasonable remuneration; they simply were unable to attract them. That is when I conceived the idea of Pradan, the organisation I have spent nurturing the past 25 years of my life. The idea was to create an organisation to systematically induct and groom professionals to work in villages and provide them platforms to work from. Many of the NGOs I had already met would, I thought, be effective platforms for the professionals to work from.

As a donor, my employer would only make grants and not provide services or set up organizations. I needed someone to set up an organization and a constellation of people, who would govern and guide it. I could then make a grant to get it off the ground. Heads of several NGOs I met had agreed to be the governance constellation. My explorations to find someone to set up the organization led me to Vijay Mahajan. Vijay, 28 years then, had recently graduated from the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad. Prior to that, he had studied engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi and worked for four years with a well known multinational. He had always had interest in grassroots development, had on his own visited a few well-known NGOs and had been involved in an interesting rural action-research project led by the founder director of his management school, Ravi Matthai. Vijay readily took to the idea and agreed to explore it further while simultaneously working with one of the NGOs I introduced him to. That is how Pradan was set up in 1983, as an Indian non-profit. I stayed back to finish a few other programmes ideas I was working on but was closely involved as an informal advisor and mentor to Vijay, in helping with linkages and knowledge inputs. For the first three years,

Pradan would only loan its professionals to work with other NGOs. Vijay himself worked in a large NGO that helped poor farmers develop land given to them under the bhoodan movement led by Vinoba Bhave, one of the earliest recipients of the Magsaysay Award.

Recruiting professionals turned out to be far more difficult than Vijay and I had imagined; it continues to be so even now, in the context of the larger numbers needed. The main reason, in my view, was that working at the grass roots is not the 'normal' identity of professionals and that, unfortunately, persists even now; the lower than market salaries and the difficult working conditions contributed only marginally. The normative role for professionals is to give advice, supervize others and generally be in positions in which they exercise normative authority from their supposedly superior knowledge and presumed sense of responsibility. A few who want to work at the grass roots with poor people branch out on their own as the Aroles and many others like them have done and continue to do. Others engaged in development join governments where they play the 'normal' roles expected of professionals.

Four of Vijay's classmates and a few others with a bit of grassroots experience joined Pradan, during the first two years. Pradan instituted internships for students to provide them exposure to grassroots work. A couple of people came through this route. Efforts to recruit from professional colleges by courting faculty sympathetic to the idea were not very successful, nor were efforts to recruit through advertisements. A small breakthrough was made in 1985 when IRMA, the rural management institute set up by the National Dairy Development Board to train managers for milk cooperatives, entertained requests from NGOs to let them also recruit their graduates. This provided a steady trickle and at one point Pradan was the largest employer of IRMA graduates, outside the Dairy Board. Pradan chose to work on enhancing livelihoods of poor people, in part because of the dire poverty among the people we were working with and also because of the proclivities of the pioneers, who joined in the initial years.

I formally joined Pradan in 1986. That is also when we began our own village projects, working with poor communities directly rather than only via other NGOs. The latter approach was discontinued in 1992.

TRAINING TO WORK WITH HEARD AND HEART

We learnt a few things from the experience of the early years. First, that getting professionals on board in large numbers would require a far more vigorous effort than we had been able to mount so far. We realized that we would need to cast our net wider than to a few elite colleges as in the initial years. Second, our education system, especially higher education system, simply does not train people to be effective as grass roots development professionals, even in disciplines that are supposed to have a rural orientation, such as agriculture and social work. Educated people, including professionals far too readily jump to offering solutions rather than trying to understand the context in which poor people are. There is little reflection and no attempt to learn from the people. That is the classical extension paradigm and is ineffective with the historically excluded, isolated and marginalized communities; it works well only with those already in the mainstream of society and economy. We realized that we

would need to systematically groom campus graduates as grassroots workers rather than putting them to work straightaway. This, in effect, meant that human resource development would become as important for us as the organizational mission of promoting livelihoods. The goodwill we had earned, principally because we were putting professionals to work in villages, gave us the courage take on this challenge. We even began informally calling ourselves a 'rural university' with villages as classrooms and the rural people and all our experienced professionals as faculty! And I believe we have to an extent become a rural university even though we do not and cannot grant a degree (that is a future project).

We created a separate human resource development unit and I myself took responsibility for it. A behavioural consultant, who continues to work with us to this day to refine systems, helped us design a year-long apprenticeship programme in 1994. Pradan would now recruit individuals with an MA level of education (16 to 17 years' education in India) in any field of study only as Apprentices; they become employees, designated as Executives, and begin working independently in projects only upon completing the year-long apprenticeship.

To expand recruitment, we trained every one with four or more years' experience in Pradan as a recruiter and more keep getting trained as they gain the threshold of work experience. There are now 80 professionals in Pradan trained as recruiters. In teams of two, they go to one or two campuses each, every year, taking time off from their regular work in projects. They administer a culture-neutral (non-numeric, non verbal) test to judge mental ability, two group discussions, and conduct an interview, besides scrutinizing academic performance, which must be consistently above average. We now recruit from 70 to 80 campuses every year. Beginning with 10 Apprentices in 1994, we now get 150 apprentices every year. Apprentices receive stipends more than adequate to meet their living expenses.

The apprenticeship itself consists of mentored learning by doing, reflection and limited interactive classroom inputs. Each Apprentice is placed in one of Pradan's 30 projects, in which there are 8 to 12 professionals, working in a cluster of 100 to 130 villages to help poor people enhance their livelihoods. An experienced Pradan professional, who has received four-week training, including an intense behavioural lab, is assigned as the Field Guide or mentor to each apprentice. There are about 50 trained Field Guides and more keep getting trained as they gain the threshold of field experience. Engagement in the field is structured and includes a 15-day stay in the home of a poor family in a village, a participative village study, small assignments to understand the impact of Pradan's work and tasks designed to learn various skills of working with poor people in villages. Apprentices periodically write reflective reports about their experience and discuss those with their Field Guides, who give them feedback. Three reviews are conducted through sociometry, and those below a threshold of motivation to work with poor people are advised to leave. An apprentice is also free to leave any time; there is no obligation to repay the stipend and expenses Pradan may have incurred. Since working in villages is still not a preferred career for educated people with urban career options, we pay for all Apprentices to go home for a week at the end of the first three months so that they can share with their family and friends their experiences and buy some goodwill and support.

Pradan has professional development programmes that continue beyond apprenticeship, including programmes that groom people for their organizational responsibilities, such as recruiting, mentoring and managing programmes. The core, however, is the apprenticeship, in which the insights and empathy gained through personal encounters and the attitudes necessary for bonding with poor people are developed and practical skills needed to play a catalytic role in poor people's lives are learnt.

Educated people, including professionals far too readily jump to offering solutions rather than trying to understand the context in which poor people are

NURTURING TRUSTEESHIP

A tenet that has guided Pradan since inception is that as a helping endeavour that seeks to bring about transformations in individuals and communities, development work is a bond between two individuals; this is what I learnt from the Aroles. Each one of us engaged in building such a transformative relationship, such as building the self-confidence of poor people. Educating, or counselling, is a trustee of that relationship. That relationship or transaction, while it occurs, is not amenable to 'third party' monitoring. Now, an organization as a human formation cannot be very different outside from what it is inside. Therefore, if people are to be trustees outside, they must be so treated inside. Several key features of Pradan, such as a collegial climate, flat structure, rotational leadership, democratic governance, etc., derive from this basic tenet. In a way, the head and heart combination is as important internally as it is in our work in the communities.

Internal governance in Pradan has evolved over time. Vijay stepped down as the first chief executive when he completed five years but stayed on for another four years. Succeeding him, I did the same, and so on. A constellation of senior people, initially three and then seven, deliberated on policies and strategies during initial years. Currently, all professionals in Pradan automatically become members of a general council upon completing four years. They now choose a steering committee for a three-year term (through sociometry rather than election) to function as the internal board, and the chief executive is chosen every five years through sociometry. Pradan has had a retreat of all professionals since the very second year of its existence. A five-day event, it is an occasion for reflection, sharing experiences and critiquing its own work.

OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

Over the years, more than 1,000 Pradan professionals have worked in villages for varying lengths of time. It now works with over a million people from nearly 200,000 families in seven Indian provinces. About 60 per cent of them are from various ethnic tribes, many of which, until a few generations ago, depended on hunting-gathering. Another 15 per cent are from among the erstwhile untouchables or outcastes among Hindus. These two groups together constitute over a quarter of our population and are easily among the poorest. Both have historically been outside the pale of the mainstream economy and society. First and foremost, they need to be helped to discover their potential or agency to change their own lives so that they can claim what is their due and join the mainstream with dignity and pride. To stimulate such changes, people need

to go through positive experiences. One needs to engage with them in a non-threatening relationship in a sustained way.

This is where and how Pradan professionals begin and this is where empathy comes into play first of all. Pradan begins by organizing women from these families into small self-help groups around small savings and credit. As groups gain in strength and members gain confidence, they are facilitated to carry out a diagnosis of their resources and potential opportunities to enhance their livelihoods. Men also participate at this stage. Pradan would then help the families get the necessary skills, finances and know-how to take up new livelihood activities or enhance existing ones. The groups are federated into secondary and tertiary formations to strengthen a sense of solidarity. Over time, the groups also begin to take up issues that affect them as communities, such as access to services, etc. The experience of working together also helps women to work as cooperatives when they need to deal with the markets. There are now more than 11,000 such primary groups and several hundred cluster associations, federations, cooperatives and companies.

The poor people Pradan works with also have limited assets, mainly poor quality of land without irrigation; many have no assets. This is where the professionals' knowledge is primarily challenged, in creating robust livelihood opportunities from limited and inferior assets, owned by people with no skills and no education. Pradan pilots new livelihood ideas, demystifies technologies, downscales technologies and production systems to suit the contexts of poor people of limited resources and low-risk thresholds. It extensively collaborates with the state, market and knowledge institutions and has made several landmark innovations.

EPILOGUE

There was much debate about the approach to be followed for India's development in the run-up to independence, during the 1940s. Gandhi famously argued for self-reliant village republics. He felt that priority must be given to develop villages into self-governed republics without want, illiteracy, ill-health and superstition. He wanted to modernize the village and create a new construct of good life that the world would emulate. Modernization was indeed the theme adopted for India's development but without the village. We are the world's largest democracy. We have elected bodies for governance down to the village, yet villagers do not have an effective voice in how their local school runs, if it runs at all. As education and educated people focus on abstractions and 'things' like technology, capital, goods and services, they keep getting more and more alienated from poor people. That is clearly visible in my country, now a powerhouse of educated human resources and technology, and it is beginning to particularly matter because we now have the money to investin village development and human well-being.

I believe Pradan has demonstrated one way of changing things. In a small way, it has rediscovered professionalism as it was meant to be – a synthesis of head and heart, of knowing, feeling and purpose. It has demonstrated possibilities. I hope others will listen and join.

Speech delivered by Deep Joshi at the Magsaysay Award presentation ceremony on 31 August 2009, at the Cultural Center of the Philippines

Combining 'Head' and 'Heart'

DEEP JOSHI

Pradan is an organization which promotes livelihood among poor people, mainly in Jharkhand, West Bengal, Orissa, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Pradan works with 170,000 families across India, mostly tribals and very poor people. We add about 20,000-30,000 families every year. To bring about effective change in other people's lives one need to have a heart, to have empathy, but one also needs knowledge. So that is the combination of the head and heart. It is not enough to be just a bleeding heart. When one works with a poor family who only has a couple of acres of land, no irrigation, whose resources and skills are limited, how does one help that family make a living? One needs to have the capacity to think on one's feet, to develop ideas. But one must have empathy too, the ability to care. One needs both heart and head to be effective.

People have the potential to do things, even though they may not have the ability; ability is potential actualized. People should not be fed through donations or charity, but helped to develop their potential. Some years ago, Amartya Sen defined capability in two ways, the "being" and the "doing".

One reason why women are treated badly, for example, is because they are conditioned to accept bad behavior. It is okay for my husband to slap me once or twice if I didn't put enough salt in the lentils. Now all Pradan's programs begin with women, creating self-help groups, where we start from learning to sit in a circle to show that we are all equal. Pradan's trainers often use the "seven rivers" exercise as a tool to show women their situation, drawing seven lines to denote seven rivers. At the bottom is the river of sorrow, with pictures of poverty – a sick man on a bed, bawling children, etc. – while the river of happiness is right on top with pictures of houses and trees, a cow tethered nearby, children going to school. When we ask women the question, "Which river do you want to go to?" A number of them cannot even imagine they can get close to the top. The other part of Pradan's work is the development of skills, such as rearing poultry, improving irrigation techniques, etc. Then, people are linked to some source of funding, perhaps a bank, or a government program. If one woman rears 500 birds it is not so much, but if 500 women rear 500 birds each, then they already have a say in the market. At that stage one forms a cooperative, which means one has to teach them not only how to run a cooperative, but also leadership skills.

The change I have seen in women across projects all over the country is most fascinating. In the 170,000 families that Pradan has worked with, 11,000 women self-help groups have been formed, challenging existing norms. The poultry

cooperatives all put together earned 600 million rupees last year! Another example is tasar silk, where disease-free moths are reared by people to make silk. Earlier, only the government supplied moths but we felt this is an economic activity, why should it be free? People buy seed, farming implements – why not moths? So we asked several people in the village, mostly sons of moth-rearers who know how to use a microscope and separate the diseased egg from the rest, to become entrepreneurs. I thought that was a really good venture.

At one level poverty is the inability to feed one's children and oneself, at another level it is the fact that one does not have count, one does not have a voice, and one cannot influence anything

At one level poverty is the inability to feed one's children and oneself, at another level it is the fact that one does not have count, one does not have a voice, and one cannot influence anything. One of the best ways to remove poverty is to improve our management of rain-fed agriculture. Even the newly formulated employment guarantee program, NREGA, does not make sensible use of resources. I find the act of digging wells has become so popular under NREGA but the truth is that how many wells can one dig, actually one has to harvest the rainwater. The problem is the way NREGA is designed, where project planning must take place in the panchayat (the village assembly). Often, though, there is no such assembly. And if such an assembly existed, they would need massive doses of training, such as how to build a bund, which is where the NGOs could come in.

That would mean dealing with village politics and village planning, also the bureaucracy, such as the block development officer and elected representatives. Because the money, from the central government goes through the state, the district, the block and finally to the panchayat, and here both the sarpanch (village headman) as well as the block development officer are co-signatories. So programs have to be approved by the bureaucracy and that is where one has a lot of tensions. Ideally, villagers should call an assembly if they want something done but that does not happen often because one does not want to antagonize the "sarpanch" who is an important man.

But I have been telling my colleagues in Pradan, that Pradan's women self-help groups, now that they are sufficiently vocal and self-empowered, they should be the ones to call for the village assembly, Pradan does not have to do it! Once the village assembly is called, then NGOs like Pradan can come in and give advice on where to plant trees, build a bund, grow one's crops, etc. And that is how NREGA money can be effectively used. So NREGA is a good program but its implementation can be improved enormously. I have been passionate about rain-fed agriculture because I do not believe agriculture is going to become an insignificant livelihood for people. It might be an insignificant contributor to the GDP but it still provides a living to 60% of the people and that is not going to change in a hurry. If one looks carefully, a large population between 18-40 years have no skills, they are not even literate, so what is one going to do with them? Agriculture is going to remain an important part of the economy. And if two-thirds of the populati on is dependent on rain-fed agriculture (most of India gets 700 mm of rainfall every year), then this sector becomes even more important.

I do not believe agriculture is going to become an insignificant livelihood for people. It might be an insignificant contributor to the GDP but it still provides a living to 60% of the people and that is not going to change in a hurry

There is a lot of talk about subsidies, but I feel that building people's capabilities is the answer. If the family cannot do it, then the state must. But I do not think the state can go around giving assets to enable one to make a living. If the state gives one a cow, it cannot be expected to subsidize the feeding of the cow. It may subsidize a part of the cow for the simple reason that very poor people cannot handle an economic asset well enough to produce a surplus as well as service a debt. But the cow should certainly produce enough milk so that it is enough to feed itself. When people talk about subsidies, I say, one needs to subsidize capacity-building, not subsidize production itself. One may need to subsidize assets, or at least a part of it, because poor people cannot take big risks. I can set up a dairy with 10 cows and service a loan at the same time, but a poor family can at best handle two cows at a time, that too depending upon the period of the loan. That is why some amount of capital subsidy is needed for very poor people.

The role of the state is to help a person buy the cow, or a part of the cow, and teach the person how to rear it – or at least provide for teaching, because the state is a lousy teacher so it should not teach. And the market can provide all the other services, like marketing the milk, buying the feed, etc. In Latin America, I believe, they are experimenting with "leasing" the cow, meaning, very poor people whose risk-taking ability is nil are given a lactating cow and the milk is bought back so that the cow's lessee is able to buy fodder and ably use the asset that is sitting in their own house. Over time these people may get enthused enough to take a loan and buy their very own cow! I am hugely tickled with this idea.

62 years after independence, poverty levels are still around 30%. The World Bank puts it at around 40%. I do not know what the figures are, but every time I travel through some of the poorest regions of our country, such as Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, etc, I see the grinding face of poverty. My sense of India is that about one-third is in very bad shape, where the entire village does not even get two meals a day, and if they do they have to probably migrate from home and work in the big cities or the army, etc. Maybe another 20% to 30% are better off, but they still barely survive. Another 30% of India is doing okay, and the last 5% are doing fantastically well! But I worry about the bottom half of India.

"Why are we like this after 62 years of independence?" I think because we have not given importance to the grassroots, to working alongside the villager. I have not really read Gandhi but I believe that one of the things that he said was that the Congress party, after independence, should be disbanded and that Congressmen should go and work in the villages. Now Congressmen were freedom-fighters, probably idealists. But we chose a different model, where most of them joined the government and thought they could bring about change from the top. There was crisis after crisis. Now the obsession of Indian agriculture has been how to ensure aggregate food production, which is very different from food security across the board. Very few people actually understand

that one can actually increase productivity, the carrying capacity of the resource base by simply managing the rainwater. One of my gurus used to say, catch the water when it falls, where it falls. Now that notion among mainstream planners and scientists does not exist, they are still focused on plants, crops, diseases, breeds, fertilizer, and this came from the success of the Green Revolution. Sure, if we had not had the Green Revolution, India would have been a basket case, waiting for the next shipment of grain to arrive from the U.S. But when some things are successful one can keep going in one direction for 30-40 years. But can we now, after nearly 40 years, change the management of our resources? Can we look at our forests and our deserts in a different way?

We should have looked beyond the Green Revolution much earlier, although it is happening now. In the mid-90s, there was a national watershed development program where NGOs were brought in as implementers but allocations were small. But today there is so much money; the NREGA's budget for a year is 400 billion rupees! The most interesting outcome of the structural economic reform has been that state revenues have expanded like never before. Money is no longer a problem in India. There is no longer any reason for us to remain poor. It is an irony that India can think of putting a man on the moon, but we cannot find ways of putting a third of our population on its feet.

We have the money, we have the resources, but we are stuck in a system of governance and administration which is tough to unlock because there is a lack of political consensus. People talk of administrative reforms, but one cannot bring those about because we cannot get an across-the-board consensus that the system is not working, and to fix it requires some unpalatable actions. For example, the way centre-state politics function, suppose the NREGA has failed in one state but its books are fine, the central government can do nothing to change it. If all the political parties said, look we cannot live with this kind of poverty, it has got to go and if to do this we have to fight corruption, well so be it.

In Pradan, we feel it is important to tap into government programs and funds meant for poor people. Why should I go to the Dutch or Norwegian government with a begging bowl when that money is available in India? So except when we are doing something new, we do not use money from external sources for the building blocks of development, like pumps and pipes, wells and houses. But since government does not give any money to fund training, for development support, we need to raise grants. Foreign contributions are a small share of the total.

There is a lot of talk about corporate social responsibility, but I find that the way CSR is often done is unacceptable. A lot of it is simply public relations. For example, in the retail of fresh vegetables, corporates will naturally source 90% of their produce from large farms, but I would tell then that if they really want to be socially responsible, they could source the remaining 10% from a really poor area. Pradan could help them source their produce, whether tomatoes or cucumber, from really poor tribal families in Jharkhand. It might make the tomatoes a little bit more expensive, but it is bound to really help those families. Sometimes corporates respond to these ideas, for example India's milk revolution some decades ago was a joint venture where the marketing was done by the private sector – making India the second-largest milk producer in the world. So if corporates really want to show social

responsibility they could help bear some of the costs and perhaps help with marketing.
I was born in a poor village in Pithoragarh in Uttarakhand. We used to walk to school, which until Class 5 was about 1.5 kilometers away, straight uphill. Middle school was about 5 km away, and engineering college in Nainital one bus ride away. Except there was only one bus, so if one missed it, that was it. Today there are several buses and jeeps and shared taxis. Most villages have electricity. On the other hand, women who used to collect fodder for their cattle, their lives are exactly the same. They probably get a bit more cash, because their husbands are in the army or work in the big city. But the women are doing exactly the same things that my mother used to do. I got salty Monaco biscuits to eat when I visited last year. But health services have not changed. Education is much more accessible, but the quality of education is very poor. So one does not have to miss the bus anymore to go to school, there are so many other issues.

From the village school I went to engineering college in Allahabad, taught there for a while, then went to MIT in the U.S. And then I came back. This is my home, my country. When I was a student at MIT, the Watergate scandal had broken, Sam Erwin's hearings used to be telecast live and we used to watch it as if it was entertainment. Then, when the Emergency was declared in 1975, it touched a chord somewhere deep down and I knew I had to go home. I had a scholarship at MIT but I could have paid it back just like all my other friends did. I enjoyed life there, I did not face any racism, but somehow that was not my place. Actually, my place is my village where I grew up.

In the U.S., when one is away from home, one thinks much more about what one can do for one's country. When I came back, I joined an NGO which used to do public policy work, and my first assignment took me to an NGO in Jamkhed in Maharashtra set up by a doctor couple, the Aroles, both of whom were MDs from Johns Hopkins. It was the experience of seeing Mabel Arole sitting with village women when the penny dropped. I knew this is what I wanted to do. Here was a highly educated doctor but the way she interacted with people was so different. She identified with them; there was a sense of empathy. She did not behave as if they were poor and therefore she had to "give" them her expertise. She used to get illiterate village women and train them to be health workers. I could have been another Arole, set up an ashram somewhere and help 10-20 villages but I wondered if I could set up an organization that would systematically help bring people to the villages. That is how Pradan happened.

And I found, in India, how people do not really question authority. I think that is typically South Asian. We are a caste-based, very hierarchical society. My own family is a high-caste Brahmin and when my grandmother was alive, if a Dalit even so much as touched us, we had to be sprinkled with water from the Ganges and cleansed before we could enter the house. But my mother was totally different. She came from an even higher-caste family, from a family of astrologers, but for some strange reason some of her best friends were the Dalit women who worked in the fields. She was a great influence on me. Then in the U.S., when I called my supervisor "Sir," he told me, "We do not call each other 'Sir' here, call me Nate!" The experience that work is work, not high or low brow – that became a habit.

Edited excerpts from an interview with Jyoti Malhotra for The Wall Street Journal

Deep Joshi – The Titan

PRADYUT BHATTACHARJEE

"And love is not the easy thing,
The only baggage you can bring…
Is all that you can't leave behind
Walk on, walk on
What you got, they can't even steal it
No they can't even feel it." U2

It was a warm sunny day in the winter of 2003. We were a motley group of young boys and girls, serenading to the songs of freedom, bubbling with enthusiasm in a dusty nondescript village of Kesla in India's central heartland. We were fresh out of college and after a gruelling three months of apprenticeship in Pradan, we were having some fun. But the day was heavy with expectations and suppressed trepidation because we were in for a tête-à-tête with our then Executive Director (ED), Deep Joshi. The picture that I conjured was that of a stern taskmaster out to preach us novices with dos and don'ts. But how wrong I was! He was just like one of us (albeit with liberal dollops of grey). The calm, serene face with that childlike innocence reminded me of Prof. Keating in Dead Poets Society extolling his students saying *Carpe diem* (Seize the moment). There was a dilemma among us whether we should call him Deep or Sir. Finally he himself broke the deadlock asking us to call him by his first name.

Deep inspired us to contribute meaningfully to society and argued the need for infusing professionalism into the fledgling development sector. He told us that the "head has to work in tandem with heart to usher in change rapidly." I was a romantic revolutionary till then but Deep's session propelled me to take a pragmatic approach to development. We all were so touched by his simplicity and down-to-earth nature and his knack of demystifying things. I remember one of my friends, Kapil, asking Deep for a cigarette. We were horrified at his audacity but Deep not only offered one but lit it as well. It was a moment to treasure for us newcomers.

When Deep was sharing his journey of life during one of the retreats, I was spellbound by his kaleidoscopic life, its vastness, diversity and the man's indomitable spirit. The ingenuity of his mind in conceptualizing and actualizing the concept of Pradan is something that I am still in awe of. For me, he was Peter Pan showing me the way to Neverland, the land where there would be no poverty!

I was apprehensive when Deep was to retire. Would the edifice he had erected crumble because more often than not we used to look up to him as the last resort? But the very fact that Pradan is going from strength to strength dispelled all fears; it dawned to me that it is the idea that withstands the test of time…a person is immaterial and there lies the greatness of the proponent of the idea.

Deep inspired us to contribute meaningfully to society and argued the need for infusing professionalism into the fledgling development sector. He told us that the "head has to work in tandem with heart to usher in change rapidly."

Deep visited Khunti (where I was working then) in 2008 and I cherish the moments that I shared with him. He asked us to look into the simple things that can bring a change in a family's life instead of hankering after complex things, to believe in a community's potential to take charge of its own affairs and be the agent of change instead of being good managers. He asked us to broaden our horizon and be dreamers. During one session with Deep, he asked us to close our eyes and visualise a barren land and imagine a mango orchard there silhouetted by the horizon. I met him again in a workshop in Delhi; his energy was undiminished. He had been criss-crossing the godforsaken countryside of Bundelkhand, exuding the same confidence of transforming lives. He enquired about the things in the field and urged us to carry on the good work.

As Pradan embarks on its mission 2017 and breaks new frontiers and explores hitherto unexplored vistas, I still believe in Deep's words. We need more and more inspired youth to take up work in the development sector as a career. There is no ambassador better than Deep to propagate the idea. Magsaysay or no Magsaysay, he will continue to stoke the imaginations in persons like me, and for me he will be the same person I met seven winters back, who will hug me and admonish with the same élan, believing nevertheless in my potential.

Deep Joshi – Inspiring Young Professionals

VISHAL JAMKAR

Whatever theories I learned about comparing leaders and managers while studying organizational behaviour, during my graduation, culminated in practice when I interacted with Deep. I credit him for my decision to continue in the sector. In school, we read about great leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Abraham Lincoln — whose exemplary leadership left a mark on civilization. I always wondered what they would be like in flesh and blood. What qualities did they have that they were thus acknowledged? Were they humble despite having so much? How did they give direction to their people? How did they create the next line of leadership? What did other people mean to them? Did they have any weaknesses and did they hide them or were they open about them? Did they get angry when work was not done? How did they think and feel? It must have been tough to carry such a burden? I had so many questions. But I was fortunate that I interacted with Deep! Almost all my questions were answered. It might sound funny, but I used to try to copy him in my behaviour! After reading Gandhiji's autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth*, I sensed that it's not difficult to be like Mohandas Gandhi, provided one made the effort. I admire the way Gandhiji inspires others to strive for excellence. The same with Deep

Among Pradan's non-negotiables is integrity. Integrity is defined as the congruence between thoughts, words and action. For me, Pradan stands for values. The values and beliefs which were implicit and deeply rooted in me, were in consonance with Pradan's, and made me comfortable. I learned from Deep how to incorporate the values I respected in my behaviour, converting my beliefs into action. I have learned as much from his speeches and writings as I have while observing when he opted to be silent and when he would have speak up.

Earlier, I had always wanted to meet someone like him. In our growing years, we youngsters do not meet thoughtful personalities, who can tell us about the possibilities of self-expression that can be transformed into a meaningful vocation. I imbibed the vision and the possibilities of expressing my self from Deep. I am sure if many had the opportunity to interact with such personalities, many of us would have embarked on a different journey for ourselves and the country.

Being at Kesla, I've had a number of opportunities to interact with Deep because he would come for the Development Apprentices training for young professionals here. When I was a Development Apprentice, I met Deep once and gave vent, for an hour or so, to all my personal frustrations. He listened to me quietly, nodding

his head, keeping eye contact without uttering a single word. That was not all. I mailed him, to which he replied suggesting that I be non-judgmental and seek knowledge. I hardly understood it then. But slowly, I realize what he meant. That incident has remained with me.

I learned from Deep how to incorporate the values I respected in my behaviour, converting my beliefs into action

Deep has this uncanny ability to relate to us. Every time he meets me, he asks me "*Kasa kaay*?" in Marathi and I reply, "*Bara ahe.*" Deep, despite his seniority, communicates in a language we understand. His views do not dominate our interaction. He cracks jokes that we understand and always smiles as if everything is possible without any worries. I've never found him rushing or completing something hurriedly; he behaves as if he has all the time in the world; you can approach him any time with any silly difficulty, and he'll respond in such a way that you'll feel that what you are saying is of absolute importance to him.

A Time to Dare

DEEP JOSHI

Individuals and organisations in the so-called voluntary sector follow a variety of strategies ranging from the ameliorative to the transformational. Underlying these, however, is a shared concern of influencing the future of Indian society and to make it more just and humane so that more and more of our citizens live a life of dignity and purpose in freedom. I believe this underlying vision needs a clearer articulation by all of us in the sector. Where do we think we are headed as a nation, as a society? What kind of future do we envision? What are the objective conditions? What are we working towards? What is a reasonable prognosis for, say, two to five decades hence? What could we do now to secure the future we want?

I believe we are at a stage in our evolution when it is imperative to ask such questions and seek concrete answers instead of assuming those under broad labels such as development for all, prosperity for all, an egalitarian society, etc. It is not just adequate to rue about the state of things and then proceed with actions as if all is well and 'under control'.

It is well beyond the scope of this paper to draw a comprehensive picture of the likely future. I only highlight here the key issues that must inform our actions as individuals and institutions that value freedom, dignity and purpose and want to enhance those with our actions. In doing so, I draw on ideas developed by Robert Chambers and Gordon R Conway in Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: Practical Concepts for the 21st Century, Discussion Paper 296, Institute of Development Studies, February 1992.

The trebling of India's population over the past 50 years and the prognosis for continued growth through much of this century calls for a basic reassessment and explicit statement of what material prosperity is likely. That alone will inform the choice of institutions and human processes to ensure a climate in which freedom, dignity and purpose remain achievable objectives for all.

MODERATE WELL-BEING

Given the overall prognosis for material progress and population growth, it is clear that a large segment of the population in India will have to do with very modest levels of material well-being in the foreseeable future. I believe we tend to shy away from speculating about the limits of the modernisation and growth paradigm.

It somehow seems only fair and, therefore, the contrary, unfair and even shameful thought to assume that everyone will sooner or later catch up and enjoy the kind of material well-being associated with the modern, urban middle class. Yet a little reasoned thought and analysis will show that widespread material prosperity is least likely. It is not merely a question of time. It is not only a question of what the economically feasible rates of growth are and, therefore, how much time it will take to 'pull everyone up', but also a sociological, political and ecological question of sustainable growth.

Our choices of strategies and actions, must be informed by an abiding concern to enhance the capabilities of the people. This implies that our work must focus on building people's capabilities rather than merely ameliorating their present situation

In a society endowed with grossly unequal distribution of resources and capability, there will be many who will enjoy unprecedented prosperity as our economy grows, spurred by the unrelenting human search for material well-being. This is all too apparent already. In this scenario, unless there is a widely shared sense of equity and fairness, it will be increasingly difficult to keep the social fabric together. Therefore, our actions must be informed by a concern to enhance the notion of fairness and certainly not diminish it.

TOUCHSTONE OF EQUITY

The idea of equity and fairness has both material and psychological dimensions. That one is able to create choices and influence phenomena that affect one's well-being is as, if not more, important as material well-being. That everyone has reasonable opportunities to affect one's future regardless of one's roots is basic to the idea of equity. This I believe is an issue that the sector must use as a touchstone in developing strategies and actions. Only if we do so will we come up with alternatives to current normative frameworks.

Capability has always affected human well-being. Spurred by the growth in technology, heightened interconnectedness and the pressure on resources, it has now become a critical determinant of human well-being. This will become more acute every passing day. There has been unprecedented growth in human capability in India, as indeed globally.

We know more about the natural phenomena that affect our lives and that we seek to harness to enhance well-being and limit misery. We have developed new ways of doing things and organising our actions. More people than ever before have access to such knowledge. Capability goes beyond such knowledge. It includes one's perception of place in society, one's ability to influence the world one is affected by, the ability to make choices, to adapt, experiment, innovate, to build networks and to contribute to others' well-being.

The growth in capability in our society has only been matched by unprecedented inequality in its distribution. While more Indians than ever before now have the capability to make a place for themselves anywhere in the world, large populations are poorly endowed with the capability to affect even their immediate environments. Many such as the tribal people and those earlier dependent on traditional institutions have, in fact, suffered erosion in their capabilities.

Our choices of strategies and actions, therefore, must be informed by an abiding concern to enhance the capabilities of the people. This implies that our work must focus on building people's capabilities rather than merely ameliorating their present situation. More importantly, it implies that we seek developmental frameworks that build on people's capabilities, potential or actual, rather than the other way around.

Perspectives about development are unlikely to change unless our views about people's potential and capability change. We need to build on people's capability and have faith in their capability

The development process in India during the past half-century bears a deep imprint of the concern to modernise a 'backward society'. Often explicitly, and always implicitly, it has meant catching up with the so-called developed nations. Catching up means, first and foremost, materially, followed by a fair deal for all as implicit in the democratic and socialist pattern of society we have sought to create.

Inevitably, catching up also means clearing up the backlog. It means quickly educating the armies of illiterates, never mind the purpose and efficacy of the education our schools peddle; producing enough food quickly to stave off starvation, never mind the inability of poor people to buy that food; providing health care services to prevent epidemics, diseases and ill health quickly, never mind the motivation of the service providers and the professional and sociological walls that separate them from the poor, and so on. The sheer size of the slate that needs to be cleaned means the state feels impelled to become the cleaner itself.

CLEANING MESSY SLATES

The state as the provider of services—the cleaner of messy slates—and as the harbinger of development has thus seen unprecedented growth. This unprecedented turn in human—especially Indian—history has had several undesired implications besides unimaginable erosion in quality, capability and legitimacy of the institution of the state itself. In the arena of institutions, the state has been like the proverbial banyan tree. As the state took upon itself the responsibility of delivering development, other institutions have remained stunted or have even withered away.

Thus it is the state that installs a hand pump for drinking water and the citizens who drink from it do nothing for its upkeep. The state employs over three million teachers but cannot get them to teach, leave alone educate. Citizens readily empty their pockets to bribe government functionaries but cannot collect small sums to repair a school building, a village road or a leaky pond. In short, much of the development fostered by the state-led 'catching up' paradigm is institutionally unsustainable and many actions of the state have eroded other institutions.

I believe much social and political energy in the near future will be wasted in folding back the institutionally unsustainable carpet of development unfolded by the state. The process is already underway. The emerging institutional vacuum also implies that it is not enough to come up with bright new ideas or technologies to solve society's problems. Institutional mechanisms must be created to ensure that the ideas are translated into sustainable action on a large scale.

In this scenario of a state unable to cope and on the retreat, stunted institutions and powerless and emaciated citizenry, voluntary organisations must work to promote institutionally sustainable processes of development. In concrete terms, it implies that people must play a central role and take charge of the development process themselves. How do we address these challenges? There are no easy answers and I certainly have none. I can, however, offer a few pointers that may aid our continuing search for answers.

We need to be far more reflective and critical of the 'what and how' of our work. Our actions must demonstrate our motives, rather than the other way a round

CHANGING MINDSETS

Foremost in my view is the need for us to radically change our self-perception. The roles and identities of key institutions, especially the state and the market, are undergoing radical changes. So must ours. It is imperative that we get out of the 'interstices' and 'on the margins' mindset. I did not believe such a mindset was appropriate even when the state was the pre-eminent 'development agency'. It certainly is not appropriate now because the state itself is throwing up its hands.

Isolated action on the margins can hardly affect such monumental issues as equity, capability and institutional sustainability. How can we achieve salience if we continue to operate in our little enclaves on the margins? I believe we need to take a longer-term view of our work and develop broader perspectives. The issues I have highlighted are transformational and call for the involvement of an ever-widening circle of citizens. Should the sector not see itself as a vehicle for enabling more and more citizens to apply themselves to the issues of widespread poverty and crass inequity? I believe it is a time to be daring rather than defensive. If lawful action to create a fairer society is not 'mainstream' in a democracy, what is?

To be in the mainstream, we must first set very high standards for ourselves. I believe there is much scope to improve the quality of internal governance and to inculcate a culture of transparency. We require much higher standards of performance and effectiveness. We need to be far more reflective and critical of the 'what and how' of our work. Our actions must demonstrate our motives, rather than the other way around.

Widening our circle, involving more and more citizens, proactively and methodically, is another strategy we need to follow. Little is known about the sector and much that is known is biased and not very flattering. We do little to change these perceptions, expecting that our 'good work' will eventually stand out. For example, we do little to use the media or inform the vast numbers of young people in schools and colleges about our work. We need to work to change that and not remain confined to our own organisational preoccupations.

ALTERNATIVE PARADIGMS

Another area where there is need to be daring is that of the perspectives and paradigms of development itself. We need to develop and carry through alternative paradigms of development. Much creative work has been done in the sector that has the promise to redefine basic propositions about education, health, governance, livelihoods and the management of the commons and

basic services. Rarely do these 'interesting experiments' create new social constructs. For example, can we not develop an alternative system of education so that people themselves will take charge rather than remain dependant on the state and tied to the 'catching up' paradigm? Can we develop and carry through a construct of local governance outside the 'three-tier'framework? Can we imagine and work towards forest management without forest departments?

Perspectives about development are unlikely to change unless our views about people's potential and capability change. We need to build on people's capability and have faith in their capability. After all, little progress can be made unless people themselves take charge of their own development. There are plenty of examples to demonstrate that poor people can manage complex human and technological processes. Yet many among us shy away from handing over. For example, we know poor people spend significant sums of money to get poor quality health services and education. Yet we would balk at the idea of designing services that require poor people to pay, at least to their capability. As a result, our approaches often are no different from those of the state agencies whom we rightly criticise.

Finally, I think we need to be much more outward looking than we are. Very few among us build bridges with agencies of the state, the market and even with each other. For example, many among us harbour very negative views about panchayati raj institutions, leave alone collaborating with them. The refrain is that panchayats are dominated by vested interests. It is perhaps true. But how would they change if we do not work with them and create mechanisms to enable poor people get a toehold? After all, the idea of development itself demands that poor people be able to effectively deal with the institutions of society. How would that happen if the agents of change themselves work inside little cocoons?

This article was first published in July 2002.

"I believe Pradan has demonstrated one way of changing things. In a small way, it has rediscovered professionalism as it was meant to be – a synthesis of head and heart, of knowing, feeling and purpose. It has demonstrated possibilities. I hope others will listen and join." Deep Joshi

Pradan is a voluntary organistaion registered under the Societies' Registration Act in Delhi. We work in selected villages in 7 states through small teams based in the field. The focus of our work is to promote and strengthen livelihoods for the rural poor. It involves organising them, enhancing their capabilities, introducing ways to improve their incomes and linking them to banks, markets and other economic services. Pradan comprises professionally trained people motivated to use their knowledge and skills to remove poverty by working directly with the poor. Engrossed in action, we often feel the need to reach out to each other in Pradan as well as those in the wider development fraternity. News*R*each is one of the ways we seek to address this need. It is a forum for sharing our thoughts and a platform to build solidarity and unity of purpose. News*R*each was supported in the past by Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and Ford Foundation.

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