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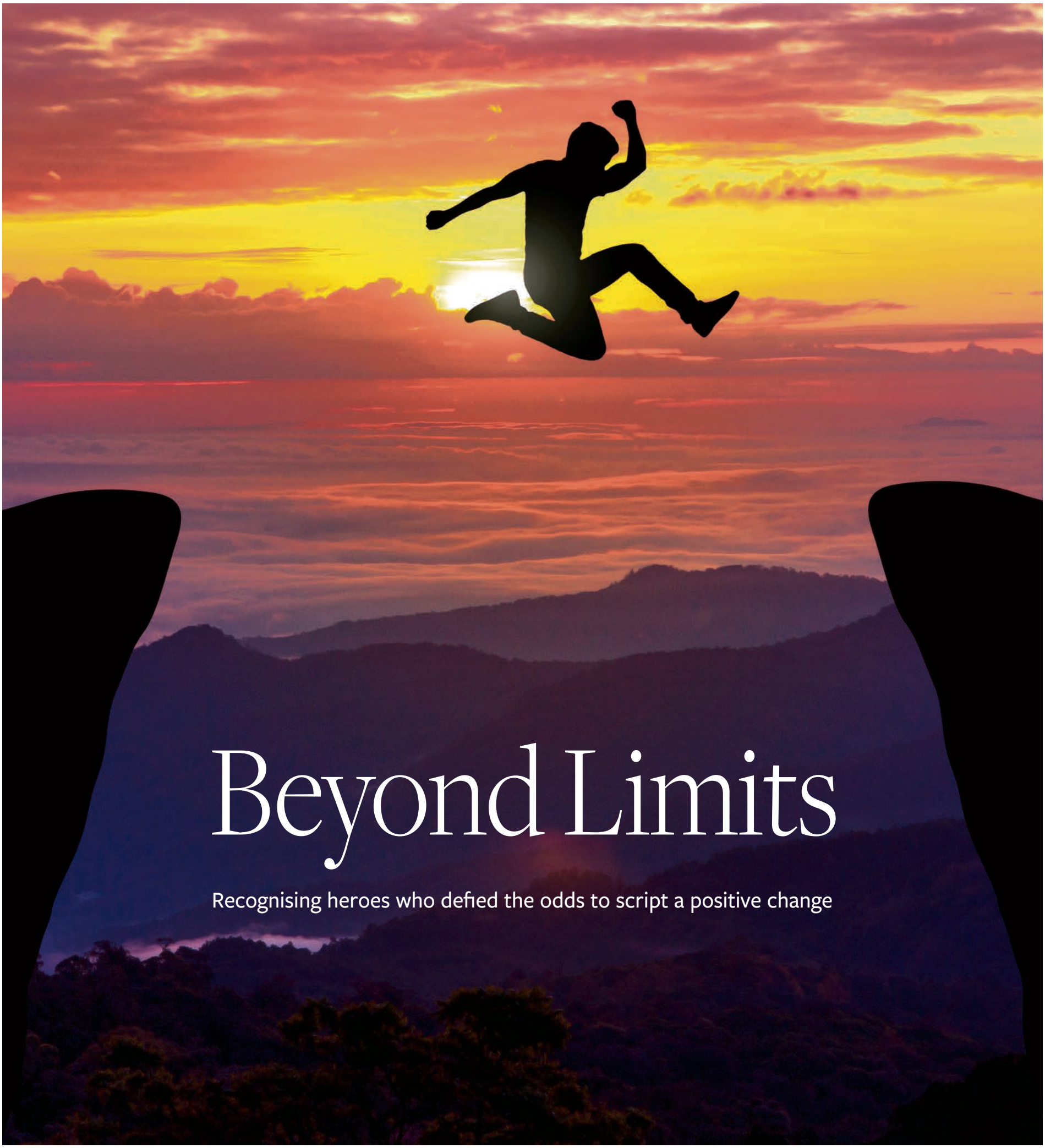

Beyond Limits

Recognising heroes who defied the odds to script a positive change

CHANGEMAKER OF THE YEAR

Unified Payments Interface

India's paymaster

The Unified Payments Interface is not only making India a less-cash society but also ensuring that digital payments become easy and safe **Rashmi Pratap**

The Unified Payments Interface is helping Indians from all walks of life transact digitally ISTOCK.COM/TRILOKS

A decade-and-a-half ago, it would have been impossible to imagine an alternative to the ubiquitous Visa and Mastercard. Card payments were synonymous with these names and they ruled urban India. The Reserve Bank of India was well aware of the need for a domestic payments network and created a Department of Payments and Settlements. But it was not easy to challenge the domination of MNCs in the payments space.

"Old habits are hard to break and new habits are hard to form. But if one is determined, then change is bound to happen," says Dilip Asbe, MD and CEO of National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI). Asbe, like his predecessor AP Hota, has been working to change the way India makes payments. "There is a need to make people aware about the ease and simplicity of doing digital transactions," Asbe says.

NPCI has taken upon itself the mission of not only making India a less-cash society but also ensuring that digital payments become easy as well as safe. When Hota, founder-CEO of NPCI, joined the Department of Payments, the mandate was to supervise payments systems, and, alongside, create a domestic card payments network

By 2008, when NPCI was set up as an umbrella organisation for all retail payments systems in India, Hota was sent to the corporation on deputation. NPCI was set up as a not-for-profit company, with the support of the RBI and Indian Banks' Association (IBA). Its ten core promoter banks are State Bank of India, Punjab National Bank, Canara Bank, Bank of Baroda, Union Bank of India, Bank of India, ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank, Citibank and HSBC. In 2016, the shareholding was broad-based to 56 member banks to include banks representing all sectors.

While NPCI has been steadily gaining ground in the Indian financial system through the Cheque Truncation System, Aadhaar-enabled Payments system, RuPay Card, Immediate Payments Service, Unified Payments Interface, BHIM app and Bharat Bill Pay, the journey has not been an easy one. NPCI started out from a small office in Churchgate and had to remind promoter banks to depute officers.

NPCI's first milestone was the setting up of the National Automated Clearing House (NACH) — a web-based solution to facilitate inter-bank, high volume, electronic transactions that are repetitive and periodic in nature.

One of its most successful products remains the RuPay Card, which was launched in 2012. A combination of Rupee and Payment, RuPay is NPCI's card payment scheme, conceived to fulfill the RBI's vision to offer a do-

mestic, open-loop, multilateral system that will allow all Indian banks and financial institutions in India to participate in electronic payments.

The biggest advantage of RuPay is its low cost and affordability. Since the transaction processing happens within India, it leads to a lower cost of clearing and settlement for each transaction. This makes the transaction cost affordable and is driving usage of cards in the industry. Moreover, the transaction and customer data related to RuPay card transactions resides in India, unlike with Visa and MasterCard.

But rolling it out was not easy. Hota, in an interview, said that at one point, the business appeared to be collapsing when Verifone, the largest point-of-sale (PoS) terminal manufacturer, refused to accept RuPay cards. To promote the acceptance of RuPay, it was important that it be swiped at most PoS terminals but Verifone, with 80 per cent market share, was reluctant. It demanded a fee of ₹200 per terminal for updates. "We ended up paying around ₹20 crore to Verifone for its one million terminals. It was more than what we had spent on developing the payments infrastructure," Hota had remarked.

But NPCI's willingness to make the payment only helped the RuPay card gain wider acceptance. It now accounts for almost 50 per cent of the debit cards issued in India.

By 2013, NPCI had implemented inter-bank ATM transactions, clearing and cheque truncated systems. This eliminated the physical movement of cheques in the clearing process and instead an electronic image of a cheque would be sent along with relevant information to banks.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the launch of the BHIM app in Delhi on December 30, 2016 RV MOORTHY

But the best was yet to come. In 2016, NPCI rolled out its Unified Payments Interface (UPI) — a system that powers multiple bank accounts into a single mobile application, merging several banking features, seamless fund routing and merchant payments into one. This allows for immediate money transfers through mobile devices, round the clock — even on bank holidays. It offers single-click, two-factor authentication besides seamless single-click payment.

UPI became the backbone of the Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM) — an app that lets users make quick payments. Users can make instant bank-to-bank payments and pay and collect money using just a mobile number or Virtual Payment Address (UPI ID). It can be used to send money, request money and scan and pay. Available in 12 languages, including Hindi and English, BHIM remains one of the most robust apps for financial transactions.

Saket Modi, CEO and Co-founder, Lucideus — the IT risk assessment and digital security services provider for BHIM — says NPCI officials' insistence on security around the app is unparalleled. "All the digital transactions in the world involve two-factor authentication. BHIM is the only app with three-factor authentication," he says.

Modi believes that working with NPCI is unlike working with any other organisation because of the sheer impact it has on the lives of people. "NPCI is building solutions for a billion-plus people unlike any private player. It has a direct impact on the country. Through them, we get to serve the nation," he says.

The demonetisation exercise of November 2016 gave NPCI a big boost as more and more people began to opt for digital transactions. Over 60 banks across India are now UPI-enrolled, and in September 2017, transaction volumes through UPI stood at 30.8 million, a 100-fold jump from 0.3 million in November 2016.

NPCI continues to move into newer directions. It is working to develop a standard QR code specification for Person to Merchant mobile payments. Users can scan these QR codes through their mobile banking apps and pay using their card-linked accounts.

But NPCI still faces challenges. Asbe says there remains a need to enhance the acceptance infrastructure. "There are only about 3 million PoS terminals to serve close to 900 million debit card customers. With an increase in the number of mobile phones, improved data connectivity and asset-light payment infrastructure models like QR codes, there is scope to fill the gap," he says.

And then the challenge is to create an ecosystem where all stakeholders are aware of the benefits of digitisation. "The biggest challenge lies in consumer awareness and literacy on digital payments. When it comes to changing the payment landscape in the country, we need constant support from banks, the regulator, the Government and, most importantly, from consumers," says Asbe.

Q&A

Dilip Asbe

'Changemakers are lifelong learners'

How difficult is it to bring about a change?
Old habits are hard to break and new habits are hard to form. If people are made aware of the benefits of change, then the transition becomes easier.

What are the attributes a changemaker should have to become successful?
Changemakers are lifelong learners who are willing to push themselves out of their comfort zones. A successful changemaker is one who is willing to fail in order to eventually succeed.

Does India, as a society, encourage changemakers?
With each passing year India is achieving new milestones of progress because of changemakers. About a decade ago no one had imagined that using an email-like address one could send or receive money. But today that is a reality.

What is the biggest change you wish to see?
We are working towards reducing the dependence on cash so that India becomes a less-cash society. We want more and more people to transact digitally because there is a cost attached to printing currency.

CHANGEMAKER OF THE YEAR

Other nominees...

The GST Council

The power to take all decisions relating to the Goods and Services Tax, India's biggest indirect tax reform, rests with this federal body. Set up after Cabinet approval in September 2016, it is chaired by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, with ministers from each State and Union Territory as members. It acts as an alternative decision-making authority to Parliament and State legislatures and marks a new era of cooperation and coordination between the Centre and States. All decisions till date by the GST Council have been taken by consensus without any voting being required. It is fast in its decision-making and meets as and when required, even through video-conferencing, to look into issues that arise in the implementation of GST. The Council has set up various committees and expert groups to look at all issues in detail, be it for refunds to exporters or returns, and to ensure that implementation of GST happens without too many issues.

Nandan Nilekani

A co-founder of IT services giant Infosys, he is among the few Indians who have successfully become technocrats. After being a part of Infosys, which was instrumental in paving the way for building Brand India in outsourcing, Nilekani left in July 2009 to serve as chairman of the Unique Identification Authority of India, a Cabinet-rank position that he took up at the invitation of then Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh. When it started out, Aadhaar was to be used primarily as the basis for efficient delivery of welfare services. The identification method will be biometric (with recent virtual ID) and the drive to create this government database of the entire population of India has been called "the biggest social project on the planet". In 2016, the Aadhaar Act was passed, which gave it legislative backing, in an effort to provide efficient, transparent, and targeted delivery of subsidies, benefits and services, the expenditure for which is incurred from the Consolidated Fund of India.

RJio

India's sole 4G-only mobile network operator, it is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Mukesh Ambani-controlled Reliance Industries. With an initial investment of ₹2 lakh crore, the RJio network covers all 22 telecom circles in India. The services were first beta-launched to Jio's partners and employees on December 27, 2015, on the eve of the 83rd birth anniversary of the late Dhirubhai Ambani, founder of Reliance Industries. Services were launched commercially on September 5, 2016. Within one year India has leapfrogged from 155th rank in mobile broadband penetration to becoming the world's largest mobile data consuming nation. Today, Jio customers alone use 125 crore GB of data every month. Jio's entry has seen the price of data fall from ₹4,000-8,000 per GB to ₹10-20. Reliance Jio posted a profit within 15 months of commencing commercial operations.

ISRO

India's space agency, it was set up with the goal of harnessing space technology for national development. Over the decades, it has done more than achieve this goal: ISRO has carried out over 95 spacecraft missions, 65 launches and has put over 250 foreign satellites, belonging to over 30 countries, into orbit. It has largely relied on the PSLV for small satellite launches but, in recent years, has also employed indigenously developed cryogenic technology to deploy heavier satellites in space. And it has achieved all of this at a fraction of the cost incurred by foreign space agencies, thanks to its vast array of low-cost satellites. India has been able to up its abilities when it comes to communication, navigation and broadcasting infrastructure. Its technology is helping the country prepare for and cope with the aftermath of natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes and cyclones. It is also developing technologies such as re-usable launch vehicles and scramjet engines (it uses oxygen in the air as fuel thus reducing the cost and weight of the launch vehicle). ISRO is now transferring to Indian industry the knowledge resulting from the years of its path-breaking work.

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ICONIC CHANGEMAKERS

Dr Rani Bang & Dr Abhay Bang

Giving infants the gift of life

Dr Rani and Dr Abhay Bang's success in Gadchiroli has transformed the way India and the world tackle high infant mortality **N Madhavan**

Dr Abhay Bang and Dr Rani Bang discuss healthcare with tribal villagers in Gadchiroli, Maharashtra

Gadchiroli district is as backward as it can get. Located in Western Maharashtra, some 1,000 kilometres from Mumbai and bordering Chhattisgarh, 60 per cent of its land mass is covered by forests and 80 per cent of the people live below the poverty line. Indigenous people account for 40 per cent of the district's population and primitive beliefs and age-old traditions, such as resorting to witchcraft to treat diseases, govern everyday life.

In 1988, the district's infant mortality rate (IMR) stood at 121 per 1,000 births, among the highest in the country. But what happened in the next decade-and-a-half surprised policymakers both in India and abroad. The IMR in the district saw a steep fall to 30 – equal to the rate in large cities with state-of-the-art medical facilities. This change came about not because the Government suddenly chose to invest heavily in the district's medical infrastructure but due to the work of the doctor couple Rani and Abhay Bang. Their home-based newborn care (HBNC) model revolutionised the way infant mortality is approached in rural areas.

Today, based on their success, the Government of India is training 8.19 lakh village health workers under its Asha programme. HBNC has reached 11 million newborns across six lakh villages. And the results are beginning to show. According to a 2016 study by Prabhat Jha of the Centre for Global Health Research, India prevented about one million child deaths between 2005 and 2015. HBNC has played a key role in this. Six African countries embraced this model in 2005-06.

Influenced by the Mahatma

Born in 1950, Dr Abhay Bang (68) spent much of his childhood in Mahatma Gandhi's Sevagram Ashram in Wardha, Maharashtra (his father was a Gandhian). Gandhi's teachings left a strong impression on him, so much so, that at the age of 13, he had decided to pursue medicine and serve the people.

He entered medical college when he was 17 and there he met Rani Chari, his future wife, who, despite coming from a wealthy family, chose a simple way of life and wanted to serve the people. "Our dreams and aspirations matched," says Dr Abhay. He completed his MD in Internal Medicine and she in Obstetrics & Gynaecology.

Both topped their respective classes and could have had a lucrative practice in Mumbai or Nagpur. Instead they began working in Kanhapur, a village near Wardha. Soon they realised that merely running a clinic was inadequate to improve the health of people in the villages and their focus shifted to public health.

But most research in India on diseases such as malaria or cholera is done by foreigners. Not much information was available on how to carry out public health research in India. Their search to understand it took them to Johns Hopkins University in the US, where they completed their Masters in Public Health. On their return they chose Gadchiroli as their base and started SEARCH (Society for Education Action and Research in Community Health) in 1986.

"We chose to go where the problems are and not operate out of cities where infrastructure such as electricity and office facilities existed but were far removed from the challenges plaguing rural India," says Dr Abhay Bang. Gadchiroli had other advantages too. "It had a unique rural and tribal population mix and offered us an ideal test-bed to research diseases affecting both tribal and rural people," explains Dr Rani Bang (67), who began her work by focussing first on 'sickle cell' disease,

which is common among the tribal population, and then on women's reproductive health (this has now become a global policy replacing the earlier focus on just birth control).

The turning point

One rainy evening in the late 1980s, two women rushed into the Bang's home at Shodhagram, 15 kilometres from Gadchiroli town, where SEARCH's 40-acre campus is located, with a very sick infant. Even as Dr Abhay Bang began evaluation, the baby stopped breathing. "It died on my bed while I helplessly watched," he recalls. He deduced that the child could have died from 18 different causes.

The child's death affected them badly and their focus turned to infant mortality. About 100-odd villages in the district became their laboratory and they began to record every childbirth and death. To their shock they found that 121 infants died within one year of birth and the major cause (40 percent) was pneumonia. While pneumonia could be treated with antibiotics, diagnosing it required x-ray machines, which were scarce in the district.

They began to look for a simple but effective way to identify pneumonia and arrived at a method based on the child's breath rate. With no medical facilities worth the name, they also had to find a way to reach the cure for pneumonia to the people. Midwives or traditional birth attendants (TBAs) in every village were seen as a possible solution. After all, of the 26 million babies born in India, 75 per cent are in villages and of this, 84 percent are delivered at home, mostly by TBAs. Dr Abhay Bang designed a simple breath counter instrument to enable them to count. Once they diagnosed pneumonia, the infants were given antibiotics.

Gadchiroli's infant mortality rate has plunged from 121 to 30 deaths per 1,000 births, thanks to the efforts of the Bangs

The solution worked and within two years (by 1990) the IMR in the district began to decline and fell to 75-80 per 1,000 as the death rate among infants due to pneumonia declined to just 0.5 percent. This simple method to cure pneumonia among infants not only proved to be crucial in India, where a million infants died every year from the disease, but is also in use in over 77 countries.

The IMR level remained at 75-80 per 1,000 for the next five years (1990-1995). A closer look revealed that the bulk of the remaining deaths occurred among newborn infants within four weeks of birth. Initial research by SEARCH revealed that 42 percent of the newborns were malnourished at birth and were easy prey to diseases; 54 percent required medical treatment at birth.

World Health Organization norms clearly specified that ill-born infants should be rushed to a hospital but in Gadchiroli district, hospitals were far and few. Also, local custom mandated that a newborn and mother should not leave their home for a certain length of time after the birth. This situation called for an innovative solution — healthcare had to be provided at their home. Thus was born HBNC.

Building on the success of using TBAs to fight pneumonia among infants, SEARCH identified one woman from each village and trained her as a village health worker. Their training included checking the newborn's weight, temperature and breathing, maintaining hygiene, giving injections/antibiotics (if needed) and maintaining a complete record.

Overcoming challenges

There were objections from many quarters saying it was ill-advised to get uneducated people to provide such services. Dr Abhay Bang got a team of ten leading paediatricians from all over the country to check if the trained village health workers were competent to treat the newborns.

The team of doctors gave the green signal and HBNC was rolled out. The results were stunning. By the year 2000 the IMR had fallen to 30 per 1,000 births.

IMR has remained at this level since and SEARCH is working on a new intervention: home-based intensive newborn care. "We hope to reduce IMR to 25 per 1,000 by this initiative," he says, adding, "further reduction would require hospitalisation facilities as this involves heavily pre-term and underweight babies."

Drs Rani and Abhay Bang have also started new initiatives that focus on non-communicable diseases such as hypertension/stroke and alcohol addictions in the district. Dr Rani Bang points out that it was the villagers who forced them to take up the issue of alcohol and tobacco addiction. "A study in 2015-16 revealed that the 1.2 million people in the district spent ₹350 crore a year on alcohol and tobacco. This was way above the ₹157 crore the Government spent as part of the district's development plan," she adds. Today, the duo have successfully managed to bring total prohibition in the district.

They have also started NIRMAN, an initiative to create changemakers. "We have trained over 1,000 youngsters and 200 of them are already out in the field working on social issues," says Amrut Bang, the couple's younger son, who manages the programme.

Both Dr Abhay Bang and Dr Rani Bang, who were awarded the Padma Shri in 2018 in recognition of their work, were offered attractive posts by the Government and other organisations over the years. But they chose to stay back and restrict their work to Gadchiroli. "Without Gadchiroli, Rani and I are zero. This is our lab, where we see a problem, measure it, develop solutions, field-test them ... and when we succeed, we try to bring about a policy change that benefits people across the country," explains Dr Abhay Bang.

He signs off with his favourite quote: "One accurate measurement is infinitely superior to a thousand intelligent opinions."

Q&A

Dr Abhay Bang

'When it comes to values or power relationships, Indian society does not want change'

How difficult is it to bring about a change?
Even if there is a real need for change and there is a feasible solution, it still faces enormous resistance and takes one generation.

What are the attributes a changemaker should have to become successful?
Let me quote Mahatma Gandhi: Be the change that you want to see in the world.

Does India, as a society, encourage changemakers?
It does when it comes to technology or how you dress. When it comes to deeper change in values or power relationships, Indian society does not encourage changemakers.

What is the biggest change you wish to see?
Young people should go for higher and social goals rather than joining the rat race of making money. Even if you win the rat race you're still a rat.

YOUNG CHANGEMAKER

Srikanth Bolla

A catalyst for change

Born blind, entrepreneur Srikanth Bolla has opened the world's eyes by triumphing against all the odds **V Rishi Kumar**

Srikanth Bolla (centre) decided to become an entrepreneur so that he could be a job-provider rather than a job-seeker

Srikanth Bolla's entire life is testimony to the manner in which he has defied considerable odds and driven change — in his own life and in those of others. He was born blind into a family of agriculturists in Seetharamapuram in Machilipatnam, Andhra Pradesh. That alone would have crushed a weaker spirit, but Bolla persisted — and has triumphed against adversity, fighting every step of the way, from getting an education to venturing into an entrepreneurial career. Today, he runs Bollant Industries Limited as its CEO, with five factories, employing over 650 people, nearly half of whom are differently abled men and women.

"My parents, Damodar Rao and Venkatamma (who were cousins), were devastated that their baby was born blind," he says. The blindness was the genetic effect of a consanguineous marriage, and his parents received a lot of unsolicited — and wholly unwelcome — advice. Snuff out the blind boy, some members of the rural community said: he is utterly useless, and you'll struggle to bring him up.

It's a good thing that Damodar Rao and Venkatamma were deaf, so to speak, to such heartless suggestions. They resolved to bring their son up as best as they could.

"But at every stage, from the time they initiated me into a school in a rural area, they had to fight the 'system'," Bolla recalls. Since Bolla was facing discrimination at the Machilipatnam school, his father shifted him to Hyderabad's Devnar School for the Blind, where he was guided and mentored by his special needs teacher Swarna Latha.

The beginning

"That was just the beginning of my fight against the system," he says. "And that has continued over the years. But each hurdle I faced made me stronger as I had to challenge the system and find a space for myself."

Having completed his schooling with distinction, he had a tough time securing admission to the Intermediate course. "I wanted to pursue science, but was told that I could only take up arts because of my disability. However, we filed a case and won and I went on to pass intermediate with distinction," Bolla says.

Guided by teacher Swarna Latha, he went on to secure 90 per cent in the high school examination. But again, he was rejected in junior college, and had to go to court to get admissions to higher learning institutions and even to write exams.

Bolla wanted to graduate, but he was repeatedly rejected by top Indian institutions, including the IITs, owing to his disability. But was his spirit crushed? On the contrary, Bolla turned adversity into a challenge — and went on to graduate in business management from the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the US. It was the time he spent at MIT, where the learning environment made a big difference to shaping his worldview, that he sowed the seeds that would lead to his trying out something radically different.

"Having faced challenges at every stage during my education, I always had the urge to do something differently," he recalls.

An entrepreneur is born

Rejecting a couple of job offers from multinational corporations in the US, Bolla decided to become an entrepreneur so that he could be a job-provider rather than be a job-seeker. "I chose this option as it gave me a chance to do something for people who had similar problems as I did," he says.

In 2014, pooling together a few lakh rupees, Bolla embarked on his entrepreneurial journey and set up Bollant Industries Ltd to fashion eco-friendly disposable products and packaging solutions, made entirely out of nat-

ural leaf and recycled paper. The product portfolio includes areca leaf plates, dinnerware, food trays, cups and eco-friendly products, including disposable plates, paper cups and biodegradable products made from betel leaves.

"Having seen the importance of paper-based plates and products in the US, where a couple of companies have turnovers of millions of dollars, I decided to enter this segment, which was unorganised and fragmented but had a huge potential in India," he says.

But more uniquely, Bollant's larger mission was to generate employment opportunities for millions of differently abled people, who are mostly uneducated and unskilled.

From a small facility in Hyderabad, Bollant has today grown to several manufacturing units through a combination of organic and inorganic growth.

Recently, Bollant acquired an ailing packaging unit near Hyderabad and turned it around, where more than 200 women workers are employed.

Today, Bollant has manufacturing units at Nacharam near Hyderabad, and at Nizamabad and Hubli. "We are also in the process of acquiring another sick unit with a plan to turn it around. This has meant that the proposed plan to set up a large unit in Sri City will take a back seat for the time being," he explains.

Despite his success, Bolla continues to innovate; he personally supervises the plant floor to ensure quality

The company is on course to achieving a turnover of about ₹60 crore this fiscal, up from ₹35 crore last year. "As the scale goes up, we expect the turnover to shoot up," he says, reeling off balance sheet data without a hitch.

Taking pride in the way his business has shaped up over the years, Bolla says, with a lilt in his voice, "Bollant was recently valued at over ₹400 crore by an independent third-party consultancy firm, Anandam & Co."

Limitless ambition

Not content with what he and his company have achieved over the past five years, Bolla is planning to further ramp up production and significantly increase the turnover.

The entrepreneurial path thus far has not been easy. Narrating some of the challenges he faced on this journey, he says, "When I approached Andhra Bank for a ₹15-crore loan, they rejected my application, stating that we need to provide collateral. But as we are now seeing from the huge scams in the corporate world, not everyone was subjected to such rigorous due diligence," he says wryly.

Through one of the MIT connections, Bolla's venture first brought in investments from Ravi Mantha, who was part of The Indus Entrepreneurs, followed by investments from serial entrepreneur SP Reddy.

Thereafter several marquee investors pitched in. The spark in Bolla and his tenacity to fight against all odds encouraged a number of investors, including Ratan Tata, in his personal capacity during 2016; that was Tata's first non-tech investment.

Srini Raju of Peepul Capital and ILabs, Satish Reddy of Dr Reddy's Labs, Kiran Grandhi of GMR Group, Arun Alagappan of TI Cycles, Anil Chalamalasetty of Greenko are among other investors in Bolla's venture. Ravi Mantha and SP Reddy continue to be associated with Bolla and his company.

Armed with a strong balance-sheet and charting a clear growth path, Bollant is looking at the next round of funding to expand its business. "It won't be long before you hear from us about this," Bolla says.

Changemaker's creed

Summing up his change-making philosophy, Bolla says, "I chose management studies even though I had an aptitude for computer science. I wanted to become someone who leads rather than someone who works under others." Rather than be content with work to make a living, Bolla says he decided to become an entrepreneur so as to make a difference.

And despite his considerable success, Bolla continues to innovate and personally supervises the plant floor to ensure top quality.

Not only does the manufacture of paper products as an alternative to plastic directly contribute to environmental protection, the products are made from leaves and agricultural waste, which would usually have been burnt.

Strikingly, no one who is differently abled has been injured in the factory operations. "However, I cannot say the same about 'others' in the factory. Does this mean people become careless if they have all their faculties intact?" he wonders.

One of Bollant's early initiatives was to co-found Samanvai, a centre for children with multiple disabilities, helping them get over their many challenges. "Isolation of differently abled persons starts from childhood and continues all through life," says Bolla, perhaps remembering his own experiences.

"At school, you are condemned to the back benches and kept out of group events. My dream is to see all differently abled people gainfully employed," he says.

To whom does a man like Bolla turn to for inspiration? "I have had very engaging conversations with the late President APJ Abdul Kalam, who was a great inspiration and encouragement to me," he says.

Over the past three-four years, Bolla's work has begun to be recognised; he has won a string of awards. Among them are the Emerging Leadership Award, given by ECLIF Malaysia, and the Emerging Entrepreneur of the Year 2016 award, given by CII.

Bollant's mission, as represented in its tagline, is: "Where everyone counts." On Bolla's entrepreneurial journey, he has impacted hundreds of people, including many who are able-bodied, with his change-making example on how to work hard and achieve goals.

Q&A

Srikanth Bolla

'Passion, ethics make the difference'

How difficult is it to bring about change?
Change looks difficult. It has to be brought about through a lot of pain and passion. If anyone can overcome that pain by pursuing a unique path, it would be possible to bring about change.

What are the attributes a changemaker should have to become successful?
Mind and body have to be put towards that goal with pride that we are doing good to others. We have to work in a humble, honest way and hold up against all odds. How you manage values by teaming up with people and lead with passion and ethics makes a difference.

Does India, as a society, encourage changemakers?
No. Changemakers are seen as idiots. When someone pitches an idea, it is discussed and dismissed.

What is the biggest change you wish to see?
I want to see every person with disabilities get employment.

YOUNG CHANGEMAKER

Other nominees...

Garvita Gulhati (18)

A multi-faceted teenager, Garvita began to see herself as a problem-solver at a very young age. Her mantra: "To see the change you want in the society, you need to take responsibility and shoulder the pain." At the age of 13 she started a campaign #saynotocrackers. Two years later she started 'Why Waste?' along with another student. The trigger for her to start Why Waste? was a report that said 14 million litres of water is wasted unused in glasses at restaurants. To address this issue, she devised the 'Half-marked' glass method, exhorting restaurants to fill glasses only till the halfway mark. This initiative also had campaigns such as #emptyglasses, #naturewashere, and #whywaste to make people conscious about their lifestyle. She uses her calligraphy skills to draw cartoons about environmental issues in a humorous and impactful manner. She has recently started an initiative called 'Ecotonix' to take this effort to the next level and has employed five cartoonists. She also conducts cartoon competitions in schools to create awareness among children and to help them become changemakers. This comes from her strong belief that everyone is a changemaker. She started 'Lead Young' at school and runs a 'Changemaker Society' in her college. She is currently pursuing a B Tech degree, and is a certified calligraphy artist who is on the verge of obtaining a BA degree in the classical dance form, Kathak. She is also working to transform her college campus into the world's first eco-friendly, self-sustainable student campus.

Kuldeep Dantewadia (21)

At the age of 21, Kuldeep started collecting garbage from about 150 households in Bengaluru for sustainable disposal. He regretted that his 'garden city' had become a 'garbage city' and the desire to help the city regain its glory propelled this sustainable development initiative. It did not take him long to co-found Reap Benefit, a startup, to bring about an attitudinal change among youngsters in solving civic and environmental issues. Reap Benefit aims to address these issues in a 'green' manner, working closely with local authorities, NGOs and corporates. Now 28, Kuldeep's aim is to empower students to make a collective impact on the environment by increasing recycling, reducing energy consumption, waste generation and water usage, and assisting institutions in acting sustainably. His designation at Reap Benefit is Chief Problem Solver.

Mohammed Rafiul Alom Rahman (25)

Brought up in a conservative Muslim cultural environment in the North-East, Mohammed Rafiul Alom Rahman became an activist fighting for the cause of gay Muslims in India. The first person from his family to attend university, Rahman secured a post-graduate degree in English literature from Delhi University. He runs a Facebook page called 'The Queer Muslim Project', which serves as a platform for the empowerment of LGBT Muslims in India. Its primary objective is to offer individuals a safe space as also to dispel the shame and religious stigma associated with homosexuality. Rahman is also the founding member of the Delhi University Queer Collective (DUQC) founded in January 2014 to garner support for LGBTQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Intersex) groups on campus. He launched a zero-tolerance campaign to end violence against LGBTQI students and faculty members within the Delhi University. His focus areas include gender, sexuality, human rights and LGBT Muslims in India. He writes and speaks on gender issues and archaic laws that curb the human rights and freedom of the LGBTQI community. Rahman is now developing a digital storytelling platform, Jazbaa, to enable LGBTQI people to record and share their stories.

Ritesh Agarwal (24)

He founded OYO in 2013 to provide a standardised, predictable, affordable, budget room experience including free wifi and breakfast at ₹999 onwards using proprietary technology and a talent pool of hospitality experts. He was addressing the fragmented budget accommodation space which had no standards, apart from the branded budget hotel rooms from established players — domestic and international. Ritesh started coding at 8 years of age and by 13 had his own SIM card-selling enterprise. At 17, he authored *The Encyclopedia of Indian Engineering Colleges* which went on to garner massive sales. He dropped out of college to launch his first startup — Oravel Stays Pvt Ltd in 2012 — the Indian version of AirBnB fuelled with a ₹30 lakh investment from VentureNursery, an accelerator. Oravel was a designed as a platform to enable listing and booking of budget accommodation. Realising soon after his experience with frequent budget room stays, that the problem in the budget hospitality sector is not price or availability, but the lack of standardised and predictable offerings, he pivoted Oravel to OYO Rooms in 2013. Until last year, Ritesh did not have a home of his own; every night he stayed in a different OYO room. This helped him keep track, first-hand, of how they are maintained and run.

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CHANGEMAKER - FINANCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Bandhan Bank

Banking on the bottom of the pyramid

In transforming the lives of the underprivileged, Bandhan Bank has fashioned a hugely successful business **Shobha Roy** and **Pratim Ranjan Bose**

Chandra Shekhar Ghosh is not given to hyperbole, and yet, when the MD and CEO of Bandhan Bank smilingly says that the banking model that Bandhan abides by has no parallel in the world, it is hard not to see it as a trifle over the top. But that's what making a change is all about. And Ghosh's experience offers personal testimony of why such radical change-making makes for good business.

There is a rudimentary simplicity about the manner in which Kolkata-based Bandhan Bank goes about its business. Nearly 90 per cent of the business of Bandhan, which was earlier a microfinance institution, comes from rural clients, mostly women borrowers, and since it operates in a region which has an unflatteringly low credit penetration, it is the simplicity of the product offering that is critical for it to provide efficient service and to keep costs low.

How, you may wonder, can a bank, which is required these days to adhere to higher levels of compliance and stricter norms, keep its processes simple?

It is difficult, acknowledges Ghosh, 58. "But when something has to be done, it has to be done," he says, matter-of-factly.

Illustratively, during its MFI days, Bandhan had a one-page form for its microcredit borrowers. But when it became a bank, the legal team came up with a 24-page form, citing a regulatory mandate.

He refused to approve the form on two counts: it would make no sense to the majority of the bank's clients (rural borrowers); and it would straightaway lead to additional expenses without yielding any apparent benefit.

"To me, the question was simple," says Ghosh. "I was earlier spending ₹1 on a form. If my expenses on every form go up to ₹24, it cannot lead to more repayment — my repayments are already 99 per cent! I told my legal team to find a way out. And they did."

To this day, he adds, Bandhan Bank maintains a one-page form. "Everyone is happy. The only thing they have done is to change a word here and add a sentence there, to meet the regulatory requirements."

His argument is simple: if reams of paperwork could mitigate banks' risk, the country would not today be staring at over ₹9 lakh crore in stressed assets pile-up. Bandhan Bank, says Ghosh, will follow all the legal and regulatory requirements, but it will not slip into the groove of the 'copy-paste format'.

The Bandhan model

What, then, is the Bandhan model of banking? As an MFI, Bandhan placed emphasis on face-to-face meetings with borrowers to assess their needs and repayment abilities rather than focussing on tedious paperwork. And as a bank, Bandhan continues with its 'hi-touch' model. "We meet our borrowers at least 50 times a year, so we tend to understand them better, which brings down the credit risk. Data is not everything," Ghosh says.

And, when he says 'we', he isn't employing the pronoun loosely. He is probably the only bank chief who makes time to meet clients. And it is such meetings that occasionally yield sweet surprises.

Rita Pal, a 50-year-old customer from Habra in North 24-Parganas district, once told Ghosh she kept his photo along with images of gods and goddesses in the puja corner of her house. "Even today, the recollection of her words gives me goosebumps," he says.

Financial inclusion

Ghosh didn't quite set out to set up a bank. After clearing his MSc in Statistics from Dhaka University in 1985, he took up a job at BRAC in Bangladesh, before moving to West Bengal, where he had a short stint at a Howrah-based MFI.

In 2001, he set up Bandhan as an MFI, driven by a keenness to make loans available at a lower rate. The intention turned into a conviction in 2009-10, following a series of suicides by borrowers in Andhra Pradesh owing to high interest rates and high levels of indebtedness. Ghosh was convinced of the need to raise deposits as a cheaper source of fund. Since NBFCs were not allowed to raise deposits, it became necessary to become a bank.

As Bandhan became a bank in August 2015, the cost of funds dropped from 11.5 per cent to 7 per cent and the lending rate was cut from 22.4 per cent to 18.4 per cent. Overnight, 64 lakh borrowers from the eastern region were integrated with the banking system.

From 64 lakh in 2015, Bandhan's customer base has now expanded to 1.3 crore. The bank is adding a mind-blowing 7,000-8,000 customers a day; 90 per cent of them are from the poorest sections of society. Most of them are probably gaining access to finance for the first time.

Ghosh concedes that Bandhan's transformation from an MFI to a bank has induced many changes from the regulatory and management point of view. But the core values remain the same, he says. Bandhan's 2,500 Doorstep Service Centres (DSC) are a demonstration of this unchanged value system. All of them have a spartan one-room office, with only a few plastic chairs, and modest accommodation for employees. The model has remained the same since its inception. Based on feedback from a few employees, Ghosh once considered doing away with the staff accommodation facility at the DSCs. But the wife of one of the staff members felt that it would be easier for her to keep tabs on her husband this way, and so Ghosh dropped his plans. "Bandhan is not a bank. It's a family that includes staff, customers and their families," he says.

As Bandhan became a bank in August 2015, the cost of funds dropped... Overnight, 64 lakh borrowers from the eastern region were integrated with the banking system

Chandra Shekar Ghosh, MD and CEO, Bandhan Bank
DEBASISH BHADURI

Transforming lives

And the family delivers. Maintaining the simplicity of its operations and the processes as the fulcrum, the bank has ushered in a silent transformation in the lives of many people.

Illustratively, a 55-year-old widow from Rajpur in South 24 Parganas borrowed ₹3,000 from the MFI ten years ago, and used it to buy saris, which she sold door-to-door. Today, she owns a shop in Rajpur and sells a variety of apparel. Strikingly, she values her relationship with Bandhan as much as she did in the past. "It is amazing to see the transformation. This is the power of credit, when put to use in the right manner," he says.

Rita Pal (who worships Ghosh) charted a bigger success story. In 2005, she took a loan of ₹7,000 from the MFI to manufacture brooms and sell them in the local market at Habra in West Bengal. Today, after a series of successful re-financing, Pal runs a small-scale broom-making factory; her brooms get sold as far away as Patna.

She has bought a Tata-407 pick-up truck to supply her products and a second-hand Ambassador. The passenger car was meant for her personal and commercial use, but it is readily available — free of cost — to her neighbours to ferry patients to hospitals, indicative of the community spirit that prevails. Pal, who is childless, now aspires to set up an orphanage.

Ghosh can empathise with the plight of many of his clients, given his own life circumstances. He grew up as the eldest of six children of a small-time sweetmeat maker in Greater Tripura (now in Bangladesh). In that sense, he has seen life in many hues and colours, and transforming lives is for him something of a mission.

His non-profit agency, Bandhan Konnagar, runs 2,000 primary schools across West Bengal, Assam, Tripura, Bihar and Jharkhand, offering free education to children from underprivileged families. It has also brought about more radical change — for instance, in the lives of 55,000 beggar families, whom it convinced to earn their livelihood. The non-profit takes full responsibility for the beggar families for two years, during which period they are given entrepreneurship skills training, provided with seed capital and guided into a respectable life. On a recent trip to Murshidabad, a border district in West Bengal, a woman from one such family offered him some puffed rice (muri) to eat. She insisted that they did not get it by begging. She is now into the trade of preparing puffed rice.

Looking ahead

Is Ghosh happy with the changes he has brought about?

"I am happy, extremely happy, to have earned people's love and respect. One can earn money in many ways, but earning people's good wishes is priceless," he says. "(But) there is still a long way to go."

According to the 2011 Census, there are about 24 crore families in India, of which only four crore are covered under microcredit. Even if just half of the other 20 crore families requires microcredit, there is immense opportunity for growth.

MSMEs will be another area of focus, given that there are about 55 million of them in India providing employment to about 11 crore people, but only 7 per cent of them enjoy bank finance.

Bandhan, says Ghosh, will stick to its principle to grow by giving loans to larger numbers of people rather than to a few. It needs to scale up its operations horizontally. And Bandhan is gearing up to do just that. "Our country has a huge population. They say small is beautiful, but in fact big is necessary to be able to reach out to more number of people in a sustainable manner," he says.

Q&A

Chandra Shekhar Ghosh

'Once change happens, it can be scaled up'

How difficult is it to bring about change?
Change is not easy, especially behavioural change. It is a continuous process. But once the change happens, and that is positively established, it can be easily scaled up.

What are the attributes a changemaker should have to become successful?
Patience and hard work are the key. One cannot break down in challenging times. One should also not worry about results.

Does India, as a society, encourage changemakers?
No change is ever possible without the support of the people. Maybe there are a few challenges initially, but no change can ever come merely due to one person's initiative; people's support is a must.

What is the biggest change you wish to see?
I want to see people smiling; the kind of smile that emerges out of pure satisfaction.

CHANGEMAKER - FINANCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Other nominees...

The Centre for Digital Financial Inclusion

Part of the Institute for Financial Management and Research (IFMR), Chennai, it was established in September 2014. The Centre focuses on four key areas — Research, Innovation and Scale, Policy and Programme Support, and Dissemination. Research is used to develop a deep, field-level understanding of relevant issues; to identify and assess intervention areas; to understand facilitators of cashless transactions and evaluate the impact post intervention. Under innovation and scale, the Centre promotes product development and scaling of new digital payment use cases, business process re-engineering and developing an ecosystem comprising infrastructure, partnerships and collaboration to further digital financial inclusion. Policy and programme support is used to create a favourable and conducive environment for interventions and to ease administrative and regulatory bottlenecks that limit innovation and scale. Dissemination aims to spread the learning from interventions for the benefit of others. Since its inception the Centre has initiated research studies, programme-support projects and technology-intervention projects in various domains. The Centre has also set up a digital innovation lab in Bengaluru to promote development and scaling of new digital payment-use cases and to encourage research.

Kinara Capital

This Bengaluru-based company focusses on lending to micro and small businesses. The company was founded by Hardika Shah in 2011 to create a financially inclusive community by providing products and solutions to micro and small businesses, thereby generating new jobs and improving livelihoods. Kinara Capital provides loans without asking for any collateral. It has a presence in six states — Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Karnataka and Maharashtra — and in Puducherry. As of December 2017, Kinara Capital's total assets under management was ₹250 crore and the number of active loans, 8,779. Its debt partners include Shriram City Union Finance, RBL Bank, Vijaya Bank and DCB Bank. Investors in Kinara Capital include Shriram City Union Finance, the Susan and Michael Dell Foundation and Unitus Capital.

Oxigen Services India

One of the largest payments solutions providers in India, its business involves service aggregation and distribution, utilising mobile services, PoS and web-for-online payment processing, and money transfers. It has a large bouquet of services integrated into a single transaction and payment processing platform. They include prepaid, postpaid and subscription-based services such as mobile money transfers, recharges, bill payments, ticketing and subscriptions for leading service providers. The Oxigen Wallet is India's first non-bank mobile wallet app. Approved by the RBI, the app allows users to send and receive money through popular social channels such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, SMS and Email. It has a customer base of over 150 million and a pan-India retail network with over 2 lakh access points.

Paytm

Founded by Vijay Shankar Sharma, it is the consumer brand of mobile internet company One97 Communications, India's largest mobile payments and commerce platform. One97's investors include SoftBank, SAIF Partners, Alibaba Group, Ant Financial (Alipay) and Mediatek. Paytm started out offering online mobile recharges and bill payments and today has over 280 million registered users. It has even expanded to have its own online marketplace. Sharma had first pitched the idea of entering the payments ecosystem in 2011, at a time when India was still a cash-driven economy and the envisioned marketplace was practically nonexistent. Digital payments got an unexpected push after demonetisation. The note ban threw up an immense opportunity for Paytm, and the company ran aggressive campaigns, including full-page ads in all leading publications, the day after demonetisation was announced. Paytm quickly launched its app in 10 regional languages and started aggressively signing on merchants and reaching out to customers in every nook and corner of the country. After receiving $1.4 billion in funding from the SoftBank Group in May 2017, Paytm has continued to invest in new growth opportunities, launching Paytm Gold, a wealth management product, and acquiring online ticketing and events company Insider.in. The launch of the Paytm Payments Bank is yet another feather in its cap.

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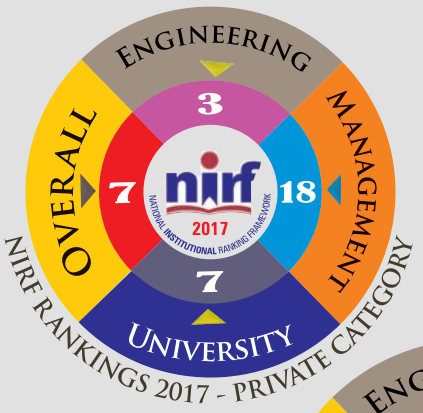

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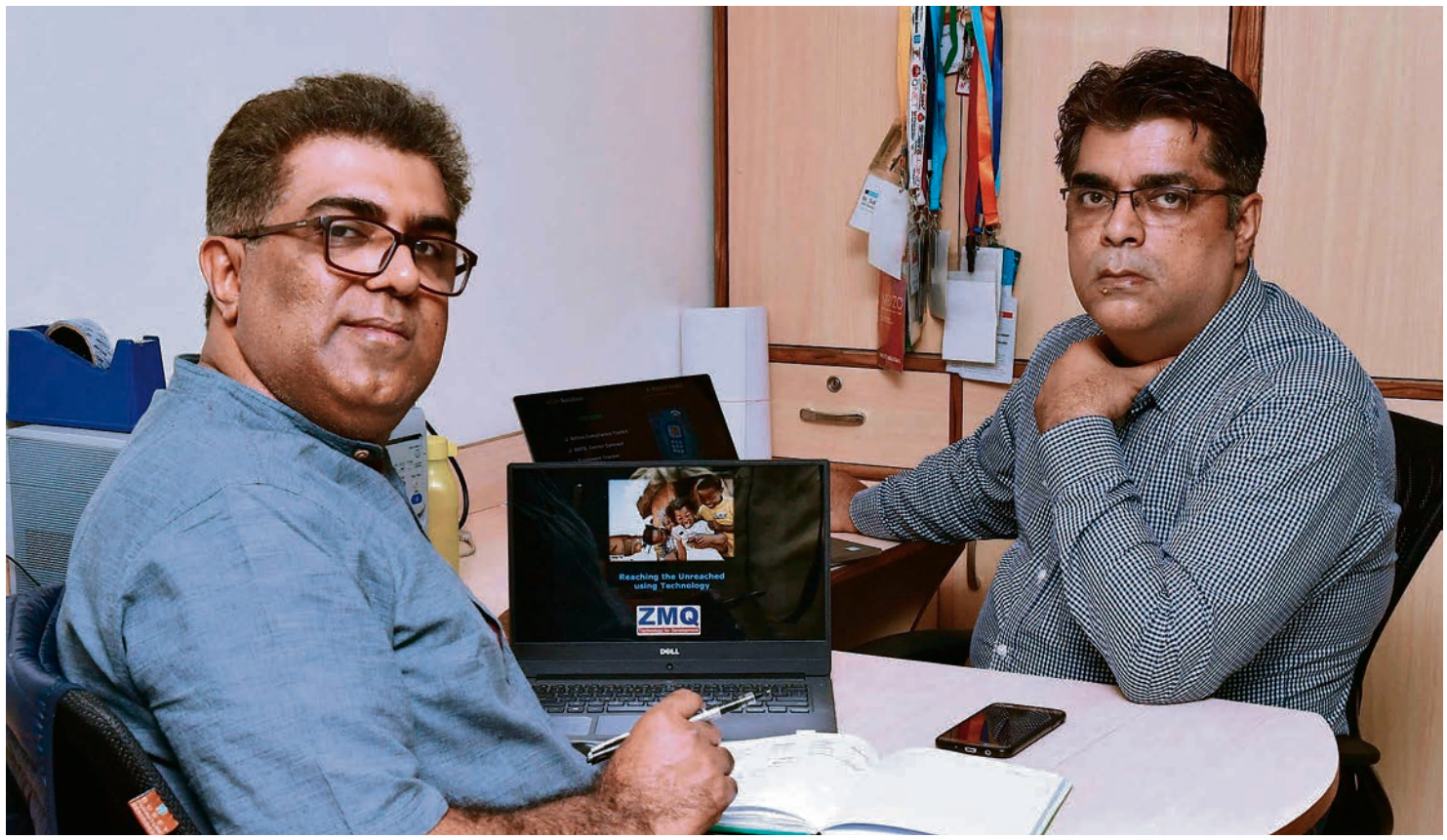
CHANGEMAKER - DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

ZMQ Development

A mobile lifeline for the poor

ZMQ Development's MIRA channel delivers life-saving information in a fun way over the mobile to those with limited resources **Chitra Narayanan**



ZMQ co-founder Hilmi Quraishi (left) with CEO Subhi Quraishi KAMAL NARANG

In Jinja, a town some 80 km from the Ugandan capital of Kampala, a favourite name for baby girls now is Mira. Some 5,500 km away, in Delhi, this is bringing smiles to the faces of social entrepreneurs Hilmi and Subhi Quraishi, founders of ZMQ Development.

For grateful Ugandans are naming their bonny baby girls after ZMQ's mobile phone channel MIRA, which delivers life-saving health information in a fun way to pregnant women and adolescent girls.

MIRA, or Mobile Integrated Resources for Aurat, is one of the digital innovations on health and education ZMQ — a technology for development firm — has developed for thousands of people in rural India, Uganda and Afghanistan.

For the Quraishi twins, who are just short of 50, this kind of appreciation from the beneficiaries of their programme is far more significant than the many awards that have come their way in their 19-year social entrepreneurial journey.

Working out of an unpretentious office in a Delhi suburb, the Quraishi brothers have been quietly transforming the lives of many using the coding skills they learnt in Russia. Their mobile apps break down important health issues into simple stories and engaging games that are literally talking toolkits for people with low literacy levels.

More importantly, their out-of-the-box solutions are changing the traditional top-down approach to public healthcare in India.

To give an example: In treating Tuberculosis (TB), a major health problem that claims 500,000 lives every year just in India, non-compliance is a big challenge. Patients need to take their medication regularly to purge themselves of this infectious disease, but forget or do not complete the course leading to drug resistance. The WHO recommended approach followed by most nations is DOTS, or Directly Observed Treatment, Short Course, which focusses on surveillance. Typically, the patient has to report to a health centre and compliance is marked on a register. This, says Subhi Quraishi, is a top-down approach.

In contrast, ZMQ's Freedom TB programme sends a voice notification to every TB patient at the medication time followed by an optimistic message that gives hope of cure soon.

When they started this campaign in Mewat in Haryana, the ZMQ team was shocked to find that the actual compliance rate was far lower than that recorded by government health workers. Often target-based recording of data results in over-reporting. Evidence-based reporting gives clues on why a patient has missed out on medication, and the issue can be addressed.

Similar mobile phone solutions have been developed for maternal health, immunisation, polio, HIV/AIDS, and other health challenges.

In most places ZMQ's interventions ride on existing government platforms and systems. But often they add a layer of their own.

Take the case of maternal health. The Government's Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) educate and spread awareness on universal immunisation, reproductive care and child health among other things, at the village level. But they are over-worked.

What ZMQ has done is to send a set of MIRA workers to the field to teach rural women to use apps, ask questions, enter data and so on. Voice-based applications and visual icons help those unable to read.

Scaling it up and creating impact

Typically public healthcare projects face the challenge of scale. ZMQ has overcome this

with its MIRA model, which after its successful rollout in Haryana is being replicated in Odisha and even internationally.

The good work in Mewat district, where there has been a 55 per cent increase in antenatal care consultations, 49 per cent jump in institutional deliveries and 41 per cent rise in child immunisation rate, caught the eye of the Millennium Alliance, a platform which helps scale up innovations that benefit the bottom of the pyramid.

Founded by the Technology Development Board, Department of Science and Technology, US Agency for International AID (USAID) and FICCI, the Millennium Alliance has taken MIRA to Uganda and Afghanistan giving ZMQ grants and helping with capacity building.

Says Nirankar Saxena, Deputy Secretary General, FICCI: "ZMQ has been one of the most promising social enterprises the Millennium Alliance has supported." He describes how they have demonstrated measurable impact.

According to their stats, MIRA has touched the lives of 850,000 women, adolescent girls and children delivering health information at their doorstep.

Some 66,000 women, children and girls in Uganda and 43,000 in Afghanistan are using the solution. The results of this simple, low-cost intervention have been phenomenal with 3,000 Ugandan and 1,700 Afghani women successfully completing their pregnancies using the MIRA Channel. Not one maternal death has been reported during the project period.

And, MIRA is expanding by the day. Says Hilmi Quraishi, "In Uganda, we scaled from one to three districts. Beyond that the government is going to manage it." He also shares his vision of "Ubering" MIRAs. "Every girl in a village can be a MIRA, and create a universe of Miras," he says.

After Haryana, ZMQ's MIRA model is now being replicated in Odisha and is even being tried internationally

Fire in the belly and dad's vision

Looking at their upbringing, the Quraishis' foray into social entrepreneurship was predestined. Their parents instilled in them staunch Gandhian values and a thirst for knowledge. Their political scientist dad, Dr Zahid Masood Quraishi (that's where ZMQ derives its name from) and their mother Meraj, a lecturer, always exhorted them to spread learning. Hilmi describes how his dad, who named their elder sister Ilmana (knowledge), would say that if every individual educated just two more, illiteracy would vanish from India. The Quraishi twins did their schooling at Montfort school in Delhi's Ashok Vihar, but when the boys were 16, their father, who had been educated partly in Egypt, sent them to the Soviet Union for higher studies as he wanted them to also absorb socialist values. They had finished their MS in Computer Science in Moscow and started on their PhD, when their dad died and the twins returned to India. "On the journey back, we decided to start an organisation in our father's name that would deliver education," says Hilmi.

In the initial years (1999-2002), all they had was the fire in their bellies, with only their mom's salary and their dad's pension to support them. They made mistakes. For instance, they created an entry-level literacy programme for children on CDs but when they went to villages they discovered these were useless with no computers. "We were doing things with passion but without any analysis," says Hilmi.

But they learnt from every mistake. The break came when they created a game-based learning kit on HIV/AIDS. It was picked up by the Delhi State AIDS Control Society. By 2003, the brothers had launched their first mobile application — a game with social messaging. Reliance began running this on its R-World platform.

"We moved from HIV/AIDS to tuberculosis, and did campaigns on climate change, polio, leprosy, mental health — all through games on R-World," says Hilmi.

Gradually, work began coming in from development organisations. Subhi Quraishi proudly points out that ZMQ may actually have been a pioneer in social games.

Spreading out

The Quraishi brothers' minds are always ticking, solving problems. There is no resting on the success of MIRA. The next innovation — an adorable, talking doll that advices children and pregnant women — is ready. The Pashto-speaking doll has been given to women in-Afghanistan.

"Women in villages often don't get their own mobile phones. So, the dolls can take their place and reach them with useful messages," points out bright-eyed Ayushi Singh, programme manager at ZMQ. The dolls also capture information — women can talk/reply to them. This is captured on a disk, which is collected by a MIRA worker and uploaded on a server.

Now, the Quraishis want to introduce the dolls in India. These will cost barely Rs 400-Rs 600, they say.

They are also working on an early education programme, Kreeda Aangan, that delivers basic literacy through games. "There is no better way than games to take education to the last mile," says Subhi Quraishi.

A new project they are excited about is 'Your Storyteller'. These are real stories gleaned from village people that have been animated and delivered back to them with a subtle message. Particularly poignant is a story on child marriage.

So far most of ZMQ Development's work has been funded through grants or sustained through projects that the sister firm, ZMQ Technologies, does.

The Quraishis are clear they don't want to mix commercial work with the non-profit service they do. As Subhi says, "I don't want to die with a billion dollars in my bank account but would rather touch a billion lives."

Q&A

Hilmi Quraishi, Subhi Quraishi

'Be selfless and focus on goals'

How difficult is to bring change?
If you have the fire, are persistent and stick to your objectives, then it is not difficult.

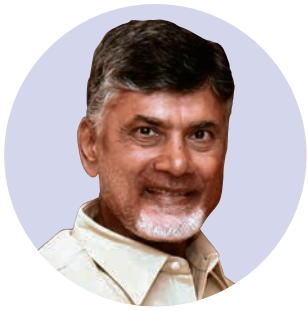
What are the attributes of a changemaker?
Must have constant focus, and a goal in mind. Should be selfless and dedicated, and ethically correct.

Do you think India encourages changemakers?
There are some contradictions in society… India has to build a culture of looking at the needs of all.

What is the biggest change you would like to see in India
Equality and justice at every level.

CHANGEMAKER - DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Other nominees...



N Chandrababu Naidu

The chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, he is a great proponent of technology and its utility in improving governance. He is a big believer in solving problems using data rather than by relying on instinct. To achieve this he has initiated State-wide data collection. Today, no other State in India has a data portal that is as comprehensive and transparent as that of Andhra Pradesh. From the core dashboard of this portal, Naidu can access the key performance indicators of 33 departments, including information such as power generated daily, water levels in reservoirs, the rainfall scenario, tax revenue collected, etc. He has launched E-Pragathi, a ₹2,400-crore State-wide enterprise architecture that seeks to leverage the power of technology for good governance. In Naidu's words: "This is a great way of reviewing our shortfalls and achievements." Not surprisingly, the NDA Government entrusted Naidu with the task of heading a chief ministers' task force on digitisation.

Hotstar

Owned by broadcaster Star India, it is currently India's numero uno premium streaming platform in terms of downloads (300 million). It was launched in early 2015. With nearly 1,00,000 hours of exclusive content across eight languages and coverage of the biggest sporting events from around the world, including cricket, football, kabaddi, tennis, F1 and badminton, Hotstar has a huge and diverse content portfolio. The Hotstar Premium service features television shows, movies and sports from around the world, including Emmy Award-winning shows such as *Game of Thrones*, *Veep* and *Silicon Valley*, and live sporting tournaments, including Premier League and F1, all at a monthly subscription fee of ₹199. Hotstar has appropriated the top spot on the Google Play Store as well as the Apple App Store, and has been named among the most popular apps of 2017 on both platforms. Hotstar is still burning cash — its parent, Novi Digital, posted a loss of ₹409 crore in 2015-16. Its subscription revenue stood at ₹24 crore and revenue from advertising amounted to ₹128 crore.

Practo

This healthcare portal began operations in 2007 and caters to patients, doctors, diagnostic chains, hospitals and other healthcare providers, offering a range of services from booking appointments to ordering medicines. It has two aspects to its business: the first is helping consumers identify doctors and book appointments; the second is a software for clinics and hospitals, through which patient medical records can be stored and accessed. Practo has a team of over 1,500 people. According to the company's RoC filing, at the end of FY2016, Practo had clocked a revenue of ₹165.14 crore and posted a loss of ₹64.61 crore.

Ola

Founded in December 2010 by Bhavish Aggarwal, alumnus of IIT-Bombay, along with fellow IIT-Bombay alumnus Ankit Bhati, this taxi service offers a range of services. They include affordable AC cabs and luxury rides as well as localised offerings such as autorickshaws, shuttle buses, cycles, rentals, outstation travel, and corporate travel. The Ola app integrates city transportation for customers and driver partners onto a mobile technology platform to provide convenient, transparent and quick service for hassle-free on-demand transportation. Ola's success is attributed to the innovative mindset that saw it introduce many features that took its rival Uber many months to replicate. It is one of the most well-funded startups in India, having raised $3 billion to date. Bhavish does not own a car and vows that he never will.

UdyamiMitra

This comprehensive digital platform was launched by SIDBI in December 2017 to provide micro, small and medium enterprises better access to credit as well as expertise. It can be used by entrepreneurs to get loans of up to ₹2 crore under the MUDRA Yojana through any bank branch mapped on the portal. To boost entrepreneurship, the portal also provides access to non-financial services and expertise from handholding agencies. The online module helps in auto-estimation of working capital needs and enables MSME applicants to provide information electronically, access bankable project profiles, communicate with various stakeholders and track their application. It also serves as a one-stop source for all schemes/subsidy-related information pertaining to the MSME sector in India.

CHANGEMAKER - SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Other nominees...

Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan

Founded by by Zakia Soman and Noorjahan Safia Niaz in 2007 in Mumbai, this autonomous organisation fights for the rights of Muslim women. It was at the forefront of the demand to ban the practice of Triple Talaq and has campaigned for implementation of the recommendations of the Sachar Committee Report. Earlier, BMMA conducted a study of Muslim women's views on reforms in Muslim Personal Law — 'Seeking Justice Within the Family' — across 10 States and found that an overwhelming 82 per cent of the over 4,000 women surveyed had no property in their name; 78 per cent were homemakers with no income of their own; and 92 per cent had no idea about Muslim Personal Law. It released a draft on June 23, 2014 called 'Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act' recommending that polygamy be made illegal in Muslim Personal Law. BMMA has also worked for Hindu women in several cases. It has backed Hindu women in their fight to seek entry into the Shani Shingnapur temple in Ahmednagar, Maharashtra.

Ekam

A not-for-profit organisation, Ekam was started in 2007 by Dr Sailakshmi Balijepalli, a paediatrician, to improve the public healthcare system and lower child and maternal mortality. It partners with government agencies to upgrade newborn-care units in government hospitals, enable health checks of mothers and children, and help in appointment of nurses in government hospitals. Its interventions are sustainable and involve multiple stakeholders such as public health bodies, government hospitals, private hospitals, corporate groups, health professionals and the community. Ekam has screened 80,000 children so far and has supplied drugs worth ₹2 crore, lab equipment, manpower, and secondary- and tertiary-care support to hospitals.

Centre for Aquatic Livelihood – Jaljeevika

This Pune-based NGO was founded by Neelkanth Mishra in December 2013 to promote entrepreneurship in inland fisheries, as an alternative for those otherwise dependent solely on rain-fed agriculture. It aims to bring together stakeholders, local governments and organisations, technical experts, policy analysts and advocates, and natural resource managers to "science-farm" together. It also provides small and marginal farmers access to credit, markets and formal institutions. CAL Jaljeevika works in Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra to strengthen fisheries cooperatives, fisheries-related farmer-producer organisations, and women's self-help groups. It introduces farmers to the entire fisheries value chain, from seed production and net-making to sales and marketing.

Energy Efficiency Services

EESL is a joint venture of public sector undertakings controlled by the Ministry of Power. Set up in 2010, the company was tasked with creating and sustaining markets for energy efficiency in the country. It has risen to prominence under the current government. Since 2014, EESL has been implementing UJALA (Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for All), the world's largest zero-subsidy domestic LED bulb programme. Over 28.85 crore LED bulbs have been distributed as of mid-February and this has led to a saving of 37 billion kWh of energy annually. In value terms the saving amounts to ₹14,989 crore. In addition, a peak demand of 7,502 MW has been avoided and 3.03 tonnes of carbon dioxide have been reduced per annum. EESL is looking at electric vehicles as the next big step towards improving energy efficiency in India. It recently floated the world's largest tender for electric vehicles.

Cochin International Airport

CIAL is the first greenfield airport in India built under the unique PPP mode. It is also the first airport in the world that operates on solar power. The 12 MWp solar power plant comprising 46,150 solar panels laid across 45 acres near the cargo complex produces 60,000 units of electricity every day, sufficient to meet the power requirements. Originally expected to cost over ₹1,000 crore to build, this international airport finally cost less than ₹250 crore, owing to indigenous design. The project was implemented with the support of 18,000 shareholders from 29 countries and delivered on time thanks to a unique rehabilitation package which later became a case study for World Bank. It recorded a Profit After Tax (PAT) of ₹179.45 crore on a turnover of ₹669 crore in FY17. CIAL is now a case study for various B-Schools brainstorming on managerial issues related to corporate leadership and ethics. Government is expected to lean on CIAL and its experience as it rolls out its UDAN scheme which requires cost-efficient airports to be built in rural India.

GVK EMRI

This technology-based service is arguably India's first comprehensive mass-scale emergency response mechanism. It has changed the way emergencies are handled in the country, using a common number, 108, much like the 911 service in the US. The 108 service, a brainchild of the now-disgraced B Ramalinga Raju (founder of Satyam Computer Services), has saved thousands of lives and attends to medical, fire and crime calls. A caller in distress or a passer-by need not worry about explaining the location of an incident. The GIS-based technology automatically detects the location, distributes the call details to relevant people and deputes the nearest ambulance in the fleet. Backed by a technology backbone, EMRI services were flagged off in April 2005 with a small fleet of 30 ambulances in 50 towns. A shot in the arm for EMRI was the State Government's willingness to contribute 95 per cent of the funding for the public-private initiative. After the Satyam scam the GVK group stepped in to fill in the gap. Satyam's new owner, Tech Mahindra, continues to provide technological support to the company.

CHANGEMAKER - SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Sridhar Vembu

Made in India, taking on the world

Zoho's products are used by millions, and they're made by top engineers as well as people from underprivileged backgrounds **TE Raja Simhan**

Prema, 18, daughter of a silversmith living in a remote village in Virudachalam in southern Tamil Nadu, had to walk a couple of miles to her school. She did this day after day, determined to complete at least 12th standard before her parents rushed to get her married. Fast forward ten years to the present. She is an iPhone app developer at software company Zoho, earning some ₹75,000 a month.

At Zoho, there are many like Prema, who have braved poverty to become software engineers. Vikas, son of a mechanic, and Srilatha, daughter of a farmer, for instance.

These bright students were picked by Zoho University (ZU) after their 12th standard and trained to write complex programming codes at Zoho, rubbing shoulders with graduates from top engineering colleges, and earning as much.

The brain behind the idea is Zoho co-founder Sridhar Vembu. The 50-year-old, who himself hails from a Thanjavur hamlet in southern Tamil Nadu, wanted to do two things: tap talent right at the school level and help economically weak families educate their bright children.

Thus, ZU was conceived as an alternative to conventional colleges. The university does not offer any recognised degree, but in the software industry, ZU students are well-recognised.

The university, which started with a class of just six a decade ago, has so far trained some 650 students. Every year, a hundred students get trained at ZU, 70-75 in Chennai and 25-30 at Zoho's Tenkasi office.

Technically, Zoho is headquartered in the US but all its employees are located in Chennai and Sivakasi. Recently, the company started a centre in Renigunta in Andhra Pradesh. About 10 per cent of Zoho's 5,000-strong workforce are ZU alumni. They have played a critical part in Zoho's Made-in-India applications that often compete with those developed by giants like Google and Microsoft in the US, Europe, and China.

BIJOY GHOSH

Long journey

For 'vice-chancellor' Sridhar Vembu, it's been an educative journey in the last two decades.

Sridhar's parents belong to a family of agriculturists. But his father, S Vembu, moved to Chennai, and eventually worked at the Madras High Court for over 30 years. His mother is a home-maker.

Being the eldest of five siblings (three brothers and a sister), young Sridhar had much responsibility thrust on him. Yet, he did well academically.

Sridhar attended Anjugam Higher Secondary School in West Mambalam in Chennai until 9th standard, and then moved to Jaigopal Garodia National Higher Secondary School in East Tambaram to finish his 12th standard in 1985. He obtained a B.Tech degree from IIT-Madras and went on to get a PhD in electrical engineering from Princeton University, US.

Much of India's talent, even today, lies undiscovered. There are way too many diamonds in the rough

Sridhar joined Qualcomm as a wireless systems engineer but his passion was to become an entrepreneur. After a short stint at Qualcomm, Sridhar set off on an entrepreneurial voyage. Fascinated by the Indian software business, though still in its nascent stage then, Sridhar with two of his brothers — Sekar and Kumar — and three friends founded a small IT company, AdventNet, in 1996 out of a garage in Tambaram, Chennai.

AdventNet was rechristened Zoho Corporation in May 2009, and there has been no looking back for Sridhar and Zoho.

While these two brothers turned independent entrepreneurs — Sekar started Vembu Technologies and Kumar GoFrugal Technologies — sister, Radha, and youngest brother, Mani, work at Zoho in Chennai.

Synonymous with operating systems for business, Zoho has nearly 40 applications for every segment: sales, marketing, customer support, accounting and back-office operations. It also offers an array of productivity and collaboration tools.

Zoho's user-base of 34 million-plus across 120 countries speaks volumes for the success of its products globally.

Trigger

Looking back on what triggered the Zoho idea, Sridhar says, "I saw a huge opportunity in software, and also saw that India has a vast talent pool. Much of India's talent, even today, lies undiscovered. There are way too many diamonds in the rough. The process of building software and technology and the process of building our skills are two sides of the same coin. 'Learn as you do' is the idea of contextual and experiential education. It is heartening to see the idea work, and the proof is Zoho."

Bootstrap king

Clad in jeans and a black Zoho T-shirt, Sridhar is different from most startup founders. He does not believe in getting funds from external sources. This means the entire funding to build the 5,000-plus employee company in the last ten years has come from Sridhar's pocket, and from accrued profits.

"The foremost reason we have not taken external funding is because we don't need it. But it goes deeper. I have seen how companies that get funded lose what made them unique and interesting. We survive by being interesting and relevant, and remaining private allows us to reinvent ourselves. Even after 22 years, the startup spirit lives on at Zoho," he says.

In his role as CEO, Sridhar guides strategic programmes around employee advocacy and business development. He likes working on design patterns and creating new programming languages. Sridhar has also been instrumental in broadening and deepening Zoho's software portfolio to develop several business applications.

The whole atmosphere at Zoho is building and expanding the system. "A successful company creates an ecosystem, and I am happy to see the flourishing ecosystem born out of Zoho. Numerous companies have come out of the Zoho stable, including Freshworks, vtiger, ChargeBee, vTitan, Falacio and Edcite," says Sridhar.

Zoho university

As a startup, Zoho had trouble finding talent, with most graduates, particularly from well-known colleges, preferring big names. Zoho decided to disregard the college a person had graduated from or the grades he/she had obtained. Most of Zoho's recruitment was by 'word-of-mouth' but it still could not attract IITians ot IIM grads. This was another reason that drove Zoho towards starting its university.

It does not offer a recognised degree, but in the software industry, ZU is well-recognised

Zoho University went to schools to identify 16/17-year-olds in Plus-2 who could potentially become software engineers. It administers an entrance test, and puts qualifiers through a 24-month training course where they are taught different subjects, including English, Math and Programming, for 12 months. At the end of the first year, students are moved to working teams for hands-on experience.

Initially, ZU did not pay students any stipend. But, now, it pays from Day 1 a monthly stipend of ₹8,000, and gives every student a laptop with 24x7 internet connection.

As more than 50 per cent of students are from Tamil medium, the curriculum for English includes watching classic English movies and reading newspapers and articles.

Students are taught the latest in programming. They get trained in HTML, CSS, Javascript, Java, JSP, Databases, and Zoho's Frameworks.

The second year, with Zoho's product teams, is more like an apprenticeship. The performance of the successful students is indistinguishable from that of their college-educated peers.

"We believe the higher education establishment is not serving the cause of education; it is expensive too. We do not believe college is the only or the best way to get a good education. We believe it is a travesty for the academic establishment to encourage young men and women to pile up so much debt in the pursuit of a degree," says Sridhar.

"India has the raw talent pool to be a global leader in technology. The challenge is to create companies and products from, and for, all that talent. I have always relished this challenge. It has been a fulfilling and rewarding journey," he says, about creating Made-in-India software products for global markets.

No wonder Forbes described Sridhar as the "Smartest Unknown Indian Entrepreneur". And, this 'smartest unknown' Indian will continue to give global giants a run for their money with his innovations and products.

(Employee names have been changed for privacy reasons.)

Q&A

Sridhar Vembu

'Look beyond book learning and degrees'

How difficult is it to bring about a change?
The fundamental difficulty is inertia, or lethargic indifference, which is harder to counter than active opposition.

What are the attributes a changemaker should have to become successful?
A strong sense of mission, arising from internal conviction, while also being open-minded to find pragmatic pathways.

Does India, as a society, encourage changemakers?
Despite the vastness of India and its diversity, it is difficult to get a substantial proportion to agree with you. Yet, it is possible to find one's own niche.

What is the biggest change you wish to see?
India embracing experiential and contextual education, rather than formalist credentialism, which emphasises book learning and degrees. Only this can create skills and opportunities for our vast population, while spreading the fruits of development and prosperity in an equitable fashion.

How we did it

After a thorough evaluation at the preliminary stages, a high-powered jury finally chose the winners

RAMESH SHARMA

(From left) Jury members Debjani Ghosh, Gopal Srinivasan, Amitabh Kant, Naina Lal Kidwai, CV Madhukar, Rohini Nilekani and S Ramadorai (via videoconference)

The *BusinessLine* Changemaker awards were instituted to commemorate the 25th year of this newspaper. But rather than just felicitating corporate excellence, these awards celebrate individuals and organisations whose work has had a positive and far-reaching impact on people's lives. We wanted to recognise changemakers, especially unsung ones, with these unique awards.

The award process began with a call to the public on December 14, 2017 seeking nominations. Simultaneously journalists from *BusinessLine* and the award's Knowledge Partners — Deloitte and Ashoka — Innovators for the Public — began nominating potential candidates.

The nomination window closed at midnight on January 17, 2018. Over 600 nominations were received across five categories — Changemaker of the Year, Young Changemaker, Changemaker – Social Transformation, Changemaker – Financial Transformation and Changemaker – Digital Transformation (no nominations were sought for the Iconic Changemaker category as the candidates were shortlisted by *BusinessLine* and the Knowledge Partners).

In all, 588 nominations were subject to the award's selection criteria, over five rounds of screening. Finally, a shortlist of 92 names emerged.

The 92 screened nominations were pruned to 49 through a pre-evaluation exercise and the 49 nominations were then subjected to our detailed evaluation criteria. This process resulted in the final set of 28 nominees for the five categories and six names for the Iconic Changemaker category, taking the total number of nominees to 34.

These 34 names were presented to an independent jury chaired by Amitabh Kant (CEO- Niti Aayog) and comprising S Ramadorai (former vice-chairman, TCS), Naina Lal Kidwai (banker & former country head of HSBC in India), Gopal Srinivasan (CMD, TVS Capital Funds), Rohini Nilekani (Founder–Chairperson, Arghyam), Debjani Ghosh (President-Designate, Nasscom) and CV Madhukar (Investment Partner, Omidyar Network).

The jury met in New Delhi on February 23 (Ramadorai joined through a video conference from Mumbai) and deliberated for over two hours to arrive at the winners.

600+
Nominations

34
Nominees

6
Winners

A Changemakers 2018 evaluation meeting in progress at *BusinessLine*'s headquarters in Chennai BIJOY GHOSH

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