

Contribution to society improves our work efficiency and we can contribute to the organisation better:

Nagappa Bakkannanavar

Nagappa Bakkannanavar is the Assistant General Manager and head of Information Resource Centre (IRC) of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Bengaluru. He is managing TCS libraries at Bengaluru branch and in addition, he is passionately contributing to the TCS's CSR initiatives on education, health and environment. His untiring field work has inspired countless students studying in the villages and towns.



*In this interview with **Santosh C. Hulagabali** for **Open Interview**, he candidly shares how his initial journey of social work began when he was barely fifteen years old. His passion got new wings when he got into social work at TCS. He talks on why and how TCS carries out CSR activities, how the teams are delegated, how the initiatives are evaluated and how they succeed in creating the impact in the social segment.*

- **You are one such library professional whom we often find off the library grooming students studying in villages and towns as part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative of TCS. Indeed, we appreciate your work.**

I thank you for the encouraging words on my contribution towards CSR activities.

Having born in a poor agricultural family, I have seen many ups and downs during my childhood. However, looking at others who are living in similar or worse conditions, I feel that my problems are nothing as compared to them and I strongly want to do something good for them.

At the age of 15, with no strong plan I set up *Saraswati Pustaka Bandhara* - a collection of used school textbooks, novels, etc. donated by kindhearted people. This was my first step to work for the society. Those books were shared with needy students for a period of one year and

were collected back after the exams. However, due to unavoidable circumstances, I could run it only for a couple of years and my parents also wanted me to close it and focus on my studies.

I had dreamt of becoming a teacher and teach the children at the grass root level. After my graduation, I tried getting admitted to Bachelor of Education and Master of Arts in English but I couldn't get the seat in both these courses. Later, I opted for Bachelor of Laws. During this period, I worked as security guard to meet my daily needs and support my studies. Looking at my financial condition, one of my friends suggested to pursue Master of Library and Information Science (M.L.I.Sc.), which could provide me better job opportunities. I got myself admitted to M.L.I.Sc. with a hope to get a job.

The dream came true. Immediately after pursuing M.L.I.Sc., I got a job as Lecturer in a polytechnic college. I worked for a short-period and then started my career as librarian. For nearly eight years, I served as librarian at various medical and engineering colleges. For the past fourteen years, I am working as Branch Head of Information Resource Centre, Tata Consultancy Services, Bengaluru.

• **We are curious to know in detail why TCS has commissioned this CSR task, how you are entrusted with responsibility to carry out that task and how is it being executed.**

Since its inception (1868), Tata Group is involved in various causes for the benefit of society. It is contributing about 66% of its profit for the societal improvement. Being a subsidiary of Tata Group, TCS also serves the society through sustainable CSR programmes.

TCS supports people and planet under the banner of 'Impact through Empowerment', where empowerment is a process of strengthening the future today so that risk is minimized, value is created, and certainty is experienced. TCS makes this happen using its IT/BPS core competence, wide geographical footprint, volunteering and sponsorship through the active involvement of its employees. The core areas of its CSR initiatives are education, health, environment, restoration of heritage and affirmative action.

Affirmative Action (AA) is a natural extension of TCS' core belief of helping individuals overcome historical constraints of class and marginalisation to realise their potential. This very approach (AA) focuses on employability, education and entrepreneurship thereby enabling the underprivileged communities to take a lead in improving their well-being and bettering their lives.

I am handling multiple programmes of TCS AA in the areas of employability. I deploy these programmes as a faculty member/mentor and evaluate the progress made as part of the leadership team and suggest future course of action and scope for improvement.

TCS believes that providing access to quality skill-based education will help create a noticeable transition in the life of the students and help them step confidently into the corporate world. TCS conducts dedicated employability trainings on IT/BPS Employability Skills, Project Guidance, etc. in 250+ colleges across India. Certification courses and academic projects are provided to students to strengthen their technical skills. TCS also provides digital courses on communication and technical skills (as foundation courses) Faculty development programmes and technical books from our TCS libraries are donated to rural colleges as well.

All these programmes are delivered by TCS employees like me in the college premises investing our personal time under the banner of 'Purpose4Life'. On successful completion of the courses, students are provided with opportunity to join TCS. Employees also sponsor and mentor meritorious underprivileged girls. TCS also sponsors a vocational course in collaboration with Tata Institute of Social Science for rural students.

• **What is required to be so engrossed, committed and active in social initiative?**

Our initiatives are driven by thousands of volunteers and I am one among them. Organisation and the employees believe strongly that contribution to society improves their work efficiency and they can contribute to the organisation better with the satisfaction of having brought smile on many faces.

Yes, to be on field, it requires sensitivity and social will to reach out to the needy. When we reach out to the rural colleges to deploy an intense programme for a duration of 18-24 months, it requires enormous commitment from the volunteers to deploy the modules with rigor and robustness for every batch of students. Apart from sensitivity and social will, a huge knowledge base, large workforce, wide geographic presence, strong technology edge and diverse domain expertise are also required.

These aspects help devise programme modules, ensure robust deployment model and create quality course content to bring a substantial improvement in the quality of skill-based education. We regularly revise deployment model based on the industry- requirements, feedback from stakeholders, deployment geography, student demographics and beneficiaries' reach. Therefore, it requires a large technical workforce. With an impending need for such intervention across the globe, these kinds of initiatives are being executed by large organisations like TCS which has a global presence and strong community reach.

I am happy to be an integral part of these initiatives.

• **How is your experience so far? Do you enjoy what you are doing?**

Yes, I'm enjoying these activities very much. My journey with CSR is simply fantastic and I am expecting the same to continue in the upcoming years as well. Through TCS CSR employability initiative, I'm able to fulfill my dream of grooming the students at various

institutions across Karnataka and even in the neighbouring state- Andhra Pradesh. I feel so proud of my contribution, which has helped 2500+ rural students to enhance their skills and meet the industry requirements. 1500+ have got jobs at various MNCs including TCS. They are leading their life happily and are even doing their part in grooming rural students further.

On the other hand, with my active involvement in the CSR initiatives, I'm also growing both personally and professionally. I can now see there is tremendous improvement in my inter-personal skills, presentation skills and communication skills. Therefore,

I keep myself busy from Monday to Friday at office and gain satisfaction over the weekends by imparting my knowledge to students at different colleges and redefining their career.

• **As a Branch Head of TCS Information Resource Centre in Bengaluru, you are managing good number of IRCs and leading a big team of LIS professionals and serving several thousand users. In addition to this, you are actively managing all administrative tasks. How do you manage the routine work at your office and field work?**

I'm not the only one person who manages all the tasks; instead we work together as a team. My team is very encouraging and cooperative. It is because of that I can focus on both the things. Above all, the support of our management and guidance of the proactive leadership which is influenced by the Tata group philosophy of society first, well planned and future focused tasks, allocation of right task to the right personnel, etc. play a vital role in managing both the libraries and also the field work.

• **During your visits to the field work, you observe so many things- things that they lack or things that they have in abundance. Can you please share your impressions?**

- Engineering and science contributes to 40% of total hiring in India, but employability of two million plus graduates every year for technical roles is less than 20%. There is 29% difference in employability between rural and urban students. In rural regions, lack of English proficiency and computer skills affect the employability prospects of capable students. Also, trained, multifunctional, and skilled youth from rural areas perceive their cultural identity as a weakness and badly need help to build the requisite confidence, courage and knowledge to work with employers in and outside of India.

Most employers prefer recruiting students largely from reputed colleges and the students from rural regions hardly get a platform to showcase their potential and gain a rightful place in the industry. Hence, it is essential to focus on improving the employability of rural students.

Underprivileged students from rural regions are an inspiration for many of us because they live in socio-economic challenges in rural institutions and I could see how determined they

are to complete their graduation. They are highly receptive and appreciative of the quality sessions we deliver and are willing to commit themselves to greater extent and gain a job that might pull their entire family out of poverty. Their affection and respect towards us (and the organisation) is amazing and almost all of them join TCS when selected, because they believe us as their extended family. They work hard to prove their mettle and stay with us for long.

• **You interact with many students closely. While doing so, what stories they usually confide in you?**

It's worth listening to them. Each student has a different story to tell. While interacting with them, I come across their socio-economic condition, culture, surrounding environment, parental education, etc., During my intense interactions, students seek support on various skill sets, next generation technologies, latest industry trends and current job trends to achieve success in their career and these are being taken care in employability programmes as well. In order to keep their hopes alive and motivate them, to instill confidence and self-esteem in them, I narrate inspirational success stories of their peers to students. I create new stories along with sharing my own life story. These stories really impact them and prepare them to aim for greater success in their lives.

• **Being a library professional, is there any scope for library related aspects in the CSR initiative?**

Yes, there is a huge scope for library professionals. LIS fraternity may develop, upgrade and digitise libraries in rural schools/colleges, community centers and other deserving organisations. Lots of corporate organisations and NGOs are willing to set up libraries and improve the quality of resource material available for the benefit of children, youth and adults. This enables the beneficiaries to actively participate in knowledge-based society. For instance, recently TCS Foundation, the not-for-profit arm of TCS has donated twenty crore rupees to IIM Ahmedabad for restoring its Library. Similarly, TCS is donating thousands of books and magazines to government schools and engineering colleges to meet their requirements. We also orient the library staff to undertake effective library management practices. Our 'Adult Literacy Program' that has made one million adults to be functionally literate requires the NGO partners to setup community libraries for the learners.

• **What is the status of the libraries of the schools/ colleges you visit? How are you helping them in improving their library system?**

Some institutions have really good libraries. There is lots of scope for improvement in other libraries in the areas like resource materials, quality of the staff members, etc. I always make it a point to interact with the librarians, faculty members and principals during my visit to these institutions and give my inputs for the wholesome improvement of the libraries.

We have conducted book collection drives through employees and sale drives through vendors for donating quality books to rural institutions and help them meet their basic and regulatory requirements (for getting accredited). In fact, the impact created through our efforts varies from one institution to the other. A few institutions have proactively taken our inputs and implemented the suggestions. We always take pride of enhancing the libraries of rural institutions that play a vital role in shaping the future of the students for multiple generations.

• **How do you document and report your experiences or impact story and share with the company? How does the company take it forward to assess the impact of it and use it (for)?**

TCS has a strong design, deployment, monitoring and assessment framework for all the CSR programmes. Stakeholder-centric design thinking exercises are carried out annually to enhance the programme design. We have internal blogging tools like Knome, CSR Newsletters and social media tools to share our experiences with employees and external community. Programme deployment is completely managed against the goals set using our Programme Management tools. Our reach, outcome and impact observed are tracked against the goals set in these tools. Review meetings are held at multiple levels including the leadership team, program coordinators and volunteers. Institutional Case Studies and Reach Outcome Impact (ROI) are captured and analysed in these meetings and they are published in our annual sustainability report. Our programmes are regularly assessed by the Tata group under its annual Tata Affirmative Action Programme (TAAP) assessment and the areas of improvement and action plans are provided for further improvement. Comparative analysis is made and all the companies under Tata group are rated based on the impact created through our programmes.

• **Don't you feel that your experiences in the field should come out as case studies and they be accessible to the social workers, academicians and the LIS fraternity too?**

I had never thought of this on my personal front. However, our organization has tracked my contribution to 10+ programmes and has created a motivational story for our employees on our internal portal. I am one of the top three volunteers in our branch for the past many years and I often feel honoured when the employees look-up to me for guidance and motivation.

• **Apart from working for TCS's CSR initiative, in an individual capacity, you have carried out social work. Please share the details of your 'individual social responsibility'.**

I feel proud in this regard as I could invest myself in various ways and means to connect with my emotions and make a lifetime impact on few thousand human beings. Some of the recent

individual initiatives include funding school fee/textbooks to the children of support staff in our organisation, organising and sponsoring school/inter-school competitions to create the competitive environment among the school children sponsoring the best paper awards in conferences, delivering motivational lectures on various topics at different schools and colleges, sponsoring mother's conclave to make them accountable for their child's success, etc.

I made a memorable lifetime contribution to the school where I completed my education. I set up smart classroom, supported modernization of the school building, installed CCTV cameras in the campus, provided computers, printer, table and chairs and honoured the important personalities in the education sector, etc. at Government Higher Primary School located at Haveri in Karnataka. I invested over five lakh rupees for this cause.

It's amazing to see that more than 400 students from the school and neighbouring schools have got benefitted from this facility over the past one year. When I took stock of its impact or effectiveness majority of them opined that the facility helped enhance their skills.

This overwhelming response has inspired me to set up 2nd Smart Class at Government Higher Primary School (Girls), Devihosuru, Haveri in Karnataka in this month itself. I hope it will be received.

• **You are associated with Special Library Association and Karnataka State Library Association. Have you leveraged your CSR activities on their platforms to emphasize how libraries can impact the society through community services/initiatives? How these associations have supported you?**

Honestly, I haven't made much attempt in this regard. However, I have delivered an invited talk on 'Beyond Librarianship: Role of Librarians in Digital Society and their Social Responsibilities' in one of the conferences organized by Karnataka State Library Association. When I was a member of the public library finance committee, I had given inputs on leveraging corporate funds for the development of public libraries. There is an immense scope for blending CSR in this domain. With the proliferation of digital technologies and TCS being one of the largest digital solutions providers in India, library associations can enrich their digital content with TCS CSR educational offerings. By this they can get their digital infrastructure requirements met through the competencies of our employees.

• **You have served as one of the members of Board of Studies, Dept. of Library and Information Science of Osmania University. Does our LIS curriculum lack the focus or components on CSR initiatives by the Library or library professionals? What merits and gaps you find and how to address them?**

Serving on the Board of Studies at the Osmania University was a good experience and other board members were always encouraging and receptive to my suggestions. Currently, I am associated with a few more Institutions/Universities as a member of Board of Studies and their internal library committees.

Here, there is a scope for continual improvement and inclusion of CSR related components in the LIS curriculum that will make the LIS students socially connected.

- **Those intend to involve themselves voluntarily in community services or social activities even though their employers do not mandate it, how should they go about it and what are the areas that they can focus on?**

Sky is the limit for volunteering, and everyone is free to involve in community services. Volunteers can always take areas close to their heart and leverage their competencies to bring meaningful change. Also, basic understanding of the sector and geographies deserving more attention can make our efforts impactful.

- **You must be having fan following as your activities are popular among the participants. How do you get in touch with them to see their progress?**

Yes, many kindhearted and lovers of social work are following me on social media. They easily feel connected may be because of my humble rural background, career progress and student friendly approach and they easily feel connected. I receive an overwhelming response. Each word of appreciation boosts my energy and motivates me to do more and more for the betterment of the society. Since my network is spread across geographies, it's difficult to get in touch with everyone. However, I make it a point to meet the participants during my vacation and understand their progress. As said before, TCS CSR team completely tracks the initiatives and provides regular updates to all of us.

- **What would you say are the most important things that have you learned/gained so far from the field work?**

There are countless touching stories and experiences ever since I joined the CSR initiative. All I could say is that I have become more empathetic, caring, committed, being more contented with whatever I have and keep working hard to do my best in my profession. If my experience inspires others, that would be my greatest achievement.



Note • All the answers/ opinion expressed in this interview/document are of the interviewee.



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