

Indian Philanthropy: Pushpa Sundar's perspective

On February 23, 2017, Sehgal Foundation hosted a talk about philanthropy by Pushpa Sundar, author of the book *Giving with a Thousand Hands: The Changing Face of Indian Philanthropy*. Over 30 years in the field of development and civil service (having begun in 1963 as an Indian Administrative Service officer), she has since worked in national, international, nonprofit, government, and corporate organizations, such as the Ford Foundation, the Government of Gujarat, FICCI, and the National Foundation for India. She has consulted for the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Nand and Jeet Khemka Foundation, and many more. Exposure to international philanthropy as a senior fellow under the International Fellows in Philanthropy Program of the Johns Hopkins University in 1995 led to her becoming the driving force behind the establishment of Sampradaan Indian Centre for Philanthropy, New Delhi, a national intermediary organisation to promote and strengthen Indian philanthropy.

Ms Sundar spoke about India's need for philanthropy to supplement government provisions in the fields of education, health, environment, rural development, and the like, in order to reduce inequalities in society. She pointed out that giving (donating) money for causes is also a way to support protest and dissent, which is beneficial for good governance.

She explained the difference between charity and philanthropy. Charity caters to addressing immediate needs such in a natural disaster or when an individual is moved by compassion for a cause. No impact-based studies on charity are available to the public or featured in surveys. Philanthropy is also based on compassion but takes a long-term approach after reviewing strategies and plans. The donor or grantor of funds expects that the donation or grant will produce results in fulfilling a cause. Philanthropy can also be a catalyst for the reform of policies and for addressing the root causes of environmental and societal issues.

Among the reasons for low investment in philanthropy in India (vs. countries such as USA) is the trust deficit between funders and implementers and a lack of infrastructure for philanthropy. Indians have strong family ties and a large portion of their wealth is saved for family members to ensure their financial security. Corporate Social Responsibility is about philanthropy but also about practicing and promoting ethical business practices, producing good-quality products that do not harm the environment, and adhering to labor laws. A limited number of grant-making organizations are based in India and those corporations with home-grown foundations are slow to develop the necessary expertise in social areas, and very few companies invest in social enterprise.

India has a long way to go in terms of fulfilling what is missing in the area of philanthropy. Ms. Sundar suggests that legal and administrative aspects need to be simplified and more formal monitoring and compliance mechanisms, including a single directorate or chamber, are needed to represent the nonprofit sector.

(Article by Padmavathi S., Sehgal Foundation)