

The noise gets on my nerves



Cyrus Sahukar
VJ

Landed in Bombay late at night, almost seven years ago, and saw this ocean of people. The first impression of Mumbai was this strange buzz and high energy — things that are contagious.

Wherever you live in the country (in my case it was Delhi) you have always heard of Bombay. I was 19, not jaded yet, all excited to make my first trip to the city. I had come for my auditions at MTV when I first went to Juhu beach. I was blown away by the first sight of the ocean. I had never seen the ocean before. The first thing I did was jump into the water. And then I ate, ate and I ate. One advice to newcomers in Bombay — please don't ride the horse at the beach. I did just that and the horse galloped, refusing to stop. It wanted to take me straight to VT!

In Delhi (a desert compared to Mumbai) it hardly rains. People there get excited even watching water fall from their tap! So when I came here I would be the only one who would die to go out and enjoy the rains. My friends thought I was crazy, since all of them wanted to chill at home.

I do hate a few things about the city. The lack of infrastructure despite Bombay being the financial hub and the highest tax paying city, the noise levels and the traffic get on my nerves. But my relationship with Bombay is a love-hate relationship — when you are in it you crib, and when you are out of it, you miss it terribly.

Bombay is a learning ground. Everyone should come to Bombay for training on life because it is a miracle city. It gives each one at least one chance to do something with their lives. I always kept hearing that Bombay is a very difficult city. But I realised that it is the most cosmopolitan city in the country and a compassionate place.

The incident that changed my perspective was July 26. I was stuck at Nariman Point and had to walk to Bandra where I live. Not even one person harassed me. Forty boys helped me take my car to a safe place. People were distributing food, and water and lending cell phones. This was one time when people could have created problems. But I saw Bombay come together in times of trouble.

As told to *Suparna Thombare*

A million and more

Helmut Anheier's (Director of the Center for Civil Society at University of California, Los Angeles School of Public Affairs) research on NGO consortium activities places the number of internationally operating NGOs at 40,000. National numbers are even higher — Russia has 400,000 while India is estimated to have between one to two million NGOs.

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urban tales

Yashu Chowdhary likens her job to a prayer. "It brings smiles to so many faces," says the 28-year-old co-founder and director of Icoongo, an umbrella organisation of voluntary groups. Four years ago when she was a software developer at Wipro, Chowdhary thought her job was dead-end. "I asked myself everyday what I had achieved, and the answer was always, nothing," she says. That's when she decided to give non-profit work a shot. "My friends thought I was crazy to give up a lucrative job," she says. "My father was so upset, he stopped talking to me. But today they've all come around because they see me happy."

Chowdhary's not the only one. More and more young people are quitting jobs in management, finance, human resources, infotech, engineering and media for social sector positions. Sudeshna Das, 26, who works with a financial rating agency, recently started a voluntary organisation to help unemployed youngsters, with four of her friends — three management graduates and one engineer. "We still have our jobs, but only just," says Das. "When we scale up operations in November, some of us will have to quit. I, for one, would rather leave the job than give up my work." Reasons for this crossover, as experts have labelled this trend, are many. A decade ago the transition from private to social sector was only among older professionals who had made their money and their mark, and were looking for new challenges. "I had been a banker for 28 years," says Ujjwal Thakkar, CEO of the child rights group

Social sector jobs offer a recognition and visibility that can come to you only at the highest rungs of the corporate world

Pratham. "But I joined Pratham 12 years ago when I felt it was time for me to do other things. My kids had grown up, so I could afford to take casual payouts to join a non-profit." Today, many youngsters either opt for NGOs as their first job, or spend a few years in the corporate world before switching over.

For many of them, making a difference is not the only reason. "NGOs are no longer considered the domain of social workers," says Vimmi M Budhiraja, human resources general manager at Child Rights and You (CRY). "They have become a viable career option where you end up doing work that is as high-profile and interesting as in the corporate world." As for pay scales, NGOs in India are not exactly cash flush but many are able to chase corporate salaries, thanks to better resources management. And funding; a white paper published by a recent conference on "Crossing Over" estimates foreign funding to NGOs in the country in 2006 was a conservative Rs6,000 crores. "We can't match corporate pay scales, but some organisations do pay well," says Pushpa Aman Singh, COO of Give India, which is ready to fork out Rs10,000 for a fresh graduate in corporate communications — only about 30 per cent less than a comparable job in industry. For people with four to eight years experience, it could be anything between Rs30,000 and Rs1 lakh a month. Some NGOs benchmark salaries to those offered graduates from social sector institutes: a starting package of Rs22-25,000 a month, up from only about Rs8-10,000 a few years ago.

Still, when it comes to pay, it's a struggle for non-profits to attract young talent. "We're not always able to recruit young professionals because they have lots of other jobs options," says Tina Chatterjee, director (special assignments) at Concern India Foundation. "Even call centres and retail outlets pay better than NGOs."

Young professionals are ditching big pay packets and lucrative careers to join the social sector. **Labonita Ghosh** reports



Walk the talk: Employees at GiveIndia where 70 per cent of the staff is drawn from management, tech and engineering —Anshuman Poyrekar.DNA

Cause and effect

Adds Thakkar of Pratham: "When it comes to youngsters, my primary concern is that they will give NGOs a miss to somehow meet their families' expectations about pay and job profile. One has to be really passionate about voluntary work to overcome all this." This just makes it harder for organisations to lure jobseekers.

There are, however, other intangibles besides pay, says Meena Galliar, chairperson of the social entrepreneurship cell at the Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies. "So-

cial sector jobs offer a recognition and visibility that can come to you only at the highest rungs of the corporate world," she says. The sector is also opening up in other ways, says Pari Jhaveri of the headhunting firm, Third Sector Partners. "Non profits today are better organised and more professional. They take brand building, positioning and fund raising much more seriously now, creating a need for youngsters with specific technical and managerial skills." In a competitive market, NGOs know they need to, in a manner of speaking,

'go corporate'. Prospective funders also play this card. "NGOs come up with beautiful proposals, but no follow-up," she says. "So funding agencies insist on more professional staff before they put down the money."

B-schools across the country, having noticed this trend, are jumping in with facilitators. Some IIMs and IITs have corporate-NGO liaison cells, while Mumbai institutes like HR College of Commerce and SP Jain have a social sector component in their management curriculum. The social entrepreneurship cell at Narsee Monjee was introduced three years ago following a "market demand", and today a fifth of the 120-strong graduating class opts for non-profit jobs, says Galliar. International grant-makers like Acumen Fund or Gates Foundation offer fellowships, while some youngsters take the company's CSR route to full-time non-profit work. Greater exposure is happening through schools and colleges, says Singh of Give India, which has over 70 per cent of its staff drawn from management, tech or engineering. "NGOs like ours also make a direct pitch for more IT and b-school grads, when we advertise on IIT and IIM websites or the economic newspapers," she says.

Indeed, organisations benefit from this, too. "The management or tech graduates bring in professionalisms, and are very good at putting concepts, systems and business models in place," says Budhiraja of CRY, where 45 per cent of employees is from non-social sector areas. "This is useful for resources mobilisation, fund raising, advocacy with donors and administration in general." It's clearly symbiotic, as an engineering graduate with Akansha puts it. "I didn't find myself a good fit in the corporate world, but my work here is much richer," he says. Something that is true of both the NGO and its employee.

With inputs from *Barira T Gore*



Winds of change: Yashu Chowdhary quit her job to do non-profit work —Mukesh Trivedi.DNA

Out with the kurtas, in with the suits

Prashanth Iyer, 32, left his cushy Rs65 lakh-a-year job at Infosys last summer to join Basix, a livelihood promotion institution that works mainly in rural areas. With annual performance appraisals on successful completion of every project, Prashanth isn't missing the corporate culture in his current job profile.

"The only difference is, here I work for something more than a profitable balance sheet. I can and am making a difference in someone's life," says Prashanth.

With a growing number of professionals entering the social development sector, non-profit organisations are creating new job requirements. No longer are social workers doubling up as the fund raisers, counselors and campaign designers. Instead, non-profit organisations have created designations similar to those of corporate offices — brand managers, project managers, finance personnel and even executive director, or at least departments are being farmed out to accommodate these professionals.

"No matter the kind of organisation — profit or non-profit making — all are selling something. Here at Concern Indian Foundation we are selling a cause and we too need marketing professionals to sell our cause and raise funds, brand managers to create awareness and communication experts to get us publicity," says Tina Chatterjee, director Special Assignments, Concern India Foundation, which feels an acute need for people with marketing, sales, finance, advertising and banking experience.

"Earlier, such talent wasn't available but in the last three-four years

Brand managers, project managers, finance personnel and even executive directors. Everyone has a place in an NGO. **Sanghamitra Bhowmik** reports



Illustration: Varani Sahu

Better pay packets, non-interference, no hierarchy and high satisfaction levels are some of the reasons why professionals are prompted to walk the social development path

we have seen a surge in the number of professionals from marketing and advertising fields applying with us. They usually are middle and senior level employees and they help us with project design, marketing strategy, brand building and fund raising department," she adds.

While the help, till a few years ago, was from the outside in the form of volunteers, the emphasis these days is in recruiting full time professionals in both entry and senior level. Basix, a micro-credit company in Hyderabad, does just that. Providing credit to the rural poor, 80 per cent of Basix's staff consists of MBAs with finance and marketing specialisation

and MSc graduates a specialisation in agriculture. The company recruits from management schools such as Xavier Institute of Management, Bhubaneswar and Indian School of Business, Bangalore. "While we have defined job profiles for finance and marketing people like selling Basix's loan plans or studying project feasibility, we do not have defined job profiles for IT professionals. Yet, when last summer Prashanth wished to join us, we created a job profile that allowed him to use his IT skills for rural agriculture projects," says Reethi Sambhi, manager, corporate HR, Basix.

Mumbai-based Make A Wish

Foundation is another such organisation that's using professional help to get its message across. Says CEO Mukul Gupte, "Like how professional social workers are recruited by non-profit organisations to do counselling and other grass root level work we need professionals in other departments too. Some use us as a launch pad before entering the corporate field. And although I have some at Make A Wish Foundation there is a dearth of such talent in this sector."

But "commitment," he warns, "is the determining factor" in recruiting a professional. You may have all the required talent but you need to un-

derstand and feel for the 'cause'. Non-profit organisations understandably have a need for professionals, but what's prompting the professionals to make the shift?

"A chance to use their talent for a constructive purpose," says Neera Sanghvi of Dasra. Started by Neera and her husband Daval Sanghvi in 2003, Dasra is a management consultancy firm for non-profit organisations whose 40 per cent staff is from finance and management fields. Adds Gupte, "Non-profit organisations no longer pay measly salaries. We at Make A Wish Foundation pay Rs20-25,000 to professionals who join us with a years' experience."

Better pay packet, non-interference, no hierarchy and high satisfaction levels are some reasons why professionals are prompted to walk the social development path. Madhura Misra gave up her well paying job as a media planner to become a corporate communications head at Child Rights and You (CRY). "Yes, I'm making much less but that's not why I am here. I figured that selling the concept of CRY requires the same kind of commitment, creativity and talent as is required for any other product so, why not do something that'll give me greater satisfaction."