

A friend to children on railway platforms

Pramod Kulkarni

Society for Assistance to Children in Difficult Situation

Society for Assistance to Children in Difficult Situation, popularly known as SATHI, is a name synonymous with the rescue of run-away children found on railway platforms. To the question that many pose to Pramod Kulkarni, the founder of SATHI, on why he joined the social sector, his response has been, "I joined out of interest. I have no 'ism' to justify my decision. It was during my study at Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad that I decided to join the social sector. I used to think, an intense feeling rather, that I had no right to aspire for wealth." His decision has helped many a child running away from home reunite with his / her family.

Early years and education

Pramod grew up in Ainapur, a small village in Belgaum in Karnataka, bordering Maharashtra. His father, a clerk in government service, had to move to different towns whenever he was transferred. His mother accompanied his father. So Pramod spent his childhood under the care of his maternal grandmother.

Having been widowed very early, his grandmother had raised seven children as a single woman. She brought up Pramod and his siblings, showering them with a lot of affection and care. Pramod recalled reading local newspapers *Sakal and Pudhari*, and his grandmother narrating patriotic stories of Shivaji and stories from the Mahabharat. He got to read *Chandamama*, a children's magazine that nourished and kindled the imagination of almost a whole generation of young children.

He also recollected the family lore about his grandmother's father and his generosity. Pramod's great grandfather distributed all the food grains in the house to the needy and distressed during times of famine and food shortage.

Of his parents he said, "My mother was extremely patient. My father was rational and dispassionate. He would often valise broad philosophical and ethical issues." Besides the generosity that he seems to have inherited, the early memories of a childhood soaked in love, warmth and affection of the family members seem to have influenced Pramod's thinking in his later years. Pramod's family later settled in Vijapur. Pramod was a voracious reader. The works of BeeChi, as noted Kannada writer Rayasam Bheemasena Rao was known, greatly influenced him. Pramod disapproved of the

narrow thinking of people around him. He recollected anti-orthodoxy, anti-religion and anger being in the air. He recalled arguing with his mother about the practice of untouchability.

After completing schooling, while all his friends chose to study mathematics and physics, Pramod opted for statistics, a deviant choice according to him. His uncle, highly placed in a business corporation in Vadodara in the state of Gujarat, invited him to study in the Maharaja Sayajirao University. Pramod enrolled for M.Sc. in statistics. The Vadodara stay was a different experience for Pramod, and it opened up many new avenues for him.

Operations research was his forte and he presented papers in seminars. A professor from Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIMA) noticed him during one of his presentations. Impressed, he offered Pramod a job as a research assistant at IIMA. Though Pramod knew nothing about the prestigious institution, he grabbed the opportunity.

His association with IIMA lasted two years. He cracked the entrance test to IIMA's management course but failed to make it to the final list. As he recalled, "My professor was in the interview panel. During the interview and the group discussion, I was so overwhelmed that I failed to open my mouth!" His second attempt however was altogether a different performance and he joined the course. He graduated from IIMA in 1981.

Pramod joined a bicycle manufacturing company but left the job after six months. "My goal was not to earn money. I realised soon that a corporate job was not my cup of tea. I wanted to work for the people. Though I grew up in a village, I didn't know what a grassroots job entailed. But it was clear to me that my heart was in development. I approached some NGOs on my own. I approached some well-known organisations who had established NGOs. All of them turned me down," he recollected.

Introduction to PRADAN

Pramod joined an NGO's consumer research centre, with a commitment to work for a minimum of three years. By the time he completed three years, Pramod felt a deep desire to be in direct contact with the marginalised, and work towards their betterment. Pramod was candid that he had no idea how these organisations worked, except that they worked closely with the people. The only NGO he had visited was Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC) in Tilonia, where he spent just two days. However, after visiting India Development Service (IDS) at Medleri in Karnataka, he decided to join them, as they were working in his home state.

“When I visited Medleri village for the first time, I enquired only about the residential facility. I asked very little about the organisation’s work, the people in the organisation and my role there. I joined IDS in April 1984; my wife and our small child joined me in May. We occupied a house that had no electricity, running water, bathroom and kitchen! It was my first disappointment where people did not provide you what they agreed to. Thankfully, Leela, my wife, stood by me. IDS helped me get these facilities after about two months; till then it was a hard life,” he recalled.

When he got an offer from Vijay Mahajan, a friend from his IIMA days, he decided to opt for rural development work. Vijay Mahajan and Deep Joshi had formed Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN). Starting with PRADAN, Pramod worked for a couple of organisations in north Karnataka. During his stint of about 20 years in these organisations, he learnt the intricacies of sectoral work. Though this write-up is about Pramod’s work in SATHI, some of his experiences in the other organisations merit mention here.

Initially he worked on a dairy project, organising milk societies for women. Pramod then wrote in his journal, “Though I appreciate the importance of motivating women, I cannot justify to myself that it could be at such a disregard for economics. Also I am unable to understand why XYZ NGO does not think it right to scale the dairy programme to economic level.” In another project, when shepherds were reluctant to go in for cross-breeding among migratory sheep, Pramod introduced data collection on the health, lambing and mortality rates among sheep, to convince the shepherds.

Continuing his work with other leading NGOs in the region, Pramod worked on installation of 70 Janata model bio-gas plants, started handloom project with 20 looms, installed 200 fuel-efficient cooking stoves, worked on artificial insemination, introduced new breed of sheep, besides piggery as a part of lab-to-land programme. The work also involved mobilising women in to *sanghas*.

Pramod’s friends asked him to float an agency. He rejected the idea as he felt that he had not identified himself with any issue as his life’s mission. He felt that without a network of supporters, survival of the agency would be a concern, even if he started one. He further realised that he did not have reports as proof of his work, and hence started writing them. He continues to write his reports. In July 1998 he decided that he would set up an agency three years from then and that he would use the period to prepare for the launch.

Beginning of SATHI

The work with children living in and around railway platforms began in 1992. It was part of a project being done by Prerana, an NGO working on anti-trafficking. Prerana, being incubated by PRADAN, was handling irrigation works, while simultaneously working with railway platform children. "We had implemented a total of 250 lift irrigation schemes in 65 villages, covering 800 ha approximately." Pramod said that it would be worthwhile to visit the 65 villages now 15 years later and see the impact of his work there.

Looking back, Pramod was able to trace the journey. "We decided to move the work for railway platform children out of Prerana. We set up SATHI in 1997. We had a young lady postgraduate student approaching us in the Raichur office of Prerana, wanting to help poor children. I had seen some alumni of SNDT College, Pune working with platform children. Following my suggestion, she worked for some time with children on railway platform. By the time she left, the project was going on in full swing and it continued to grow. We received the first grant from both CRY and Oxfam, amounting to about Rs 60,000 per year. Later Deena Jeejeebhoy a member of the Tata family visited us and our first big annual funding of Rs 3 lakh came from Tata Trusts." In 1998, Pramod completely withdrew from the irrigation projects.

"When we started working with children living in and around railway platforms, the development sector except Don Bosco in Bengaluru, did not have any idea about them. Yes, there was quite an awareness about street children but nothing about railway platform children." Father George of Don Bosco who offered support in the initial phase now serves on the board of SATHI. In the first year the team worked with about 15 children. During the day, they would bring the children, clean and feed them, and instil confidence in them. In the evenings the children would return to the platforms. "We used to take these children to cinema theatres. It was obvious that people saw them as dirty children. Police used to hound them. Ours was a crude, amateur action borne out of genuine love and affection." The team did not know why the children were in the platform and what the options for resettlement were.

"Many in the funding agency felt that repatriating children back to their parents was not right. They felt that leaving home was a conscious decision of the child since the situation at home was not conducive. We continue to argue that many children leave home, based on decisions taken on the spur of the moment, often for trivial reasons."

SATHI wanted to bring the children to the mainstream, and taught them vocational skills such as printing and repairing cycles. After training the children, SATHI placed them with well-wishers in the small-scale sector. The skill theory was dominant around that time and development professionals wanted the children to be

economically independent. Pramod said, "Some children ran away from the workplace. When we traced 80 children, to our surprise, we found that 70 of them had returned home. We realised that the child had not run away in search of livelihood or money. What he was looking for was identity and connectedness." Those at SATHI concluded that the skill theory was not a working solution.

Repatriation the solution

In the mid-1990s, after about four years of work, SATHI changed its focus. Initial focus was to give the children love and care and integrate them back in the society. But the new-found objective was to make the child share its family situation, counsel the child and repatriate the child back home. SATHI came up with two new interventions, namely to take the children on a 7-day orientation camp and to send them home where possible. Sometimes a staff would take about five children and travel even up to Nepal to reunite the children with parents living enroute. The work was tough but there was joy in reuniting. The staff came back feeling very fulfilled. SATHI extended its work to platforms of Mantralayam and Guntakal in Andhra Pradesh and Wadi in Karnataka.

Pramod's management background proved useful in SATHI's work. "What cannot be measured cannot be managed. What cannot be managed cannot be expanded. We kept meticulous data and documentation. Each child's case was documented."

A funding agency called Railway Children that helps NGOs working in this sphere proved to be a good platform for SATHI to interact with other NGOs working with railway children. However there was a very strong thinking among NGOs that a child found on a platform should be institutionalised. "We were called target-oriented, heartless and unsympathetic for repatriating children back to parents. There are NGOs that work with only selected ten or 20 children on platform, for years together. My salute to them for their patience and persistence. But my approach is different. And I have data to prove that my solution also works," emphasised Pramod.

The team surveyed the children at regular intervals. The evidence added a lot of strength to their work. Father George also backed up SATHI's work. Pramod added that he was interested in finding practical solutions and not in detailed, theoretical discussions and hence avoided larger confrontational debates.

"We avoided questions like the root causes for children leaving families and means to remove the root causes. They are theoretical questions. What worked for me and my children was my theory." The team decided not to have a perfectionist attitude. "Even if I can walk just two steps towards the goal of perfection, that is a good enough contribution for me. Some accused me that SATHI was working for data as many of

them had no data to prove that their theory worked on the ground. We were conscious of recording data, revisiting children and in conducting internal and external evaluations. All the reports were shared in the public domain, with stakeholders and with all other NGOs in the meetings that we attended.”

Rescue and reunion

SATHI’s outreach staff or those of its partner NGOs are present in about 20 cities, on railway platforms across the country at any given point of time. They are present in the stations, in shifts, especially when long-distance trains arrive. Their trained eyes easily identify young boys moving alone on the platform, confused, most of the time in untidy clothes with no elder members accompanying them. The volunteers who carry SATHI identity card approach these children, engage them in conversation, make friends if possible and enquire about the reasons for them being there. Often they take the children to police personnel or staff of Railway Protection Force (RPF) present on the platform. According to estimates about 80,000 children reach the railway platforms every year.

According to one of the staff, “Most of the time the child is unlikely to give correct information about himself, his parents, village and so on in the first interaction on the platform. Our outreach staff try to build trust and encourage them to come to our shelter homes close to the railway station.”

Those who refuse to go to the shelter are left in the custody of railway police who then hand them over to government-run children’s home (GCH).

In the shelter, the staff give the child food since many of them would not have eaten for hours together. They give the child clothes to change, and a clean bed to sleep in. The staff do not ask any questions the first day. When we visited Yesvantpur shelter in Bengaluru, four children were playing carom; one of them had been rescued that very morning. The only child in the Pune centre was watching television.

Once the child rests and feels at home in the shelter, SATHI counsellors try to establish a rapport with the child. Once the counsellor establishes a rapport, children might share their stories. The SATHI staff assess whether the child’s home is functional, and whether the reason for his leaving home is something that can be resolved. If the child agrees, they collect details about the parents. SATHI locates the parents and informs them that their child is safe. They request the family to take the child back. This is not as simple and easy as it sounds. Many a time, the child gives wrong clues and false addresses deliberately or sometimes the child is so lost to give workable details. The child and the family are then produced before the Child Welfare Committee (CWC).

The rescue and repatriation are strictly as per the provisions of the Juvenile Justice Act 2000, that has subsequently been amended, latest in 2015. The child found on the railway platform, separated from the family is 'a child in need of care and protection'. As per the act, the state governments have constituted Child Welfare Committees (CWC) at district level. Each committee has five members, all selected from civil society. The committee has judicial powers.

A child found by SATHI on the platform has to be first registered with the police on the platform – either the RPF or the General Railway Police. Then the child is produced before the CWC. The committee will hear the child and hand him / her over to SATHI, with instructions on how to help the child. If SATHI finds that the child has a functional family and the child agrees to go home, it locates the family. Then SATHI produces the child and the child's family to the CWC. The committee in turn hands over the child to the family with proper instructions to the family. If SATHI has difficulty in locating the family within 15 days, it produces the child back to the CWC. CWC may refer such children to the child care institutions run either by the government or by NGOs for long-term care. A child stays at SATHI shelter only for a period of 15 days. SATHI does not run an institution for long-term care of children.

Metropolitan cities have multiple CWCs. Some committees meet every day, some twice or thrice a week. Sometimes the CWC's office may be far away from the railway station. Certain norms of convenience have been laid for such situations when it may not be possible for a child to be produced before CWC. The CWC advises SATHI to follow those norms.

Different approaches

SATHI rescues girls also. The number of girls rescued is far less, just about 2% of the total rescues. Girls rescued on the platform are not brought to SATHI shelter. They are produced before the CWC, who in turn sends them to shelters run either by the government or an institution. Women staff from SATHI visit the shelters to coordinate the repatriation of the girls. A majority of the 57 girls found in 2016 were found on platforms in Berhampur of Odisha.

SATHI developed a different approach for children staying for longer periods in government-run shelters. SATHI began organising 4-week camps for such boys. For the first two weeks, the boys would engage themselves in sports activities, painting, singing and other such activities. The SATHI staff do not ask any personal questions. "Once the children become engrossed in the activities and develop trust in our counsellors, they open up slowly. Our team would then ask them what they want to do in life and the like. These questions set the children thinking and they may be willing to go back home."

Initially the government functionaries did not think this would work. But once SATHI demonstrated that it worked, the government officials offered full support. SATHI has designed a 4-week module for this camp, with help and expert advice from psychologists in National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) of Bengaluru.

The child's mind

So why do children run away? Fear, frustration, anger, hatred, dream, fantasy, confusion or just an impulsive decision?

Disturbed families are a major factor that pushes a child to abandon home. Abusive father, separated families, households headed by single women, inability to offer basic needs like food and shelter to siblings, alcohol addiction of the male member of the family are some of the important identifiable causes that affect a child.

But there is more to it than just family distress. A boy walked 40km, for two full days, along the railway track to reach Bengaluru. He had done so with a dream that he would meet his idol, a successful Kannada film actor on the day of the actor's marriage that was being splashed across the media. He ended up on the platform, exhausted. SATHI rescued him.

A boy who had lost his parents was staying with his uncle in a village in Bihar. When the man migrated to Bengaluru in search of work, he brought the boy along. They lived in a slum, and the boy was enrolled in a local madrasa. The boy reported of being tortured in the madrasa and ran away and was found by the SATHI outreach team.

A boy sent to live with relatives in Hyderabad was made to work in a bakery by the relatives. When he was rescued, his hands were full of injuries and small burn marks.

We met SATHI staff in Yesvantpur in Bengaluru and in Pune. Pooja, Sadanand and Swati from Pune narrated their experiences of being a counsellor, "Invariably, in 90% of the situations, the child will give incomplete or false information the first time. The child would be afraid and have no faith in strangers. This is understandable."

When they develop faith in the SATHI staff, they often cry and ask them to contact their parents. But it is not easy as it seems. There are language barriers. Many times, the child does not know exact details.

A child from Goa did not remember anything except his school name. The SATHI team searched the internet, found the school and then came to know that he had dropped out of school. But they could trace the family. In pre-internet, pre-cell phone years, SATHI staff used to travel to the villages of the children, verify the information,

counsel the parents, study the family environment of the child, and then arrange for the reunion of the child.

“We have rescued children who have travelled from Nepal to Pune and Bengaluru. There was once a boy from Bangladesh. Reuniting across countries is more challenging. Some boys become aggressive. One boy threatened us with a knife. Some inflict injuries on themselves. There was a child who ran away 17 times, moving from one railway station to another. But these are rare instances. In most of the cases, we have been able to reunite the children with their families,” said the team members.

Reunion ceremony

SATHI makes reunion of children and parents into an event. As Pramod explained, “The reunion function is an emotional roller coaster for everyone participating in it. We invite judges, senior IAS officers, ministers, and key people to be present on such occasions. It leaves a deep impression on the minds of not just the children reuniting with their families but those witnessing the event as well.”

However, there are 10 to 15% children whose parents cannot be traced and children who run away from home repeatedly or those who refuse to go back to their families out of fear or hatred or just anger.

Impact assessment

In 2016, SATHI decided to review their work by visiting repatriated children. It was an elaborate exercise of tracking 150 children repatriated in 2005. Other than the families that could not be traced since they had moved houses and a few children who had passed away, SATHI met 96 children.

Many of them were self-employed as cab drivers, electricians, hairdressers and the like. While 60 of them earned less than Rs 10,000, 19 of them earned around Rs 15,000 and 17 of them earned more than Rs 15,000. “It was a heart touching and richly rewarding experience to see the children being responsible citizens,” said the team.

Ninganagouda’s is one of the case studies mentioned in the review.

Case study of Ninganagouda Sivanagouda, Alabanur

“You are from SATHI? Ho! I am so excited to speak to somebody from SATHI,” was the first reaction of Ninganagouda when SATHI team interacted with him in May 2016. As a 12-year-old, he was found by the SATHI team and reunited with his parents. “I still have the photograph of my reunion with my family 12 years back,” he exclaimed. “I wanted to thank you. Recently I searched for your office at Raichur, but could not locate it,” he said. Ninganagouda is 24 now. He had left home after taking Rs 2,000 from home without the knowledge of his parents. He landed at Raichur railway station. He spent eight long days on the Raichur platform, suffering many hardships.

He attended the orientation camp for a month. The SATHI team counselled him. And called his brother Shankarappa to Raichur and he took Ninganagouda home.

“Nobody could control my mother when she started crying as soon as she saw me,” recounted Ninganagouda. “I also remember the food, staying facilities, carom, and television while I was at the shelter and the camp. I was offered care and affection much more than what my parents would have offered me,” remembered an emotional Ninganagouda.

At his village Ninganagouda had learnt to drive a tractor and a jeep. Then he shifted to Bengaluru to become a taxi driver. He purchased a Toyota car costing Rs 8 lakh in 2015 and runs a taxi service in Bengaluru. He earns a whopping Rs 80,000 every month. Working as a taxi driver with cab aggregators inspired him to pursue his own business. Ninganagouda now plans to purchase another four or five cars and run a full-fledged taxi service.

The person and the organisation

We had a long discussion with Pramod on SATHI’s approach that is not seen kindly by advocates and activists of other NGOs who champion the cause of child rights and fight against sexual abuse of children at homes. With more than 20 years of work experience in SATHI, Pramod articulated SATHI's approach to work.

"Initially when I started, there was a lot of scepticism about my work. People scoffed at us and openly criticised our work. I do not claim to be an intellectual or an academic. We learnt a lot during the course of our work."

Going by SATHI’s experience, about 60% of the families from where children run away are 'normal' families. In 20-30% of families, there are certain aberrations and 10% of the families are dysfunctional. “When a child runs away from home, it is an

experiential learning for the child and family. If our goal is to make the child happy, can I succeed by uniting the child with the family? What SATHI follows is a practical idea which is against the espoused theory of child rights and protection. Why talk of perfectionism when it does not work on the ground? My idea is not perfect, I agree, but it has delivered results. Children reunited with their families have stayed back at home in 80% of the cases. I have data to prove that this approach of SATHI works."

Basavaraj Shali is now the secretary of SATHI, having been with the organisation since 1993. Reflecting on their journey he said, "When we started, almost everyone was critical of our work. The police, the RPF and railway staff accused us of promoting illegal activities on railway platform. Our work of rescuing children was dubbed by them as a criminal activity!"

There was a lot of misconception about SATHI's work. In the early years, when the team took rescued children for a picnic in a school bus, policemen arrested them as one of the rescued boys told the police, out of fear, that they were being abducted. SATHI collaborates with 35 NGOs all over the country. SATHI sends experienced staff to work with the NGOs till they are fully familiar with the rescue procedures and subsequent norms to be followed.

Now the police and railway staff are supportive of SATHI's work. Earlier one had to seek permission from the district collector to visit a GCH, which was almost impossible. The Juvenile Justice Act of 2006 has opened up doors for NGOs to work more closely with the GCHs. The JJ Act 2006 constituted CWCs that are easily accessible, less bureaucratic and more concerned about the welfare of the children.

Shweta Kanugo has been working with SATHI since 2015. She finds SATHI a second home, where the organisational culture is very different. "Our work has long-term impacts," she said. Lalitha Iyer is a member of SATHI's governing board since 2010. "Pramod's style is what I call humble leadership. He believes in the dictum - action speaks better than words. SATHI has consistently demonstrated this dictum. He demonstrated his own unique approach in his work with farmers while promoting lift irrigation schemes in Raichur before SATHI began its work. SATHI and Pramod believe in using the available spaces in the formal system to the best of efforts to achieve the objectives."

Recognition

The Ministry of Women and Child Development, conferred the National Award for Child Welfare - 2014 on SATHI.

The SATHI story was documented in a book by Malcolm Harper and Lalitha Iyer and published by SAGE Publications in 2013. SATHI's work has been featured in various national and international media over the years.

Other social ventures

Pramod is an individual with multiple passions and his passions are manifested in several other social ventures. With Rajiv Kuchal of Infosys and Dr Krishnamurthy of Jain Hospital, Bengaluru, Pramod is a trustee of an initiative called Chirantan. The initiative collaborates with Smile Train and organises surgeries for people suffering with cleft lip. The activities that began in a small measure in Bengaluru have now spread across all parts of Karnataka, besides Vapi in Gujarat, Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh and Muzzafarpur in Bihar. They have performed 9,000 surgeries so far.

Vidya Poshak is a project to support students from low income families with educational scholarships from the time they pass high school till they complete their collegiate education.

The beginning of this initiative is interesting. Sudha Murthy who saw SATHI's work in Raichur sent a cheque for Rs 50,000. Pramod told her that he would use it to provide scholarships to deserving students. He and R N Tikot, and an acclaimed professor, set up Vidya Poshak. Vidya Poshak supported the education of a girl from an impoverished family, with five older sisters and an irresponsible father. Today she is a confident young woman, a university rank holder, aspiring for her doctorate. She is one example of the kind of work being done by Vidya Poshak. The organisation supports about 400 students annually, with a total scholarship of about Rs 1 crore.

Future plans

Though he formally relinquished his post as secretary in December 2015, Pramod continues with his plans for SATHI.

"I need to reflect on a lot of questions that we encountered during our journey. For instance, what is a dysfunctional home? I feel, there are a number of wrong assumptions floating around in the sector.

I am thinking of connecting orphaned and institutionalised children - 100 boys and 100 girls - to 200 families in the city. That is my concept of foster parenting, different from the western concept. These children have no roots to go to when as orphan they walk out of the hostel and yet there is a strong need for rooting. If I can connect them with families it would be good."

Pramod spends a lot of time networking, getting the alumni of IIM Ahmedabad and Bengaluru, motivating his batchmates to donate to the education sector. "I also want to meet a number of IAS officers, officials in the women and child welfare department and educate them about the experiences we have had in SATHI. Now I am not tied up with day-to-day work of SATHI. There are no issues of compliances, staff salary increments, filing etc. These are out of my mind and I can now focus on networking."

"If 80,000 children run away from home every year and end up on railway platforms, we have a long way to go. I am witnessing emergence of a number of small organisations coming forward to engage on this topic. That is a welcome change. I can say with pride that the idea we sowed has caught on. It is like a positive addiction. Once you witness the joy of a family united with the child, you experience immense happiness. And you want to do more. I want to work with government-run children's homes and impress upon this idea that the SATHI approach can also be tried out with children who are in government institutions."

"Some people say, that I have sacrificed my corporate career and hefty salary for a social cause. They also say that those who work in the social sector make real contribution to nation building and those in the corporate sector do not. I disagree with this line of argument. I have all the comforts in life. I feel that the contribution of the corporate sector is as valuable as that of people like me in the social sector."

On his future plans, he said, "I want to go back to teaching mathematics. I think I am good at teaching." In Bengaluru, near the place he lives, he has started teaching in four primary schools. These are villages close to the city. He wants to make sure that the basic concepts are taught clearly. "If I can run a summer school for brighter children around the villages, that will be a good contribution. I want to teach teachers who offer tuition classes and private coaching. Continuing my work in SATHI, I want to open more shelters," he added.

On a pleasant afternoon in January 2017, we were sitting in SATHI's Yesvantpur office in Bengaluru discussing Pramod's journey. There is no special cabin designated for the founder. "It is good for NGOs and all organisations that the founder steps down and gives way for new generation to function. Letting go is good for the organisation and the individual," he signed off.

As we finished our conversation, he quietly slipped out of the SATHI office, to return to his house 20km away, in a self-driven cost-effective Nano car.

About Pramod Kulkarni

- SATHI rescues and repatriates children who run away from home and end up on railway platforms
- Every year, around 6,000 children found on 16 railway stations across nine states are reunited with their families
- A review of children who could be traced, conducted ten years after repatriation, revealed that the children had turned out to be responsible citizens
- Collaborates with Smile Train and organises surgeries for people suffering with cleft lip, having facilitated 9,000 surgeries so far
- Plans to introduce the concept of foster parenting, by connecting orphaned and institutionalised children with families

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