



# PRécis

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## Tourism moving away from mere Servicing to Delivering Experience!

*Ms. Catherine Ruth Symonds, Senior Lecturer, School of Tourism, Bournemouth University, U.K. addressed the PRSI members on how tourism as an industry is moving away from just delivering 'services' to delivering new experiences, because the customers look for more than just satisfying service. This meant the industry has to think differently.*

Hospitality and tourism sectors have got to where they are with the kind of services they offered to their customers. But now it all goes beyond just products and services because the customers have begun to look for new experiences. It is not just about food having to be hot, or ice creams having to be cold, but much more than that. Also what is seen as a quality service by one, may not really be seen to be as the same quality service by another because it is measured with different



*Catherine Ruth Symonds makes an interesting presentation.*

yardsticks for satisfaction. It has been difficult to get a grip on how this satisfaction is measured.

Customers have been demanding more and more - from phones, to business centers for conferencing, to computers, WiFi and instant connectivity in their rooms etc. and with increasing expectations they have been demanding more and more. With

more people travelling, the challenge before the players in the tourism sector is how to stay ahead in the game, moving away from traditional ways. They must now go beyond what is expected of just a 'service sector'.

On his experience after landing on the moon Neil Armstrong had exclaimed that he felt quite small. This is how we feel about globalization, looking at the access one can have to the vast markets. Now more and more people are travelling all over the world. Customer expectations are different and the products and services have to match such expectations in order to be successful. McDonald's is a success story in this globalized context, because they standardized what they offer, providing for the cultural differences and people know they can get what they want. Hotel chains also offer standardized services across different hotels. One is not sure whether mere standardization is a good strategy. If a hotel's room is



*Rachel Sunderland, International Officer (South Asia), Marketing & Communications, Bournemouth University U.K. giving an introduction about the University.*



standardized - and the one in Los Angeles is the same as the one in London, it could make a customer wonder where he was when he woke up!

As human beings, what do we see as our basic requirements? These would be food and water, shelter, hospitality and services. The other needs are built around security, love, a sense of belonging, friendships and family connections – all of which could satisfy our self esteem, build our confidence and ensure we are respected as unique individuals. Even religious expectations are very important considerations. We need to look at all these and see how we can provide for expectations around these into the tourism sector. Needs are unique for each individual and one must be able to see that there is some connection made. How unique the service is and how personalized it is will



*S. Muthiah holds the attention of Rachel Sunderland.*

determine how one looks at it “as an experience”. Tourism must expect to provide for the 'top of the pyramid' experience – an experience that might be looked at as being “extraordinary”. Those who have achieved this goal have not done it with just providing products and services but provided an experience about something which gave them a unique 'personality'. Even with a little technical device such experience can be established. One has to communicate what a device can do for the individual to heighten his experience.

Such 'experiences', which people are looking for, must be made memorable and should be seen as something which added value! These need not be expensive, involving lots of money. It



*Dr. Paul Chellakumar greets Rachel Sunderland with a hug as (l to r) Ana Adi, Head of International Development, The Media School, Bournemouth University, Thomas Abraham & Ramesh Kumar are all smiles.*

is not the only aspect. It is difficult to measure services, and quality of services. But what we could see is how we can improve the services. How a service can be measured? We also need to understand what the 'experience' is. We need to research the experience and see how it is different from the past. We should also see through advertising and through PR how we can encourage

more people to experience something.

Tourism is a different model of experiences, of different experiences and one must understand what is all this about. What motivates people? Why do people want to visit some places? What do they anticipate? What are their expectations? When something happens, what do they remember about it? Were they satisfied? Did a recollection of their experience add to their knowledge or did the memories touch their emotions?

Ten years ago, Ms. Catherine said, her friend had come to India and really enjoyed seeing Taj Mahal. He recalled his experience so deeply that, on his return, he promised to take her there. That provided the motivation for them to visit the country and enjoy the experience of seeing the Taj together later. Whenever she recollects the visit, she remembers how she was absolutely fascinated with the experience, and that visit gave her a high satisfaction.

To understand a tourist's experience, you must look at all these things together – like the products and services, the social and physical aspects, and such things. It is important to look farther than these and research into what motivates tourists looking for experiences. Is it about 'getting away' from what one does normally? Are these about 'adventure' and how things connect



*Dr. Paul Chellakumar explains to Ms. Rachel Sunderland a point of interest from the latest PRecis issue.*





*Catherine Ruth Symonds responds to members' questions.*

with them? Visiting Taj Mahal may be a tourist experience associated with prestige. Tourism may be about the relationships you have with the people you are travelling with, people from different cultures and that could be an experience. It may be about some 'novelty' they have experienced. Contacts made, relationships formed, learning for children, all such gains add to tourists' experiences. These are the reasons why people go on tours. It is also about life, culture, education as well. The more we understand about people and their culture, the more it adds value to where we are going.

As the visuals in her excellent presentation showed, there is a whole variety of initiatives tourism industry

can take up to make tourism more a matter of experience. The several slides from hotels and restaurants in Maldives, Dubai, New Zealand, Japan etc. showed how tourism was taken to new levels of experience.

Going beyond just usual products and services which must deliver on expectations consistently, these places provide top level, individualistic experiences.

This is all about what the tourists

think of, what they remember and whether they will want to come back. This is where PR comes in. Tourists must be told about what experiences they can anticipate. What they will be able to remember as experiences.



*Thomas Abraham presenting a memento to Ruth Symonds as G. Krishnan & K.T. Solaiyappan applaud.*



*PRSI Chennai Chapter Vice Chairman K.T. Solaiyappan presenting bouquets to Rachel Sunderland & Ana Adi.*



*PRSI Chennai Chapter Secretary, V. Ramesh Kumar welcoming the members and guests from UK.*

# Sign language a major communication tool for the hearing impaired to connect with others

*Members of the PRSI, Chennai Chapter, had an opportunity to interact with Mr. T.K.M. Sandeep, President, Deaf Enabled Foundation and Ms. M. Ramya, Director - Communications, Deaf Enabled Foundation, and get to know the deep nuances of 'sign language' which is the medium with which the hearing-challenged, otherwise brilliantly endowed in all respects, communicate quite effectively to connect with the other people everywhere. From what we saw, the sign language has been well developed as a masterly tool for communication and is in no way any less than the normal verbal communication.*

PRSI and the Public Relations Department of Stella Maris College, Chennai had laid out a memorable event on the day to mark the Gyan Haksar Memorial Annual Lecture Series in association with Deaf Enabled Foundation. Right from the word go - with the dignitaries warmly welcomed by the students with plant saplings, a refreshing change from the flower bouquets - to the comedy skit performed by the students on the impromptu stage, which had the audience roaring with laughter with its wordless humour, it was an event worthy of the special occasion.

Daniel Dass, past chairman, PRSI Chennai Chapter pointed out the significance of the Gyan Haksar Memorial Lecture series. He recalled the strong, pioneering footprints left in the PR field by the two stalwarts, Mr. Gyan Haksar and Mr. M. Gopalakrishnan, who were instrumental in introducing PR as a profession in what was then Madras. They had provided opportunities to the talented youth aspiring to be PR professionals to gain specific academic qualifications through

institutions of educational excellence like Stella Maris College and Madras University.

Ramya K. Prasad, Head of Public Relations, Stella Maris College, presented a brief overview of the relevant activities of the college through the year and emphasized that it is the only college that offers a post graduate degree in Public Relations. The collage of programmes, most of which were on important social and community themes, were highly impressive. As their partners from the PR fraternity, we at PRSI felt proud to see such good work done by the college. In a way, it is Stella Maris that is 'culturing' and 'growing' the PR professionals and ensuring that there will be a steady crop of fully qualified PR professionals emerging from their premises!

Shanthi Krishnan, who was in the first batch of PR students when the Course was started in 1975 in Stella Maris (the same time when the Institute of Public Relations Management was also started by Mr. Baratan), recalled how meticulously the students were taught by the two stalwarts, Gyan Haksar and Gopalakrishnan, with the kind of topics that helped to have a strong foundation in Public Relations. From what she had learned, she had picked up a strong message which she shared with the audience - if one has to move forward as a PR professional, one cannot have 'ahankara', or ego! That was something to think about.

V.S. Ramana, GM & Head - Corporate Communications (L&T - ECC), had taken the initiative of inviting DEF to associate with the day's event. He stressed on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as being another facet of Public Relations which should not be considered as mandatory. He said communication, public relations and CSR - all together should give us one message that "gives us a connect to everything". He added: "We're relevant



Chief Guest Sandeep lights up the Kuthuvilakku, accompanied by Ramesh Kumar (left extreme), M. Ramya (next to Ramesh Kumar), Ramya K. Prasad (to the left of the chief guest) and G. Krishnan (extreme right)

to the others. Whatever we do must be relevant to the society and - because we care, we must connect", he said. Mr. Ramana mentioned he had once seen how the members of DEF were functioning efficiently but silently, with just eye contacts and marginal communication through signs, and actually 'doing' more than what we all do coming from a noisy world. It was then that he felt that this organization (DEF) should 'connect' with us and he had invited them to come and share their thoughts with us. It would be nice to connect with them and leverage their energy into our world as they have great potential. Thanks to PRSI's tie-up with Stella Maris College, he said, PR acquires even greater strength, he said.

V. Ramesh Kumar, Secretary, PRSI, introduced the speakers Mr. T.K.M. Sandeep - President, DEF and V. Ramya, Director-Communications, DEF. It was laudable that Mr. Sandeep had founded DEF with the objective of developing strategies to empower the hearing impaired. He has attended meetings and conferences in India and abroad and has been acclaimed for his excellent initiatives to help the hearing impaired. He has received several awards for excellence, not only for academic achievements, but also for excellence in humanitarian service and as Role Model and achiever. Ramya has a Master's Degree in Social Welfare and had joined the DEF in 2004 as Programme Coordinator. A specialist interpreter, Ramya has worked with several NGOs, and has a multi-dimensional profile.





*Wordless humour just kept flowing.*

Mr. Sandeep, ably supported by Ms. Ramya as an interpreter, together gave the audience a fantastic overview of what the world of sign language is. Very few can understand what is meant by deaf, and what is it like to be disabled. PR may help to create awareness and spread the message that they would like to communicate too, and 'connect' with others. The hearing-challenged would like to understand - how to communicate with others.

Not that we saw any lacunae there! The way we saw them putting the sign language to maximum advantage was amazing. It was definitely a step up for clarity and even better than our normal communication with all the convenience we have in communicating. The sign language first originated in France as the mode of communication for the hearing impaired. Later, some hundred years ago it came to India, starting from Hyderabad. It is startling to know that there is a unique sign language of its

own for the deaf in every country. Sign language is understood through expression and gestures. One can 'talk' about everything, even joke, or whatever, through the sign language. Sign language is the very basic tool to communicate with the deaf.

The video presentation that followed about the sign language showed how useful and how effective it was to all the hearing impaired people. Through sign language one can communicate completely. It has its own grammar. Indian sign language has no word. Sign language is much more than just pantomime or mere gesturing. It has its own special movements, its own grammar – like what, next etc. It should have facial expressions also to supplement gestures. The uniqueness of the sign language lies in expressions like – “Your name, what?” instead of “What is your name” in the normal order of English. Instead of “Where do you live?” you say, “You, live, where?”. Expressions, body movement and body language are important in sign language.

It surprised us to know that sign languages for the hearing disabled have been developed in different forms in different countries and each country has its own unique language for the deaf. Even within India, different States have different sign languages! No one sign language can be said to be better than

another, because all sign languages help rapid communication. The sign language of America cannot be said to be better than the one in India. The sign language in Hindi cannot be said to be better than the sign language in Malayalam! Whatever the language, one has to depend on just on one sign language. The display of alphabets through signs is only useful for conveying names of



*Ramya, Director - Communications, DEF interprets Sandeep's sign language to the audience.*

people, places and events to identify. The most effective way to communicate is with the help of an interpreter (There's a movie that shows 10 Great Reasons to Learn Sign Language!).

As G. Krishnan mentioned in his vote of thanks, we all learned the basics of a 'new' language and it was nice to learn that people have developed their own special sign languages for the hearing disabled in every country and yet it is all 'localized'. May be one common language should be developed and accepted universally!

## Our cultural apathy towards environment protection should change before it's too late says Mr. Mohammed Ali

*S. Mohammed Ali, Secretary, Natural History Trust and Editor of the publication “Kattuyir” gave the PRSI members a scintillating presentation on “Nature Talks .... Are we listening?”*

*At the end of his presentation there was not a member who did not feel charged enough to go and do something about saving and salvaging what is left of our wild life and environment!*

V. Ramesh Kumar, Secretary, observed that many had said that the period from 2005 to 2012 will show a rapid progress



*S. Mohammed Ali's thought provoking talk on nature, environment and wild life.*

in environment quality but we still had a long way to go. It was stated that the cleanest city in India was Surat in Gujarat, but yet we cannot forget the

'plague' episode when a lot many lives were lost. Though we know we must play our roles in protecting environment, minimizing pollution and all, we do not know how “Nature Talks”, and would surely benefit from what Mohammed Ali has to say about understanding and protecting nature.

(The 10-Min Video Clip showed nature



*T.V. Gopal presents a plant sapling to Mohammed Ali.*



*P.A. Sethuraman presents a plant sapling to T.V. Vasanth Kumar as V. Ramesh Kumar looks on.*

and environment in all their glory – with birds calling, tweeting and chirping, cawing and cooing. The visuals brought the beauty of nature and environment around us and one felt sad if this is what we were slowly losing, without even being aware of it perhaps!)

After a brief talk by Vasanth Kumar who is a happy partner with Mohammed Ali in a common cause of protecting nature and environment, Mohammed Ali addressed the members on the absolutely captivating topic, in a lively talk that had a rustic mix of Tamil interspersed with English, about the seriousness of the dangers engulfing whatever left of the Nature and Environment.

Mohammed Ali said when the land measurement survey was taken up in Madras as far back as 1900 A.D., the officers involved saw tigers and were scared and ran away. If you want to see a tiger now, you have to go to Mettupalayam! There is a big gap between nature and us, why? How many of us pause to think about it? Why worry about animals, birds etc. when we have our own problems! We do not worry about what we have lost, but we should have realized that there's a widening gap. In Europe or North America, children learn to develop, from parents, an interest in life science, not here. For example, how many houses here will have binoculars, camera, or a telescope? To see a new world around us we must have such things. Nehru gave Indira Gandhi a binocular and a book on birds, written by Salim Ali and she had said she was able to see a 'new world'. How much priority we have given (to such an activity like watching birds)? The people in other countries enjoyed taking the picture of birds in flight, with their

camera. We have to realize how much our minds can get attracted to scenes like that! People in other countries have made a lot of progress – with the kind of new cameras they have developed. That can be done only if people develop a liking for birds and animals.

What is our spending pattern? We have crowds in jewellery stores. In cinema theatres. In malls and in food courts, we see crowds in thousands. But though learning about nature and environment is exhilarating, it does not occur to us to do so. We must also think about what we have achieved by destroying nature.

Obviously shaken by this carelessness all around “We started our good work for the betterment of nature, for we found great joy in it” said Ali. He said, most of us would not have known that even the ancient literatures in Tamil have identified birds and species and they are full of useful information. If language and literatures foster the science of nature, it could be such a nice combination for good. Even about 1500 years back, the writings from an author from Sathyamangalam in Thanjavur identified and researched on issues like migration and local migration and listed birds like cranes and Narai. The national bird of Denmark is one such bird, Sengal Narai. They do so in Denmark to protect the bird. If such a bird nests on a house, taxes are exempted. If they nest on trees, taxes for land around the trees are withdrawn. Denmark even made a place, a huge house where its national bird has made nests in large numbers in a big hall, a national monument. The government offered the house owner 10 lakh dollars as a compensation of sorts but the owner, who obviously takes pride in the fact that the national

bird chose his building for nesting in huge numbers, refused the amount offered to him!

In contrast, our national bird, the poor peacock, has never ending troubles, with people killing for its flesh and plucking out its plumes for gains! So sad!

We have failed badly in understanding that nature and environment is very much a part of our life and our culture. We are all shouting from our roof tops about the environmental pollution and global warming and melting of ice etc., but what are we doing about it? We are actually just acting it out because there is a huge gap between environmental needs and concerns and our cultural practices. In parts of South Africa, Europe and America too, one may see underdevelopment and slums, but they provide for excellent sanitation. We are not 'getting it' because we are just bothered about lessons, school, education, scores, careers and earning lots! More than 5000 tonnes of garbage is moved out of Chennai but nearly 90 percent of it will be plastic cups, plates, glasses and bottles. How can we manage environment? At the Conference on World Environment in Kyoto, Japan, our Prime Minister said we will do what you want but give us the technology to overcome the problem! We want the western nations to 'give' us help! When they say you reduce your garbage, can we not think about what to do? Is it such a rocket science?

It is about us and our mind set, Mohammed Ali said and recalled how once he saw a motorcycle rider with two others behind him ride down the steps somewhere and even as Ali was



shouting out to warn him of danger, the bike went and hit a boy! If you just watched the traffic movement on any road, you will find that there are many such reckless law-breakers. What can be done if we are so adept in breaking rules! In places like South Africa, even if the roads are empty, and if the signals on the 4-lane roads say stop, every vehicle stops. Also, if crossing roads, they ask you politely to cross over and they wait! Do we ever compare our behavior pattern with these?

Coming back to our topic, hundred years back what is now Chennai had been home to a variety of birds, squirrels, mongoose, deer and animals of the wild such as tigers! The forest land adjoining the sea coast with its saline environment and dense bushes, shrubs and trees was a wonderful and ideal natural habitat for such birds and animals to thrive. How many of us can even imagine such things? We are now only preoccupied with issues like rapes and murders, or the cinemas and the actors and their lives! How many of us have heard the sweet notes of a cuckoo, how many of us know if it's the male or female that calls out? It was only due to the untiring efforts of Dr. Salim Ali, that we know it is the male among the cuckoos that sings! But when we want to appreciate someone's melodious voice, we allude to kuyili (the female of the species)! We live with illusions and notions that are contradictory to nature! We may not also know that out of 97% water available in the world, only 2% of the water is actually potable, fresh water, and out of this 1.75% is plain ice – and we get only 0.25 % of drinking

water. How precious then is this water! The destruction of this precious resource has gone so unchecked that now we cannot raise water even from the springs. We have not been shell shocked by the diminution and wanton destruction of big rivers like Amaravathi, Noyyal, Bhavani, Cooum, Palar and Thamarabharani. We scrape out the sands from river beds. Ganges, India's perennial river Ganga, has been vandalized so horribly. How many are actually horrified by such developments? We are talking about need to allocate Rs.10,000 Crores for the purification of Ganga but we still cannot hope to do it. As it is there is only 0.25% water which can be potable. Also consider that 40% children die due to consuming polluted water.

India is an independent nation with a democratic government. India's forestry is huge, something we can be proud of. There is a maximum variety of birds in India, with some 1330 different kinds and some are very special varieties. Recognizing India to be the hot spot with maximum bio-diversity, the UN had asked India to protect and preserve them in our forests. They had asked us to protect the rare species of birds and animals. But what are we doing? Nothing! Because the White Stork – Tamil Nadu's State Bird, also go to North India, they gave up any thought of protecting that species!

It is true ancient scriptures talked about hydra-headed snake in Lord Krishna's period. They are not there now, and of course scriptures had often exaggerated! But whether such things were there or

not, man has not learned how to live. We only run after money. Every morning we use up 50 buckets of water for bathing and washing and let water polluted with soap, detergents and oil and such dirt and filth, out into the sewerage or rivers or sea! And then we ask other countries to give us technology to prevent pollution and protect environment.

Mohammed Ali said we needed a new cultural awakening and a positive thrust to save the environment from total destruction. That is how they had started their unique institution. Even in places like Pollachi or Uthukuli you see filthy ponds, open sewage and dirt all over. Often it is frustrating, not knowing where we can go and put out our pleas for help in our cause. We have made representations, we have offered to take on the role of advisers, petitioned the Collector and hoped for the best. But it might surprise us to know that most powers lie with only the central government authorities. It is said that there is a ministry, there are officials and yet we are not able to achieve much. He suggested even PRSI can join the movement and take up at least some small initiatives.

This situation, where we have no voice, should change. Our mind sets including our beliefs, and superstitions must change. People kill rhinoceros for its horn, to make powder or condiments which they believe enhances their sexual prowess! An ounce of this is priced like gold! We also see news about elephants on rampage shot or killed thanks to electric fencing and things like that! How does the caption for such stories read: "To protect people from wild elephants"! Actually, it is the other way. Already 50 percent of the wild life is gone, like the Cheetah (Sinungipuli) which has vanished, thanks to the mindless poaching. We still have a few leopards and panthers and just about 200 elephants. And we create a ruckus about having to protect 125 crore people from such small numbers of wild animals! What a pathetic situation. Ramana Maharishi had said "No one can change anyone", Mohammed Ali said, in frustration! We can sympathize with him, but probably it would be useful to see if PRSI can partner with his institution on any of the worthy projects, and take that one small, constructive step further. Visit: [www.naturalhistorytrust.org](http://www.naturalhistorytrust.org)



V. Kalidoss presents a memento to Mohammed Ali as K.T. Solaiyappan looks on.



## PRSI New Year Bash brings members, families together

It was a joyous occasion at the Krishna Hall, Andhra Club on the evening of 9<sup>th</sup> January 2013, as PRSI members and their families got together to celebrate the year (2013) that was in, with cocktails and dinner. There were variety programmes, games and prizes, music and dance. Ladies and children taking part in various games added to the fun. The excitement was not over until Tambola master R.K. Dharan conducted the game in his usual style. It was a perfect setting for a great get together and the families dispersed with pleasant memories.

*A flavour of the evening in pictures.*

