



Rashesh and Vidya Shah with students of Muktangan-aided municipal school in Worli, Mumbai

SANJIT KUNDU

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**Vidya and Rashesh Shah** have embedded philanthropy in Edelweiss instead of just having it as a CSR activity, says **Sampath Nariyanuri**

## EdelGive feat

- Impacted over 50,000 lives
- Supports organisations across education, livelihood and women empowerment
- Committed Rs 13 crore till date



e started with cheque-book philanthropy,” says Vidya Shah, executive director at the EdelGive Foundation, a philanthropic arm of Edelweiss group. Vidya and her husband, Rashesh Shah, founder of Edelweiss, were batchmates at IIM-A. After long years in investment banking, Vidya opted for a more flexible career and, by 2005, she was travelling and personally looking into non-profit projects in education, livelihood and women’s empowerment that the Shahs supported. “I met some inspiring people. They wanted to try and use people like us to not only get them money but also to help them grow their organisations. We thought we could always commit financial resources but can we, as Edelweiss, pull together resources that we have in terms of people and influence these organisations in the ways in which they run and behave? We also thought we should have a dedicated team. We set up the EdelGive Foundation in 2008 so that we could embed philanthropy in Edelweiss rather than have it just as a CSR activity,” says Vidya Shah.

A team of eight works behind the scenes at EdelGive and, every year, 100-150 of Edelweiss’ 2,500 employees volunteer for it. “In addition,” Vidya says, “we have a

# power of giving

systematic donation plan in which employees voluntarily opt to donate from their salaries every month. About 400-450 employees are involved in it.” Four to six field visits are open to Edelweiss employees with their families. “That’s what inspires us – when we see the realities on the ground. It is no more an NGO activity and it becomes rather personal.” EdelGive is also actively engaged in capacity building, and runs an intensive award programme in collaboration with the Tata Institute of Social Sciences for people working towards women’s empowerment. The winner is awarded Rs 50 lakh.

One project that is very close to the Shahs’ hearts is Masoom, an NGO that works with children who study in Mumbai’s 100-plus municipal night schools. Nikita Ketkar, a government officer, gave up her job to start Masoom after doing a very detailed study on the absence of nutrition. “It is difficult to study on an empty stomach,” says Vidya. “Most boys and girls who study at night schools are employed during the day as tea stall workers or domestic workers. The reason this project is close to my heart is that we have seeded it together. We started with two schools and, in the second year, we had six schools. This year, we expect to have ten schools and, in the next, we will have 15. We created a science lab and toilet facilities. Toilets are important because the attendance of girls will decline otherwise.”

“A lot of operations face funding problems when the economy is not doing well as donors tend to cut down their spending,” says Rashesh. “We would like to be known as a stable supporter and the organisations we support know that. The second issue is administration cost, which is absorbed by EdelGive as the organisation grows. The most fascinating thing for me is how well Edelweiss employees have participated. I have seen employees even in the lower rung making it a point to contribute to the foundation financially.” “Rashesh’s involvement is very strategic because we can get carried away sometimes,” Vidya adds. “He also lends his face to EdelGive on the corporate side, and introduces us to people we wish to meet. We get tremendous support from our senior team as they make the connections for us and spread the word.” And so it does. □

## Subjective nature of truth – by Shyam Bhat



Speaking the truth is not always easy and may not always be the right course of action either.



The ambiguous nature of the moral order of the universe is apparent in the famous story of Krishna’s role in the death of Drona.

You probably know the story well: Drona is plundering through the Pandava troops and he needs to be stopped. But he is a formidable warrior and his only weakness is his affection for his son, Ashwatthama. And so, Krishna instructs Yudhishthira to tell Drona that his son, Ashwatthama, is dead. But Yudhishthira, widely renowned for his truthfulness, is reluctant to do so.

Then Bhima kills an elephant named Ashwatthama and roars loudly, “Ashwatthama is dead!” Drona comes to Yudhishthira and asks him if this is true. “Is Ashwatthama dead?” He asks.

Yudhishthira replies, “Yes he is dead.” He pauses and adds, “But I don’t know if it’s Ashwatthama the man or the elephant (“*Ashwatthama hathaha iti, narova kunjaro*va.”). The last part, he says under his breath and so Drona, who knows that Yudhishthira can never tell a lie, believes that his son is dead. He bows his head in grief and his head gets chopped off.

One detail that strikes me as strange, and therefore probably symbolic, is the elaborate nature of the lie. Yudhishthira did not lie in a direct manner; in order to protect his own self-image of being Mr Truthful, an elephant was killed and an elaborate ruse contrived, all so that he could justify the action to himself. A psychoanalyst might say that Yudhishthira’s superego, his conscience, prevented him from acknowledging his own voluntary participation in a lie, and his mind accomplished this through various psychological defence mechanisms.

The same psychoanalyst would have to say that Krishna, at least, is emotionally more evolved. From his perspective, the war has to be won.

So, may be the moral of the story is that untruths and misdeeds are occasionally necessary, if the ends are justified. And Yudhishthira’s role is the addendum to the moral – lie if you have to, but don’t lie to yourself. □

*Dr Shyam Bhat integrates western medicine and psychiatry with eastern philosophy and spirituality in the domains of mind-body wellness, stress management, work-life balance, and leadership. Visit him at [shyambhat.com](http://shyambhat.com)*