

OUTLOOK

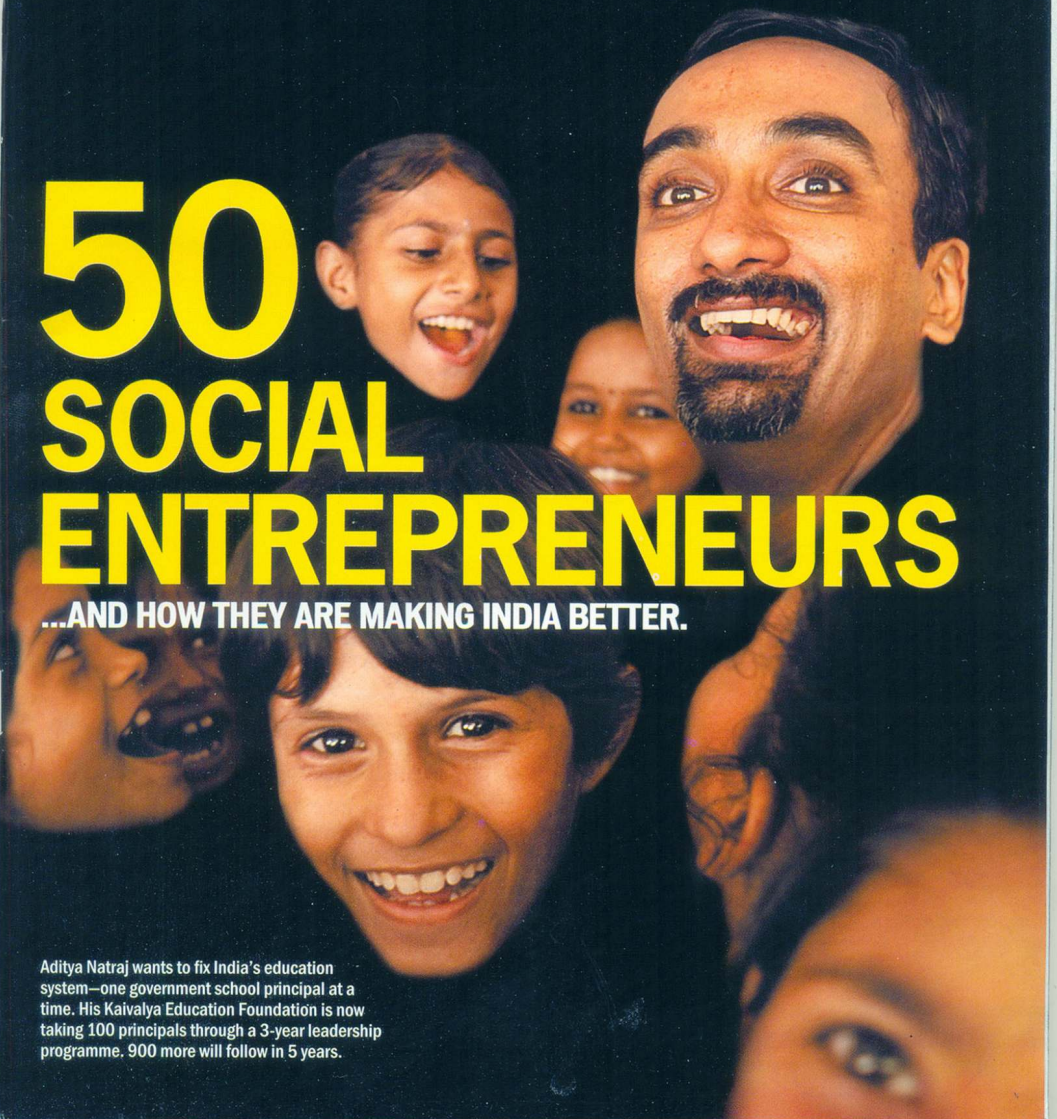
# Business

September 5, 2009

Rs 25

FOR DECISION MAKERS

# 50 SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS



...AND HOW THEY ARE MAKING INDIA BETTER.

Aditya Natraj wants to fix India's education system—one government school principal at a time. His Kaivalya Education Foundation is now taking 100 principals through a 3-year leadership programme. 900 more will follow in 5 years.



SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS

# THE NEW WEALTH CR

THEY PUT SOCIETY ABOVE SELF. THEY USE ENTREPRENEURIAL MEANS TO DRIVE SOCIAL CHANGE. THESE 50 SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS ARE ENRICHING THE NATION.







VISHAL KOUL

# The Village Logs In

Rural India is crying for services. And Ekgaon has several technologies to take those services to them.

## VIJAY PRATAP SINGH ADITYA

Ekgaon Technologies

### THE MISSION

Use information and communication technologies to improve rural lives.

### THE BENEFITS

Enable financial transactions via 30,000 SHGs, monitor state projects.

## Anurag Prasad

**I**TS NAME MEANS 'ONE village'. Ekgaon Technologies' mission is to use information and communication technologies to make a difference to rural lives. "The rural market is crying

for services," says Vijay Pratap Singh Aditya, the 36-year-old founder and CEO of Ekgaon. The area in which it is making the biggest difference today is financial services.

In what it does and how it does it, Ekgaon is similar to FINO (See page 78). Both use technology to bridge the gap between providers of financial services and the people who need those services. Yet, there are differences. If FINO has a console, Ekgaon's instruments of choice are a camera-mounted mobile phone and a printer.

Ekgaon has tied up with banks, micro-finance institutions (MFIs) and insurers. It works with their self-help groups (SHGs)—30,000 of them, with an average of 10 members, in four states. Each member has a card, with a bar code. Say, an MFI needs to collect an instalment of Rs 1,000 from a farmer. A designated person from the SHG, phone and printer in tow, goes to the farmer, who hands him Rs 1,000 in cash.

The SHG person uses his mobile to take a picture of the bar code on the farmer's card, and sends it to the Ekgaon server through SMS or mobile Internet. Every 15 seconds, the Ekgaon

server syncs with the MFI server. It verifies the data on the code and records the transaction. The agent generates a receipt from his printer, and gives it to the farmer. Transaction over. In 5-10 minutes. Ekgaon gets paid 25 paise per transaction from its partners. Last year, its sixth, the company recorded revenues of Rs 1.5 crore.

Ekgaon was born about 10 years back. Aditya, right after getting his management degree from the Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal, joined a World Bank-IIM project on wide area networks and rural connectivity. He started understanding technologies and what villagers wanted. He started finding ways to generate a match. And, thus, Ekgaon was formed.

After some trial and error, Aditya realised any technology must have three things. One, it must be based on a simple user interface on handheld devices. Two, it should be based on local languages. Three, it should work on low bandwidth connectivity. Ekgaon's application is based on a mobile, it has an interface in four Indian languages and it works on SMS.

In the next three years, Ekgaon wants to have 300,000 SHGs, even go abroad in a bigger way (it is working with a bank in Sri Lanka). For all this, it needs \$3-5 million. Meanwhile, its revenue push continues. Chief among them are remittances and mobile advertising (it is working with Google). Beyond financial services, Ekgaon is working on e-governance applications like monitoring NREGS, PDS and local public works. Essentially projects that act as a low-cost facilitator between customers and enterprises. And empower villages. ■