

UNSUNG BEACONS

*Stories of people for
whom humanity matters*

*A compilation of inspiring stories featured in
Conversations - a chronicle of social currents,
a monthly tabloid published by CSIM*

Centre for Social Initiative and Management

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Foreword

Conversations—a collection of inspiring success stories on social service kindles compassion and empathy in our souls. Each individual can make a tremendous difference by his commitment and dedication to the cause. After going through the collection, we feel how people from humble backgrounds can live for a ‘cause’ and get motivated to strive for making this world much more beautiful in our own way.



The collection is to be read over a period of time without being rushed through. One should meditate on every article to make the contents percolate into the inner fathoms of one's heart. We have to make a sincere inquiry into our existence and purpose on this earth. Every article has a painful history and subsequent success spun in simple words. Truth is always simple sans decorations. The reply given by Thiru. Iyyappan, “A mother will abandon her child only in utter desperation This is escaping from responsibilities, which needs to be corrected,” is a poignant portrayal of realities. The narrative on children's parliament in Arunavayal village depicts how leadership responsibilities can be inculcated in our young age by carefully cultivating them along with authority. ‘The Organic way’ on natural farming, ‘One man Army’ on a person who does yeomen service despite his physical infirmity, the service of Compassion Trust are all documentations par excellence... “I live with twenty one children, and do not differentiate them from my own”—a classical statement of Meenakshi, the Managing

Trustee of Ramamoorthy Education and Rehabilitation Trust moved me much.

The articles are titled aptly with poesy. 'Righteous visionary', 'Engendering an Identity', 'Every Child Matters' are a few examples. The collection covers a cross section of issues ranging from ecology to economy and is 'must read' for all administrators, philanthropists, and altruists. 'The Rain Water Catcher' lucidly elaborates how our ancestors' saved the surface water and we have become spendthrifts of our inherited treasures.

Archaeology is important in understanding our past and preserve it for posterity. 'Cultural Custodians' is a good documentation of the efforts of Dr. T. Sathyamurthy, whom I know personally during my tenure in Tourism and Culture Department. The story on 'Sevalaya' modeled on the principles of three great men of India is interesting, informative and inspiring.

The collection is unique for it throws light on the lesser known social servants of Tamil Nadu who are not in the limelight. Service is to be done with compassion and bliss. A documentation of this sort will be a great revelation for many of us and will create ripples in our subconscious minds silently. A great effort to be admired, acknowledged and applauded.

Dr. V. Irai Anbu IAS

Secretary to the Government
Department of Environment and Forests
Tamil Nadu

Founder's Note

The *Unsung Beacons* is indeed a treatise on people and their deeds, flowering out of their belief in service, and their unlimited and unconditional love to fellow beings.



Truly, they are ever evolving social entrepreneurs and leaders in their chosen path and passion. Each story helps us in reinstating our faith amongst humanity.

The contribution to the aspect of “Growing” by Dr. J.M. Sampath and Dr. Kalpana Sampath is simple, lucid and illustrative. The aspects of “learning” as a process of growing and introspection, leading to intuition as a key and need for getting rid of “fear” and “ego” are fundamental steps to social entrepreneurship. Looking inwards and self help is elaborated as the backbone for helping others—when, where, why, who, and how falls in place. “Giving” as a receiving process of growing, need for “Aspiration” and action, “Contentment” as against complacency which is bedrock for sustainable “growing” are interesting perspectives recommended by the Sampaths’.

In all, this book is an inspirational reading for everyone. I recommend it as a healthy soup for the heart.

Thank you!

P. N. Devarajan

Founder, CSIM

Alumni Talk

*Stories of young social change
agents who have pursued their social
entrepreneurship course at Centre
for Social Initiative and Management
(CSIM).*



A New Dawn

Arunodayam, a home to homeless mentally challenged children provides a new beginning to 90.

Giggles and laughter welcomed us at Sri Arunodayam. A group of about 10 children aged between 3 and 8 were seated in a circle reciting rhymes under Bharati's guidance. A silent group in the next room was undergoing physiotherapy.

Arunodayam is a home for abandoned mentally challenged children in Chennai. It was started by Mr. Iyyappan Subramanian, a student of CSIM. Affected by the loss of his own brother who was mentally challenged, Mr Iyappan started a home for these children. He started with one child in 2003 and now has over 80 children.

Iyyappan was born and brought up in Edaiyur, a small village in Thiruvavur district, situated in Tamil Nadu, South India.

Children are referred by the Government - Child help line. While most of the children have been abandoned by their parents, some have lost their way from home. Sri Arunodayam attempts to reunite such children with their families.

On seeing us, the excited children wanted to play with us. We took about four children for a stroll in the campus.

Anu, 5, wanted me to carry her and Sunithi, 4, insisted that I carry her too. Both were clinging to each other. Probably it was the commonness that has brought them together. Both Anu and Sunithi were surrendered by their mothers to the government as they could not afford to take care of their challenged children. Sunithi was the fourth child to her parents, Anu was born to an unmarried mother. Anu was very cheerful and wanted to sit on my lap when I spoke to her. It was a wonderful feeling to be cuddled by these innocent children who were unaware of the emotions they churned in me.

“Johny Johny...Johny..” said Saravanan, 5. I did not realize that he was trying to recite the popular rhyme until Chitra, the Administrator of Sri Arunodayam, mentioned this to me. “He was a bed-ridden child when he came here. Now, he is independent. He selects his clothes each day and likes to watch television and dance too”, beamed Chitra.

Mukthi, 2, was found along with her mother who is mentally ill. “Her mother is undergoing psychiatry treatment at Banyan and once she recovers, she will take custody of the child,” says Thilak, psychologist at Sri Arunodayam.

Ankith, 10, enjoyed being photographed and kept combing his hair frequently. He was talkative and curious to learn what was written about him when I

was going through his file. 'Child line' had found him stranded at the Central Railway Station and referred him to Sri Arunodayam in the year 2004. "I used to beg along with my brother in Punjab. One day, we returned home late and I got severely beaten up by our father. As we could not bear the pain, we left our home. My brother left me in a train and got off at a railway station. I was found alone by an old lady, who took me and sent me here. I want to grow up and work in office like Anna ", he said pointing towards Iyyappan.

"After undergoing counseling and treatment, Ankith is like any other normal child. We plan to admit him in a residential school for normal children," said Iyyappan.

Ramjani, 16, who does not remember how he came to Chennai, kept repeating my name. I wondered if there was someone in his family who shared the same name and asked him. He did not have an answer. All he could say was, "I come from Meerut which is far away from here."

The children are provided physiotherapy, counseling, speech therapy and medical care. "Each child is unique. We struggled to meet the needs of the children and provide them with individual attention. Now, with the support of the community we are able to manage all these needs effectively", says Iyyappan.

"A mother will abandon her child only in utter desperation. She does it either due to extreme poverty or because the father or family refuses to support her in raising such a child. This is escaping from responsibilities, which needs to be corrected," concluded Iyyappan.

Some of these children cannot perform the simplest of tasks that we seem to take for granted. Simple things like walking straight, eating or going to the toilet. A

great amount of patience and tolerance is required to supervise and handle such children. I wondered how Iyyappan and his team of caregivers made it all sound so easy!

I came away with the sound of giggles in my ears, and a sense of awe.

Iyyappan Subramanyan, all of 28 years, is a B.Sc. in Psychology, a CSIM fellow, and a guardian to more than 80 children. Among his several awards and achievements sits the impressive 'Change Looms' Fellowship. He was also among the twenty exceptional young leaders from all over the world selected as 2008 Youth Action Net Global Fellows.

—Marie Banu

For more information about Sri Arunodayam please contact Mr. Iyyappan at (044) 265 11450 or 265 10778.



The Big Little Senators

“If the Panchayat is unable to support us, then we will mobilize funds and coordinate the repair on our own.”

A. Deepa, 13, Finance Minister of Arunavayal Children’s Parliament as I walked towards the temple in Arunavayal village in Tiruvallur district, I heard young voices engrossed in a serious discussion. I sneaked in on what I imagined would be some idle chatter about some movie or game. I was wrong by a mile.

“The street light is not working for the past two days and Rani akka slipped and fell last night while crossing the road. I have already sent the petition yesterday and hope by tonight the street light starts burning,” said one girl.

“What about the leaking tap in South Street? Did the plumber come as promised?” asked another kid.

“Of course! He came in the morning and repaired it,” retorted the girl.

“Did the Maths teacher join duty yesterday?” a boy asked.

“No she did not! But the headmaster arranged for a volunteer to take her class,” replied another.

Curious to know more, I entered the temple, walked towards the voices, and sat down. I was told that the Children Parliament was in session.

I sat more respectfully.

A group of 18 children sat in a circle with a few registers and notebooks in their hands. Their animated, serious discussions revolved around real issues in their village. I was astonished by the topics they discussed:

- Deciding on issues to be raised in the forthcoming Gram Sabha meeting. Gram sabha is constituted by all members of a village over the age of 18 years. The Gram Sabha elects the Gram Panchayat, a council of elected members which takes decisions on key issues in the village.
- Allocating space for computer and typewriting classes for students who have completed class X
- Deciding on where to plant saplings
- Approaching transport authorities to ensure bus service for school children
- Preparing an archive of news items on the children of Arunavayal and their welfare
- Taking measures to improve the quality of teaching in a particular school because they weren't many teachers
- Convening the Parent Teacher Association meetings regularly.

After a few heated debates and arguments, resolutions were passed, points were recorded and the session

was concluded. Throughout the session, the children discussed the problem earnestly before arriving at a solution.

There was only one silent elder observing the group and that was Logammal, a 30-year-old social entrepreneur who initiated the Children Parliament in Arunavayal village, located 40 km from Chennai. Most of the villagers are engaged as agricultural labourers. There is only one primary school in the village. Children walk four km to the nearby village, Thiruvloor, to attend high school.

Logammal has been taking tuitions for the past seven years. She understood all the problems the children faced both at school and at home. When she spoke to them about the concept of Children Parliament as a measure to resolve their problems, the children were excited about launching one in their village. The parents were first apprehensive that this might affect their studies. After seeing the examination results in which all the children scored well, the parents were convinced. The first Children's Parliament started in April, 2007.

About the Parliament

Children from Class 4 to 12 are encouraged to be members of the Children Parliament. Younger children are allowed to attend meetings as observers. Till date, three Children Parliaments have been formed, each consisting of 20 to 25 members.

Ten of the elected members hold the following portfolios: President, Vice President, Prime Minister, Home Minister and his assistant, Finance, Health, Law and order, Information and Broadcasting and Public Works Department. The tenure for each position is five years.

Children are selected by the members for these positions unanimously based on their capabilities. If there is a contest, voting takes place. When members express their inability to continue, a special meeting is organized and a re-election takes place. An attendance register is maintained and all the proceedings are documented.

The first resolution in the Children Parliament is ‘to respect elders and those who are physically challenged’.

“Our parliament has been functioning for the past two years. There is a Prime Minister, a Speaker and eight more Ministers holding different portfolios. There are no specific criteria for participation - children who are interested, join the Parliament,” said the current Prime Minister, 16-year-old B. Mahalakshmi.

“The Speaker starts the session and requests the Home Minister to read the minutes of the previous session. The members start discussing whether any action has been taken on the resolutions passed in the previous sessions. If action has not been taken, the concerned minister is asked to give an explanation,” said Sasikala, the 12-year-old PWD minister.

“My role is to monitor the activities of the group and assist the President. We have submitted petitions to the Panchayat and have facilitated repair of water taps and street lights. The Panchayat would discuss the petition during the Gram Sabha on 26th January. If the Panchayat is unable to support, then we will mobilize funds and coordinate the repair on our own,” said Jayakumar, the 12-year-old Vice-President.

Children are given real-life responsibilities at a very early age. For instance, the Finance Minister of the Children’s Parliament maintains her group accounts and has an account in the local post office.

All children attend the Gram Sabha meeting that is conducted in Arunavayal village. When meetings are organized in the neighboring villages, four child representatives from each Children Parliament attend and submit petitions.

The advocacy efforts coordinated by the children are many. For instance, there was an arrack shop in the village which they wanted removed. The Mahalir Sangam and Youth groups had submitted several petitions to the Panchayat to remove it, but failed. The children conducted a rally on Independence Day protesting against the presence of arrack shop and on the very next day, August 16, 2008, the shop was relocated.

There are two Children's Parliaments in Arunavayal and one in Sakkaraitoppu. At Zaminkorattur, two meetings have been organized and members have been registered.

"My father is an alcoholic. He used to scold me for attending meetings and traveling out of the village. When he saw my picture in the newspaper, he was moved to tears. Now, he does not scold me at all. I want to become a collector and continue to serve my villagers," says Sasikala.

If such Children Parliaments functioned in every neighborhood in Chennai, Singara Chennai would become an enduring reality.

-Marie Banu

To know more about the Children Parliament, please contact Ms. Logammal at +91 9445252834.



The Organic Way

FarmVille, an innovative online game, is the latest craze among city dwellers. The youth are amused by the concept of rearing virtual cattle and growing a variety of crops on their 'farms'. But there are youngsters who find real farming more interesting than virtual farming. "I stopped playing FarmVille. I have a real farm in my home now and am out of the virtual world," says Kashyap, an engineering student.

This farm or kitchen garden being referred to by Kashyap has been made possible by Egamparam, the son of a farmer from Senji village in Tamil Nadu.

Like many other farmers, Egamparam's father too was unable to cope with mounting farm loans coupled with a poor yield. After his father's death, Egamparam took it upon himself to find a way to stop the incidence of farmer suicides.

"I realized that farmer suicides were rampant because most of the farmers harvested only one crop. Often, this one crop failed to yield enough to keep the farmer

financially afloat. In addition, constant use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides made fertile lands barren. And reclaiming these lands to increase fertility was too long a process,” observes Egamparam.

Egamparam’s mentor, Dr. G. Nammalwar, suggested that sustainable agriculture through integrated and organic farming method was the answer to the problem of farmer suicides. Egamparam then worked with organizations engaged in agricultural research to learn about the technical aspects of agriculture.

With the knowledge of farming and a mission to popularize integrated and organic farming, Egamparam started the Earth Watch Foundation in 2005. Promoting crop diversity, developing farm ponds, native seed planting, breeding milch cattle and planting trees are some of the activities of the foundation.

Considerable effort went into convincing farmers to move away from their conventional farming ways and adopt organic farming. “The farmers have now understood that organic farming not only increases the crop yield but also helps in retaining the nutrients and water in the soil. Although the yield for the first two years is less, organic farming aims at sustainability of the farmland.”

Seeing the positive response from farmers, Egamparam has expanded his operations from Pudukottai to include other villages like Panampatti, Melur, Manikampatti, Oorapatti and Muthudayarpatti, all situated in the Madurai district of Tamil Nadu.

These being predominantly dry areas, there was tremendous resistance to farming. But with practices like rainwater harvesting, these farmlands soon became fertile.

The Center for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) honed the entrepreneurial skills in Egamparam. Through the CSIM network, he is now working on bringing the producers and the consumers together.

Egamparam urges urban folks to shift from investing in the share market to investing in agriculture. “My plan is simple. The investor gives a two-year loan to an organic farmer at 25% interest. This money is then used as ‘seed capital’ to buy seeds and other inputs. The interesting feature of this plan is that the farmer will repay the loan along with a weekly supply of farm fresh organic vegetables. These vegetables will be supplied from the fourth month onwards.” He adds with a smile, “Apart from interest money, the investor is assured of good health and less frequent visits to the doctor.”

At the end of the second year, this capital-endowed farmer will train five other farmers about organic farming and provide seed capital to one such farmer. By doing so, the plan aims at promoting the concept of organic farming.

By setting up kitchen and terrace gardens, Egamparam has now taken the concept of farming to the homes of Chennai. With little exposure to farms, city-bred children are amazed at the carrots and tomatoes growing on their rooftops. Till the garden is ready to yield, Egamparam visits them once a week to manure and prune the vegetables. In each of these homes, a compost pit has been set up to convert the kitchen waste to manure.

To spread the idea of organic farming, Egamparam plans on taking the help of the Government to make organic farming compulsory for all farmers.

“A certain rule says that in the committee that prepares schemes for the agriculture industry, 10% of the

participation should be from farmers. Sadly, this rule is not being implemented. In the long run, I want farmers to involve themselves from the planning stage itself. This seems difficult, but it is achievable.”

“Agriculture sustains this country. It is unfortunate however, that for their own sustenance, farmers have to turn to others with begging bowls. To change this is my dream.”

—Yogini

*Interested to know more? Please contact Egamparam at
+91 9942927765*



One man Army

From zero to hero is the story of Mr. Arokiyadas - a story of courage and will power to overcome the physical and financial difficulties, and to rise like a phoenix from want and frustration to a life of commitment and missionary zeal in the upliftment of his fellowbeings.

Born with congenital deformity of limbs, life was not easy for Arokiyadas, who came from a very poor family with only mother to take care of him. He could not complete his tenth standard from Nungambakkam School. Abject poverty, to top it a government eviction notice for his house in the slum clearance board for not paying taxes caused him depression and he ran from pillar to post when a friend took him to a NGO. Ms.Usha directed him to Mr. C.J. Paul who gave Arokiyadas two letters - one for Mr. Narayanan at Ecomwel and the

second one for Padmini Subramaniam who coordinated a NGO for women.

“It was from Ecomwel that I got financial help. A loan with zero interest helped me clear the government debt. I had to repay the loan. But how could I? Nobody was willing to give me a job as I was disabled. Finally, with the help of my friend Umapathy who was also physically challenged, I got a job in an electrical shop. Both of us needed the job. So we decided that one week I would work while the next week he would. Everyone was given ten rupees a day but I was paid only eight rupees. I had to check all the electrical goods taken out by other electricians and also deal with customers. Being a fast learner, I learnt all the electrical work in a short time and became an expert electrician. But when increment was given, I got only Rs 2.50 whereas others got Rs 5. I was disappointed but did not give up. I had to prove that I was better or atleast equal to others and so I worked hard. The next year when everyone got Rs 5 as increment I got Rs 7.

My hard work yielded result

“Everyone at Ecomwel encouraged me but I will be always grateful to Mr. Narayanan, Mr. C.J.Paul and Mr. Mani for not only inspiring me but also giving me moral support and helping me in every way possible.”

Due to misunderstanding with the co-workers, Arokiyadas left his job at the electrical shop and worked with CAN (Community Action Network) for their AIDS awareness programe.

“I used to commute with my tricycle to most parts of the city distributing pamphlets and condoms to auto rickshaw drivers and others. For this, I was

paid a monthly salary of Rs 1000/-. I repaid the loan that was offered by Ecomwel from this income. When CAN project ended, I worked for Ecomwel's project at Cauvery pakkam. This was a rural development project and I used to stitch plastic bags. Later, I was given the responsibility of opening the Ecomwel office in the morning and closing it in the evening. Besides this, I offered to run errands for the staff like paying the electricity bill, attend to bank work, etc.

When Ms. Reena Perolin, the funding donor from Switzerland visited the office, she was impressed with my enthusiasm and hard work and appointed me as a full time office assistant for Ecomwel on a monthly salary of Rs.800. The next year, the salary was increased to almost double – I was paid Rs.1500.

Many people used to come to office enquiring for me as I used to guide them on how to access government services. When Mr. Mani, founder of Ecomwel, realized that I have helped nearly 500 persons with disabilities, he published a booklet highlighting my story and named me 'One man army'. This inspired me the most and I continued my work with great zeal. Ecomwel further encouraged me to undergo a training program at CSIM (Centre for Social Initiative and Management).

After the one year training programme, I was asked to start my own NGO. But, I was diffident and did not want to leave Ecomwel. Later, with the full support of Ecomwel, I launched my NGO 'Snegithan' in 2003 and Mr. P.N. Devarajan, founder of CSIM inaugurated my small office.

"Till date, I have provided referral services to over 3000 people. I not only guide and support physically challenged persons but also offer support to the under privileged children. There was a time when I did not have

money to have one meal a day, but today I have 75 Kgs of rice in my office for donation. Most of trust funds are sourced from individuals.”

There’s a sense of pride and happiness as Arokiyadas sits in his small office. On one side of the room, there are cupboards where he stores his files and part of the room is filled with the computer and accessories. The room has a sliding glass door and it is from this small space that big deeds are carried out. The major focus of Snegithan is offering counselling services for the differently abled and providing them with aids and appliances, educational and medical support, employment referrals and coordinating self employment projects.

Arokiyadas future plan is to develop Snegithan as a leading counseling centre. He coordinates an annual tour to Velankanni and other places of worship for the children who are supported by his organisation. The funds for this is mobilised from individual donations and through sponsorship.

Arokiyadas lives with his wife and twin daughters. “My children are very affectionate towards me and so is my wife. I am a very happy person now. I have a bank account and obtain a stipend from Ecomwel.”

“There is no one willing to offer support to my organisation to meet the administrative expenses. I would be happy if people after reading this article, come forward to support Snegithan”.

If people are motivated, they can help others. After meeting Arokiyadas, I feel sure that the word ‘impossible’ does not exist; man can overcome any difficulty if he has a will.

—Ambika P

For more information about Snegithan, please contact Arokiyadas at (044) 26442912 or +91 9884292630



Compassionate Corporate Corps

Saturday is busier than any weekday for Gowdhaman, who works as Systems Analyst at Royal Bank of Scotland. This is because he travels to Arunavoyal village—about 42 kilometers from Chennai—to teach children spoken English and extra-curricular activities on every Saturday.

Gowdhaman is engaged in social work along with his former colleagues Madeena and Leelavathy for over three years. While he was working for William's Lea, it was an email that triggered the volunteering spirit in him.

“We received an appeal to support the educational expenses of Arjun, the son of a housekeeping staff. We learnt that Arjun stood first in class and his family could not afford his educational expenses. I volunteered to mobilise support for him and collected Rs. 3000 from my fellow staff. The fee was remitted on time and a copy of the bill was shared with the donors via email. This

was encouraged and I wanted to help more children and offer my services to the society.”

“On another occasion, a visually impaired person wanted to pursue the teacher training course but could not afford Rs. 15,000 as fee. I mailed an appeal to my contacts in India as well as abroad and mobilised the funds. This incident made me realise that everyone wants to extend their support for a good cause, but do not know how. There were two sets of people – one who can only make a monetary contribution and the other who can volunteer his/her time and service,” said Gowdhaman.

Madeena, Leelavathy and Gowdhaman helped the visually impaired students, by writing for them during their free time. Once Leelavathy helped a visually impaired student to write his examination at CSIM. She learnt about the courses that were offered and discussed with Ms. Latha Suresh about their volunteering efforts. She advised her to enrol in the short-term course and learn to effectively coordinate the social work activities.

“I shared this information with Gowdhaman and Madeena, and all three of us decided to enrol for the Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Programme in July 2009. What was common amongst us was our intention to serve the society,” said Leelavathy.

Gowdhaman says: “We wanted to register a trust for a very long time, but were not confident to start one until I enrolled at CSIM. I have registered a Trust named ‘Compassion’ during September 2009, for which I am the Founder and Managing Trustee. Madeena and Leelavathy continue to volunteer their time to teach the children at Arunavoyal. Compassion Trust has a policy

to extend only 70 to 80% of the total financial support that has been requested for. The intention is to make the beneficiary participate and take ownership in the activity they engage in. At times, when the beneficiary expresses their inability to invest the remaining 20 to 30% of the funds that is necessary for the programme we refer them to other donors for support.”

“Our objective is to extend educational support to the under-privileged children in rural areas who lack support from any other NGO. We mobilise funds from our friends and pay honorarium of Rs. 600 a month to Ms. Madhumitha, the teacher who manages the tuition centre at Arunavoyal.”

“Around 30 volunteers are associated with the education programme and in this five of them take turns to visit the village every week. Children are taught spoken English, sports and other extra-curricular activities. Activity based learning method is used for teaching and children enjoy the word building games and sports. Those who were finding it difficult to read English can now write more than 200 words. Real-time inspiring stories are also narrated to the children. Weekend assignments are given and the children are encouraged to use the community library.”

“English classes are conducted in the morning and games are organised in the evening. During examinations, children are advised on how to manage stress and plan their study. The children are good in sports and have the potential to excel at the district and state level. What they lack is proper guidance. Around 30 children attend the weekend classes regularly and more than 65 children participate in sports activities. All the program activities are recorded so that it will

help the volunteers replicate the weekend program in other villages.”

“When I attended an interview at Google, I was not selected as I was over qualified for the position. My aim is to see that the children in the rural areas are as competent as the urban children in education as well as communication skills,” he added.

—Marie Banu

If you wish to know more about Compassion Trust, please contact Mr. Gowdhaman at 9884056355 or email gowdhaman@gmail.com



Twenty One Children

“I live with twenty one children, and do not differentiate them from my own,” says Meenakshi.

Meenakshi was busy supervising the cooking while the children were playing shuttle, and few were watching television. She said: “It is summer vacation, and so all the children are at home. They are allowed to play and do things they like, during their holidays. While all children go to school, Rajasekar (18) is undergoing training at ITI, Guindy.”

Meenakshi is the Managing Trustee of Ramamoorthy Education and Rehabilitation Trust. Her husband Ramamoorthy was an employee in Lucas TVS. When he was 39 years old, he suffered from brain hemorrhage which caused a paralytic stroke. She was then working as a school teacher in KK Nagar, with no support from her relatives to manage her family’s emotional as well as

financial needs. In 1999, Meenakshi and her husband decided to dedicate their lives for orphaned children and launched a trust.

Initially, with the support of NGOs in Chennai, care and support was offered for seven orphaned children. After Ramamoorthy expired in 2007, Meenakshi along with her youngest daughter Kalpana continued to manage the home. Now, 18 children (7 girls) belonging to 5 to 18 years of age are provided care and support.

Kalpana (25), a student of CSIM, is managing the trust activities after completing her graduation. “CSIM widened my knowledge horizons. Vijayakumari of Sivasakthi Kakkum Karangal sponsored my education here and showed me the way to gain knowledge in the social work field.

The Public Relations and Fund Raising techniques helped me to approach sponsors. The field visits, field work, and block internship provided me with tremendous exposure. The experience that I gained when I worked with many child welfare organizations, helped me in managing the children in my home.”

“It is better to have a small group, and provide personalized attention in bringing up the children, than have large numbers. I do not turn down children coming to me seeking care and protection. We removed all the doors inside our home, as we do not want the children to feel restricted,” says Kalpana.

The orphanage functions at Kalpana’s residence, and is filled with love, care, and cheer. Daniel, a volunteer teaches the children during the evenings, and the children are allowed to watch television after studying. Senthil Kumar Manian from Aspire software systems

has been a long term donor, and a pillar of strength for the organization.

“I am watching ‘Stuart little,’ said twelve year old Tamil Selvi, who was watching television. Children who come to the orphanage face a lot of anxiety, and take up to two years to settle down in the home. Some children are adamant, and need special care and affection. Once they complete their education, and are independent, they are allowed to move out of the home.

Meenakshi treats all the children like her own. “I have twenty one children now. We do not receive a fee concession in any of the schools, and we do not demand this either. All the children like to study, although some need special attention,” says Meenakshi.

Besides orphans, even single parent children, and those whose parents are HIV infected are provided shelter in the home. Children are given nutritious food, and a full-time cook is employed by the trust. All children are encouraged to study and engage in extra-curricular activities.

“I have approached corporate houses for donation, and have succeeded in seeking the support of individual employees. Support from the organization itself is yet to happen. I am quite happy with the support that I receive from my family, friends, and neighbors. Volunteers are our immediate need. We need them to teach the children as well as play with them. The focal point in my life is this home and the children.” says Kalpana.

—Radha Jagan & Marie Banu

If you wish to know more about Ramamoorthy Education and Rehabilitation Trust, please contact Kalpana at 9841802852, or write to kalpanareart@gmail.com.



Mission Education

With just Rs 5,000, Kamalakannan started his NGO, Vizhuthugal in the year 2008. Today, he stands tall as a social entrepreneur supporting five tuition centres in the district of Erode, Tamil Nadu.

Born in a weaver's family, Kamalakannan was a first-generation graduate. He followed the principles of Swami Vivekananda and was an avid reader of his books. After completing his Bachelors' Degree in Computer Science in Coimbatore, he started a Ramakrishna ashram where he taught children who lived in the nearby slum.

After a few months of starting the ashram, he joined Deccan Services, a BPO in Chennai. Kamalakannan served as a volunteer at the Shirdi Sai Baba Temple and every Thursday he distributed food to those who lived in the vicinity. "I wanted to do something tangible for these

people, but did not know how. I wanted to render social work in a professional manner,” said Kamalakannan.

Quitting a secure job and engaging in social work full-time was not easy. Kamalakannan enquired in various educational institutions in Chennai about the social work courses that they offered. “I learnt that a master’s degree in social work was a two-year course and I could not afford to pay the high fees. When I read about CSIM in a Tamil daily, I called their office and was asked to attend the interview. At the interview, I expressed my inability to pay the fees and requested for support. Latha Suresh, the Director, was compassionate and enrolled me in the course. This was a turning point in my life and I have never looked back since,” he said.

Kamalakannan joined for the Post-Graduate Diploma in Social Initiative and Management. “I was offered a scholarship of Rs 2,000 per month. I utilised this money to meet my travel, food, and accommodation costs,” he said.

Kamalakannan was selected for the ‘Inainthu Naam 99’ fellowship scheme that was offered by Siragugal, an NGO in Chennai. He was one of the 99 selected from 1,600 applicants. Of the 99, 66 were students and 33 were company representatives who were interested in social work.

“I was offered a fellowship of Rs 5,000 per month for two years to start an NGO. The formal event was organised by Siragugal in Pollachi to distribute the fellowship amount, for which APJ Abdul Kalam was the chief guest. I launched the Vizhuthugal Social Trust in Punjai Puliampatti in June 2008 along with my friends Elango and Parthasarathy,” added Kamalakannan.

The trust offers tuition services to underprivileged children. Vizhuthugal started working in one village

and later expanded to five villages. The fellowship fund lasted six months and Kamalakannan did not know how to continue supporting the NGO's activities after that period. "We found it difficult to pay the salary for our tuition teachers. I contacted Latha Suresh who said that she would support us for three months and advised me to identify a donor in the interim. When P N Subramanian learnt about our problem, he requested his friend Murugan to contribute to our trust," said Kamalakannan.

Murugan donated a computer and offered a regular sponsorship of Rs 5,000 a month. Today, there are 245 children studying from standard 3rd to 9th who are provided tuition through five centers coordinated by Vizhuthugal.

In a span of four years, Kamalakannan had donned many hats—a corporate employee, a volunteer at Sai Baba Temple, a CSIM student and a NGO head. When asked which of these roles he liked best, he replied: "I liked only two of them—being a CSIM student and my present role as NGO Director."

Additionally, Kamalakannan coordinated eye camps with the help of Aravind Eye Hospital and planted tree saplings near the tuition centers. The trust also extended support to those who needed medical assistance.

Kamalakannan visits the tuition centre regularly and also spends time teaching the children. Besides regular lessons, children are also taught spoken English, computers, and yoga. During the summer vacation, the children attend dance lessons that are conducted by trained teachers.

"Villagers from Madampalayam and Marampalayam villages are requesting us to set up tuition centers in their villages as well. Individual donations from

friends and well wishers enable us to meet the program expenses. If we have more support, we will be able to expand to these villages as well,” said Kamalakannan. “The respect I gained through my social work activities has been encouraging. My family, who were once apprehensive when I shifted to social work, is now extremely proud of me,” concluded Kamalakannan with a glint in his eye.

—Marie Banu

*For further information please contact Kamalakannan
at 9382296406*



Nightingale of Thirumullaivoyal

“The spark to play an active role in social work was there in me even when I was a young, but I did not know the means nor did I have any money to help others,” says Kalaivani.

The tuition centre was buzzing with children memorizing their lessons while their teachers were mentoring. Manoj Kumar, an eight-year-old boy rushed to the tuition centre, holding his trousers. “Miss, I have scored 90 marks in the mathematics test today,” he says. Kalaivani patted his back and smiled.

“I started with one tuition centre at Kannandapalayam village, which is seven kilometers from Thirumullaivoyal. The classes were conducted in the open ground until the panchayat provided the village community centre premise. Now, I manage three tuition centers in three different villages—Thirumullaivoyal, Kandigai, and Kanndapalayam—benefiting 150 children,” says Kalaivani.

Kalaivani is the founder of Nightingale Social Trust, an NGO registered in 2006. The Trust's primary objective is to provide education for the underprivileged children. The centre functions from 6 to 8 P.M on all days, and children are offered biscuits and snacks. Each year, Rotary Club provides free note books and stationery to all the tuition children. Once in a year, during Diwali or Christmas the children are offered gifts by Bhoomi. Besides tuition, children are also taught environment education, yoga, and spoken English.

Few children are also offered educational support through Nightingale Trust. Bharati, 17, a student of the tuition centre recently completed her 12 th standard and ranked third in her school. She is now pursuing her graduation in Mahalakshmi Women's College at Poonamalee, and all her educational expenses are borne by the Trust.

During weekends, the tuition centre doubles up to serve as a computer center. "We received four computers from Bhoomi, a voluntary group, and with the support of ten volunteers we provide free computer education to the tuition children. Zonta Club sponsors the salary costs for three tuition teachers, and we mobilize individual donations to meet our other expenses," says Kalaivani.

Kalaivani eyes welled when she remembered her childhood days. She had to discontinue her studies when she was in 9 th standard as she had to take care of her ailing grandmother. She got married when she was 21 to Kuppuswamy, an employee in the private sector. Her husband Kuppuswamy understood her desire to engage in social work, and encouraged her to pursue her higher studies.

“I have now completed my Bachelor’s Degree in Public Administration in Madras Open University. I started to work for my village community. Besides the tuition centre, I also worked towards village development and approached authorities to lay proper roads and install street lights in our village. Since then, our village has access to regular bus services,” says Kalaivani.

Kuppuswamy supports Kalaivani in all the project activities, including coordinating the health camp once in three months. “My husband teaches yoga, general knowledge, and tailoring for the tuition children. He spends most of his leisure time with the tuition children,” says Kalaivani.

Kalaivani leads a self-help group that she formed in 2000. This was her first step into social work. She is also the Secretary of Thirumullaivoyal Grama Penngal Sabha (Thirumullaivoyal Village Women’s Forum) since 2001.

“While I was actively engaged in the SHG programmes as well as Grama Pengal Sabha programmes, I also attended Entrepreneurship Development Trainings. I was keen to widen my knowledge about social issues and social work, and so participated in short-term courses conducted by NGOs. This gave me the opportunity to work with Madras Social Development Society’s ‘Care and Support Program for HIV patients’. As part of my work, when I visited the Kilpauk Medical College, I met Senthil, an alumnus of CSIM. He shared with me information on the courses offered by CSIM, and motivated me to enroll for the Post Graduate Diploma in Social Initiative and Management Program.”

“A world of change happened to me after enrolling at CSIM. My ideas on social work became more focused. I learnt about many practical aspects like registering a Trust and the formalities associated, and the strategic approach in addressing a social issue. The training provided by CSIM also strengthened my communication and inter personal skills, as well as made me understand the power of networking. Today, I network with many organizations and individuals which enables me to scale up my work effectively,” says Kalaivani.

Nightingale Trust along with Rotary Club organizes health care programs at Uvbarapalayam, Kannadapalayam, Pothur, Pothur colony, Arikambedu, Kandigai, and Kollumedu villages that are located around Thirumullaivoyal. With the support of M N Eye Hospital in Chennai, free eye surgeries were conducted for ten people, and free spectacles were provided to thirty people at Kannadapalayam. Recently, Nightingale Trust and Rotary Club have taken over the management of a private hospital in Nerkundram. While the trust refers patients to the hospital, Rotary Club coordinates the administration.

“Kannan, never knew that he was having a heart ailment until he attended our health camp. As he could not afford the medical expenses, he did not reveal about his ailment to his family. One day, he suddenly took ill and was hospitalized in Chettinad Hospital at Kelambakkam. Dr. Satish Nair who had diagnosed him during the camp saw him by chance and informed me. I coordinated the insurance claim that was offered by the government which enabled Kannan to undergo the by-pass surgery successfully,” says Kalaivani.

Awareness programs on health, hygiene and nutrition, pre-natal and post natal maternal care was also

conducted. “Our health care volunteers co-ordinate with the Public Health Centre and distribute medicines and supplements benefiting people living in seven neighbouring villages. “Our children planted 100 saplings in and around Thirumullaivoyal as part of our environment awareness campaign. I believe that every individual plays a crucial role in the overall development of the village and it is our duty to motivate them,” concludes Kalaivani.

Fighting against many odds, this young woman Kalaivani has paved the way for hundreds of villagers living in around Thirumullaivoyal.

—Radha Jagan

If you wish to extend support to Nightingale Trust, please contact Kalaivani at 09962993947.



Righteous Visionary

“When I was in 12th standard, I lost my eyesight due to glaucoma,” said (full name will be better) Chezhiyan. Despite treatment at reputed eye hospitals in Tamil Nadu, Chezhiyan could not regain his eyesight. But this did not affect his studies. He got an M.Phil degree in History. “I never found it difficult. The notes were all recorded in a cassette and given to me. During examinations, the question paper would be read out loud, and I was able to write all the exams with the help of a scribe,” said Chezhiyan.

When he tried to find a job, he found all doors closed. He realized that society was not ready to accept his skills and expertise, and realized that the differently-abled were a handicapped lot. This motivated him to take up their cause. Chezhiyan set up Mercy Social Trust in 2005 at Kadaladi, his village in Tiruvannamalai

district, Tamil Nadu and focused on the education of socially and economically backward children, vocational training, and support to the disabled and rural women through empowerment programs.

“Though I set up the Trust and began to work, I was not sure about the direction to take and the modalities to adopt. It was at this time I heard about CSIM’s programmes through H. Narayanan, the chairperson of CSIM’s academic council and its support to NGOs, CBOs, and other social change agents. I enrolled for the PGDSIM course at CSIM in 2006 and ever since, Mercy Trust has moved on a fast track. The lectures, seminars, workshops, field work, interaction with various people in the social sector and the internship programme have helped me to take my organization in the right direction,” said Chezhiyan.

“I have networked with many organizations like Rotary club, Lions Club, Udhavum Ullangal, and other local organizations. This enabled me to serve the people, especially women, in my home town, Kadaladi, a remote village. Till date, 200 women have completed their tailoring course and 20 women are being trained now. They can earn and work as trainers too. Besides training, women are also offered counseling. Career guidance has been given to over 1500 people. We are now planning to start a computer training centre and are looking for sponsors to provide computers, and teachers to train the rural and physically challenged women,” added Chezhiyan.

Although qualified, Chezhiyan could not get a job in a bank or in the government. He decided to fight for the

rights of the disabled and began working on advocacy initiatives while studying at CSIM. He realized that though the Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission had a three per cent reservation for the disabled, it was not implemented. He filed a lawsuit against the government and won. Following the court order, the Government offered jobs to 600 physically challenged people.

“Only five to six per cent of the population is physically challenged. If three per cent get jobs, they could survive and live with dignity. Not all disabled people are aware of their rights. We need to engage the media to empower them and sensitize them about their rights,” asserted Chezhiyan.

He said, “My focus is not only for the rights of the disabled, but also of the underprivileged. I have conducted awareness programs on National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in the neighboring villages. This helped many families enrol in the NREGA scheme and seek work for 100 days.”

Chezhiyan comes from a family of weavers. He aspires to work for the weaver community’s welfare in and around his home town. His dream is to set up a power loom near Kadaladi and employ his villagers. “I have submitted proposals to a few organizations. Some of them have rejected my proposal as they were not confident of my capabilities. But I will prove them wrong by starting my own power loom. I am sure they will come forward one day to support my dream. The power loom would be a social enterprise and I will employ the disabled, women and needy weavers in Tiruvanamalai district,” concluded Chezhiyan.

Having overcome several hurdles, and having succeeded in many ventures, Chezhiyan's dreams are surely not going to end soon. He will not stop until he achieves his vision of improving the living standard in and around his home town.

—Fathima Khaja Mohaideen

If you wish to support Mercy Social Trust, please contact Chezhiyan at +91 9943163345.



Engendering an Identity

Even though we may call ourselves educated, boast of great levels of exposure towards various socio-cultural-technological advancements; we still have problems contending to patriarchal values. We remain closed to liberally discussing gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation. Shabeena Francis Saveri, an achiever of sorts, is a transgender and founder President of Dai Welfare Society, Mumbai and Founder Trustee of South India Aravanigal Rights and Rehabilitation Centre, Trichy. She is a committed activist who has worked extensively in the field of Human Trafficking, HIV/AIDS prevention, Health and Human Rights, Transgender Rights, and Anti-Tobacco movements. An Indian ambassador at major international forums of discussion on transgender issues, she is also a member of the Advisory Board in Trans-respect versus Trans-phobia (TvT) Project (conducted by transgender Europe).

She has been recently invited to be a panel speaker on her research topic 'Transgender (Hijra-Aravani) Social Movements in Tamil Nadu'.

Having started her career as Assistant to the then Deputy Municipal Commissioner Mr. G. R. Khairnar in Mumbai, where she worked for the rescue and rehabilitation of trafficked women in Mumbai, she has come a long way. It was not until she arrived in Chennai for higher studies in the year 2002, that she found her true career call.

While pursuing M. Phil in Sociology at Annamalai University, she took up the PGDSIM course at CSIM in the year 2004-2005. "Joining CSIM was one of the major turning points in my life. Still studying then, I was in desperate need of a job to support myself. I was given a stipend, and Mrs. Latha Suresh, Director, CSIM, identified my interest in documentation and referred me to a few organizations that needed assistance. At CSIM, the rigorous training and the various topics that were taught changed my attitude, and provided me with a fresh perspective of life. CSIM has been an eye opener for me and it is also my second home," says Shabeena.

Spilling the beans on her childhood dreams, she recalls wistfully, "I wanted to grow up to become a school teacher. Somewhere along the way, between activism and grass-root level work, this dream wore away. When I was doing M.Phil, I decided to pursue my Ph.D, and it is then I confirmed to myself that this is where I want to be." The contentment in her voice is unmistakable.

Speaking of her growth as a professional, she reminisces her trip to the United States in 2009 as part of a student

exchange programme, visiting the George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Washington University. “Meeting teachers who dealt with topics such as ‘Queer Rights’, and students who were doing research in the same field, and also a few trans-people, I learnt about the different strategies they adopted to address Human Rights issues in their country.”

“The U.S. society is very much gendered,” she observes, “You are compulsorily required to conform to being a man or a woman, even if you are a trans-gendered person. Although there are a few welfare policies for the transgender, these policies are not uniform. At the societal front, there is no concept of a third gender in the United States and in the European countries, whereas, India is one of the very few nations where trans-people have a role in the society. Even though they are still treated like aliens, they are regarded as Demigods and are feared to have blessing and cursing powers.”

Just back from the Barcelona International Congress on Gender Identity and Human Rights, she says: “Attending international conferences provides me an exposure to realities of trans-people all over the world. It helps in forming active networks and listening to real life experiences.” Narrating her personal experiences of being a trans-woman she says, “I have been on my own since I was seventeen, and I have been supporting myself financially. It has been a long and difficult path, but I’ve taken everything as a learning experience,” quips Shabeena, even as she speaks of her tour de force. About 13 years ago, after completing school, she left her family and charted a path of her own. “Leading a normal life as a trans-person can be quite difficult,” she laments. “In states like Tamil Nadu, where the Aravani tradition symbolizes the lifestyle of trans-people, and where it is common to find them making a living

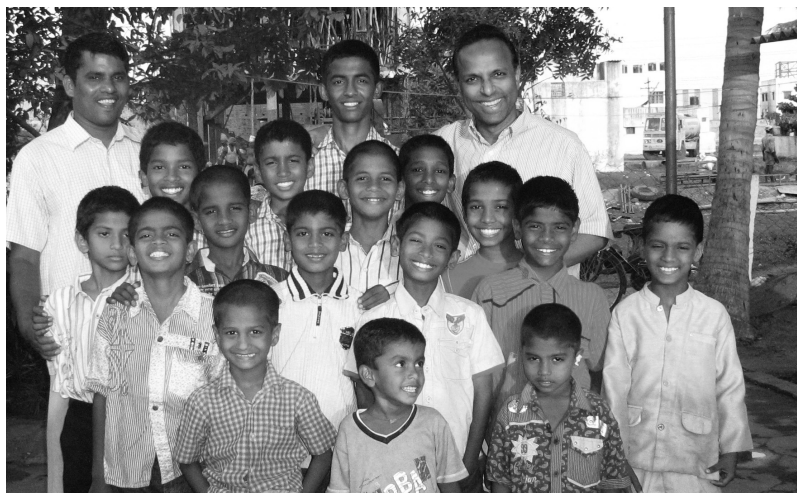
as either beggars, or commercial sex workers, it is a challenge to make people understand that trans-people can be empowered individuals—educated, employed, just like anyone else.”

“I like to lead a quiet life. I have always aspired to be an academician, and am pursuing just that. I like to be recognized for my profession and my expertise. If anybody notices me to be a trans-person, I’m okay with it. I certainly do not intend proclaiming my gender-identity to the whole world through mass media. I have never considered myself as being out of the mainstream; so I do not endorse the politics behind ‘mainstreaming the transgender,’” adds Shabeena.

Speaking about the challenges that trans-people face in our society, she points out that there is little research done on transgenders in India. The irrefutable truth is that there is massive discrimination, and it is a double-whammy when it is coupled with a disability. “Finish your education first! Transition can happen at any point in time. With the present lack of substantial policies, and rampant discrimination, it will be better to put off transition until after one has acquired a basic educational qualification,” she advises.

Shabeena’s research throws light on already existing policies for the transgender in Tamil Nadu, amongst other things. Her intention is to bring out a piece of literature that will help trans-people at the grass-roots. Shabeena’s doctoral thesis will come to fruition in about a year. She is looking forward to taking up teaching and further research. Also, she is conceptualizing a unique not-for-profit organization that will deal with education and research. Determination and discipline twinkling in her eyes, she exudes confidence even as she gets going on her very own ‘Pursuit of happiness’.

—Archanaa R.



Every Child Matters

A group of children greet me at the gate, their eyes twinkling with excitement. As I enter their home, they start shooting questions like arrows from the very first instant, grinning from ear to ear. I am here to meet G. Senthil Kumar, the Founder Trustee of ‘Child’- a Children’s Home, dedicated to boys who are HIV affected. Hailing from Madurai, Senthil completed his Master’s Degree in Social Work (with a specialization in Human Resources) and came to Chennai to start a career in 2001. “I had been toying with the idea of starting an organization for children right from my days in Madurai. However, I was clueless as to what kind of work my organization should undertake, and how I should go about setting it up. When I saw the CSIM advertisement, I immediately enrolled for the one year course in Post Graduate Diploma in Social Initiative and Management (PGDSIM). The involvement of their faculty, and the other trainers were useful resources for me” says Senthil.

He is among the first batch of students who did their PGDSIM course at CSIM. "After finishing the course, I worked with Nalmanam Home for Children for about two years. Thereafter, I worked with the Family Planning Association of India, followed by a stint in Kilpauk Medical College. It was then that I decided to work on establishing a shelter for HIV affected children" he reminisces.

"Once, while working with the Family Planning Association of India, I worked closely with a couple who were both commercial sex workers and HIV positive, and needed immediate hospitalization. They needed to be admitted in the hospital at Tambaram Sanatorium, but there was no ambulance available just then. I could not afford to take them in a taxi or a rickshaw, but somehow we managed to reach the hospital. At the hospital, I saw the nurses impatiently pushing people in two different directions. They were shouting 'Go here for TB, and go there for HIV', I realized how deeply stigmatized were the lot of HIV infected persons. The bigger and immediate concern for me after admitting the couple in the hospital, was to attend to their children in their absence. Although these children were already tested negative, their extended family still refused to take care of them. None of the homes agreed to provide them shelter, considering their parental background. As my resources were limited, I could not do anything further for this family, and do not know what became of them. It was then that I decided to start a shelter for children who are affected by HIV" says Senthil.

Senthil started the home in 2005, while working for CPACS (at KMC), on a salary of Rs 6500. "There is hardly any organization that is willing to pay Development professionals at par with other professionals.", rues Senthil. Working in an Electrical

Company and earning a modest income, he continues to juggle the demands of running the home, maintaining a family and is constantly on the look out to upgrade facilities for the children.

In the last three years Senthil's wife Pabitha, has joined in his journey towards enriching the lives of 16 children; a number kept in tethers strictly for the sake of maintaining quality of service. "We want our children to live in a family-like atmosphere", they speak in unison. "Apart from their evening study-time, they are free to do whatever they wish."

The cheery banter of the children nearby sure does suggest a liberal upbringing. There is not a dull moment in the interview as Senthil belts out ideas he is simultaneously working upon. The trust has acquired a small piece of land (a little more than one ground) in the outskirts of Chennai and expansion plans are going on at a full pace. "We will be starting a Child Resource Center," says he, "and launch a hotline as well as a website, through which anyone can access information on issues related to children's needs; especially those whose parents are infected by HIV. Our initial target is to:- provide enough resources to help those children who are in need of basic education and food; network with different kinds of people and organizations whose mission is to bring positive changes to HIV affected children; start referral-services."

"Besides, we are also designing a counseling center. Information on Learning Disabilities, the outbreak of epidemics, newer afflictions, etc. that determine the health of the child remains elusive to people from the lower class until an inevitable and dangerous situation occurs. Our counseling center will reach out to all those people" adds Senthil.

Speaking of challenges, he says:- “There is a gap between help required and help provided. Most people are more than willing to donate clothes, food, and other materials for the children. Cash donations are rare and even if we do get such donations, the donors have specific requests to earmark their donation for a particular use. Running an institution requires payment of electricity bills, monthly rent for the premises, etc., which are overlooked by prospective donors. So, when it comes to the aspect of improving infrastructure for the children, acquiring funds becomes an arduous process. However, we are hopeful things should work out just fine.”

“My family initially frowned at me for doing something radically different. On my part, I could never imagine leading a regular life, working and earning for my family alone. Still my family can’t help but compare mine with the salaries of neighbors, which are probably five times more than what I earn today. However they are able to see the immense satisfaction this work it gives me” says Senthil.

The home has nurtured some of the country’s best talent, including: Navin, a national under-16 archery player, three state level hockey players (Navin, Manikandan K. and Manikandan M.), and children who actively engage in scholastic as well as extracurricular activities. Dr. S. Anandkumar (of Lifeline Hospitals), a Trustee of the home, speaks with great enthusiasm about the ongoing work at Child. Though he is travelling and is on a tight schedule, he has offered to share some of his time over the telephone, to explain the organization’s activities in detail. There is an evident sense of pride when he recounts the achievements of the children. “‘Child’ approaches its core issue as a multi-

vectoral problem and our endeavour is to cover the following crucial areas of a child's overall development:- top class education; a conducive family-environment; nutrition and; medical counseling."

When it was time to sign off, Senthil made the following request for the Conversations readers. He says, "It would be helpful if people sent in donations to:- purchase parts of the proposed construction @ Rs. 1,200 per sq.ft.; pay for the construction of one or more of the rooms in the proposed building and; purchase cement or other construction materials as required".

—Archanaa R.

If you wish to support Child, please contact Senthil at +91 98416 56103



Sowing the Seeds of a Bright Future

Meeting with two livewire personalities who are running a promising organization, and watching them sync with each other so well, that they complete each other's sentences as they speak, I was tempted to know and so asked out of blatant ignorance, "how long have you both known each other?" "Ever since she was at the hospital, from the day she was born," chuckled Komala. Born first and third respectively in a family of four siblings, Komala Shivakumar and Sujatha Shekhar were raised with liberal exposure to social service since they were young. Thanks to their charitable and service-oriented parents, volunteering at organizations, providing free of cost tuition classes to street children, engaging in the activities of the National Service Scheme (NSS) had been a part of the routine of the sisters since childhood.

Komala did her Master's degree in Sociology and volunteered at Bro. Siga Animation Academy, and through Bro. Siga learnt about CSIM's one-year

programme 'Post Graduate Diploma in Social Initiative and Management (PGDSIM)'. Curious to learn what an NGO is, the procedure involved in setting up an organization, and how to systematize its functioning, Komala decided to take up the course. Convincing her sister Sujatha to also take it up along with her, both of them enrolled for the PGDSIM programme. They belonged to the second batch of students at CSIM and have even equipped themselves with a Master's degree in Business Administration (MBA) also. "Education makes a man think, and it is therefore of utmost importance. If one can start thinking on one's own, one starts on a journey of self-development" said Komala.

"In 2004, we started 'Iniya Udaiyam Charitable Trust'. We owe our thanks to Mrs. Latha Suresh (Director, CSIM) who relentlessly persuaded us to start an organisation of our own. 'Iniya Udaiyam' means 'sweet dawn'. Everybody deserves a wonderful dawn to begin their lives," said Komala, and Sujatha joined saying, "fundamental to that is children's education."

One of their first projects was the Value Based Developmental Education Project (VBDE). They said: "We impart capacity building, leadership training, value education, yoga, etc. in this project, and so far have reached out to around 300 children through our three centers. The children happen to be first generation school goers, and hail from rural areas, slums, and some even belong to the rag-pickers' community. Every year, we extend holistic support for these children in the form of fees, stationery, and uniforms. In the wake of the Right to Education Act of 2009 (RTE), inspired by the regional RTE training workshops, three of twenty school dropouts

re-enrolled, while two children enrolled for private tuition (evening classes).”

The concept of Child Rights has been the inspiration for their second project called the Iniya Udaiyam Children’s Movement. In this, Children’s Sangams (children’s groups) are organized, wherein children assume responsibilities of various office-bearers, such as President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and so on. They work like a Trust, wherein children pool in whatever money they can and use that fund for the purpose of serving their immediate communities. Thanks to the initiative taken by these Children’s Sangams, several neighborhood issues have been resolved. “Last year, students of the ninth standard from a municipality school in Konambedu approached us with the problem that there were no teachers in their school to teach them Mathematics and Social Sciences. We appointed two of our staff as teachers here. It was a difficult process and the children were made aware of this. In appreciation of our efforts, the children promised to score well in their board exams, and true to their word, they achieved 100 percent pass result this year,” said Komala with excitement.

Both recalled this story with pride and said that this kind of positive response from the community is what keeps them motivated in their mission. Further they stated, “We never thrust our ideas on the children. Instead, we find out what they need for their own improvement. More often than not, the ideas that are generated by the children prove to be most effective. We believe that every child should enjoy his or her childhood thoroughly.”

“Our efforts are never restricted to children alone. We organize parents’ clubs to sensitize parents towards

Child Rights and also about their children's needs. Every alternate month, our teachers visit the homes of their students in order to maintain a rapport with the parents. We are working towards creation of children-friendly communities. Our role is to create awareness as spoon feeding will not help," said a determined Komala.

Iniya Udaiyam's third project is JOYME (Job Placement for Youth and Management Education), wherein six-month placement training programme is being conducted since 2007. The training comprises of basic knowledge of computers, spoken English, soft skills such as personality development, retail management, adolescent health education, career guidance, counseling and also includes an industrial visit. The program runs six days a week, for four hours a day. Placement tie ups have been made with companies such as Nokia, Bharat Matrimony, Reliance Fresh, Trendz, Westside and other retail outlets in Spencer's Plaza, a mall in Chennai.

This project has achieved 85 percent placement record with 200 youth being part of this project till date. Most of the trainees had worked as construction workers and Komala and Sujatha swear by the change in their life style and perspectives after being placed in retail stores. "it is stunning to see how well they have groomed themselves. Unlike in our other projects, in the JOYME project, the results are quick for one to see" said Sujatha, with a sense of awe. Adding on she said: "In the year 2009-2010 we undertook a pilot project in collaboration with the Rotary International to fight malnutrition of infants and children who belonged to the age 0 to 5 years. 'Paapa Project', as we called it, focused on screening, diagnosis, providing nutrition intensive food, and food supplements to these children. Though the project ended in February 2010, follow-up is being coordinated till date."

“Beside the above projects we frequently organize one-off programs on livelihood, health, etc. After all, community development is a multi dimensional phenomenon, and we can no longer afford to focus on unitary dimensions. We support communities by mirroring back their own strengths to them,” said Sujatha.

Speaking of how CSIM helped nurture their ideas, Komala said: “CSIM gave us the confidence to start an organization. It opened a certain doorway, because of which we have seen some amazing improvement in ourselves. It has kept us grounded to our field. Now we recommend this course to our students.”

On being asked how they manage their families as well as work, the duo speaks in one voice: “Our husbands are our first volunteers. They support not only our families in our absence, but also help us with the activities of our organization.”

Smiling thoughtfully, Komala said, “However great our vision may be we cannot bring it to reality unless we have committed people to work with us. We are gifted with ten members of staff who understand and partake in our vision, and also help to maintain cordial ties with all our stakeholders.”

The essence of their mission, in the words of the duo is, “We want our communities to start utilizing the opportunities that are available aplenty, by grooming themselves to face the challenges involved in the process. We want to create a conducive social environment where the individual can lead a peaceful and splendid life.”

Their voices sound genuinely inviting when they signed off with “Come back again, not as a visitor but as a friend”.

—Archanaa R.

If you wish to support Iniya Udayam Charitable Trust, please call +91 9444423600.

Profile

*Inspirational stories of
uncelebrated people whose
organisations strive to make a
difference in the lives of the
deprived.*



The 'Auto-man' empire

He stood on the terrace of the rented, two-storey building and gently proclaimed, "I am the proud father of 48 children." To this, his wife Latha just smiled.

Srikanth, 45, got orphaned at the age of four. His education came to an abrupt halt when he was eight and, from then on, he had to work to make a living.

He grew up craving for parental warmth. Years later, he decided to turn his heartache into a resolve: to fill the vacuum that existed in the lives of orphaned children.

With this vision and a scanty savings of Rs. 5000 from his auto-rickshaw, in 2004 he started the Atheeswarar Charitable Trust to house orphaned children. Tucked in a remote corner of Tambaram in the outskirts of Chennai, the Trust is now home to 48 children.

My photographer friend and I had arrived at the Trust with some skepticism about how comfortable the children would be in this modest building. A portico led to a medium-sized hall, the outside of which had pink chipped walls. One side of the hall was covered

with English, Tamil and Hindi alphabet charts and the other with pictures of animals and plants. Children, aged between five and fifteen, seated neatly in rows, greeted us strangers with disarming smiles. Instantly, our skepticism evaporated.

The children were from neighboring villages. Most of them were orphans barring a few who were from poor single-parent families. Some children got to meet their parents or relatives once a year.

Boys greatly outnumbered the girls. While seated on the floor, the children waited for one of the staff to adorn their foreheads with kumkum, the red powder that many religious Indians use. After introducing themselves, the children asked us what had brought us there. The idea of being written about excited them immensely.

To capture their beaming faces in natural light, we took the children to the terrace. Their excitement did not come in the way of the discipline with which they climbed the stairs. Once seated comfortably, again in neat rows, they were ready to share their stories.

Irrespective of their age, they were all ambitious and confident. Vetrivel, 15, wanted to be an IPS officer. His friend, Sakthivel, seated next to him, echoed the same ambition. Together they wanted to beat up the bad guys! Murugavel wasn't far behind either. He wanted to be an IAS officer. Nagesh on the other hand, wanted to go the technology way. Computers and graphics were his forte, he said.

Some of the tinier folks were unsure of their careers but they all chorused, "We want to keep studying." The youngest and the latest addition to the family,

Mahalingam, all of 5, simply wanted to earn loads of money and relax in life.

Most of the girls wanted to be teachers or beauticians. One of them seemed oblivious to our presence. Manjula preferred to look after the younger children, one of whom she carried on her waist. Latha, Srikanth's wife, explained that Manjula had restarted her studies after a break of two years. She had been physically abused by her relatives after she had lost her parents. At 14, she took care of almost all the children there. She considered it to be her duty. She did not have any interests and preferred household chores to studying.

The kids spend their day in either acquiring knowledge or in physically strengthening themselves. With a breakfast that consists of Boost or tea, they have an intensive session of yoga post which they are off to a nearby government school. Srikanth makes sure that the children receive their lunch in school. On returning from school, the kids get ready for their tuitions which ultimately give way to an hour long session of singing devotional songs. Before turning into bed, the kids eagerly discuss their day's happenings with each other. It is then that Srikanth's and his wife's busy day ends.

From taking care of the children's basic needs of food, clothing and shelter to more demanding needs of getting them married, Srikanth has decided to take it all up. But running this institution brings along its own challenges. After meeting all the expenses for the children, the couple is left with no real savings of their own. Aside from his earnings from the auto-rickshaw, Srikanth relies on private donations.

I suddenly felt that Srikanth was saying something to me. I looked up to realize that it had been a while since

I had been standing on the terrace, absorbing what I had seen and felt there. The kids had gone down for their tuition.

“I have confidence in only three entities: God, my auto-rickshaw and myself,” Srikanth said.

We came down the terrace and bid farewell to Srikanth and his humungous family. In all this, I suddenly wondered if the couple had biological kids of their own. When asked, he pointed to three boys that had been playing merrily with the others. “We want them to mingle with the other kids. This way they will learn to appreciate what they have.”

We took a last glimpse of the children. Seated in the hall, they recited the English alphabet, followed by Tamil. They insisted that we take another set of photos with them.

We were warmly invited to visit them again and have a meal together some day.

As we were leaving the home, Manjula came up to us and said, “There may not be too much variety here as compared to your home. But the love with which we offer is the same, if not more.”

Her words stayed with me for a long time.

—Yogini

*Srikanth could be contacted at 94444 85491 or 94444 25591. Email: contactus@atheeswararcharitabletrust.org
Website : www.atheeswararcharitabletrust.org*



The Rain Water Catcher

The story of a social entrepreneur who re-invented the practice of Rain Water Harvesting in Chennai.

India is among the very few countries which permits ground water to be tapped by the citizens. However, are we exercising the freedom in the right manner? Of course not! We dig a well and expect water to be available eternally! We never realize the water cycle is complete only when the rain water is recharged back into the earth. We unfurl before you, the story of a dedicated man who works to reinvent the practice of Rain Water Harvesting (RWH).

While working for the Centre for Policy Studies, Dr. Sekhar Raghavan rigorously gathered exhaustive information about the temples, agriculture, livelihood, habitat styles and water management systems in 150 villages in Tamil Nadu. This study kindled Sekhar Raghavan's interest in

RWH. He discovered that it was an ancient and excellent method to recharge ground water.

After studying the various soil types, he found that the sandy soil in Chennai enabled the rain water to percolate and acted as a natural source for recharging the ground water level. As there was less or no open ground available in residential areas, he wanted to introduce the concept of building structures to store the rain water. From 1995 to 1998 he organised a door-to-door campaign in Besant Nagar, Chennai, to educate people on the importance of recharging ground water and RWH. The response was poor and opposition stiff.

Sekhar Raghavan used the newspapers to create awareness on RWH and highlight the importance of recharging ground water. There were few responses but the enquiries did not transform into action. In June 2001, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu established a special cell to promote RWH and a law was passed, which required every building in Tamil Nadu, residential or commercial to install a rain water harvesting structure.

He collaborated with the Centre for Science and Environment* and the first Rain Centre in India was inaugurated on 21st August 2002 at Mandavelipakkam, Chennai. Today, every Collectorate in Tamil Nadu has a Rain Centre which creates awareness, provides information and support to the public on RWH.

The Government set an ultimatum for all buildings in Tamil Nadu to install RWH structures by 31st August 2003. Sekhar Raghavan observes, in a melee to meet the deadline, nearly 98% of the houses installed RWH structures. But around 50% did not apply the right methodology.

In the year 2005, there was a heavy rainfall in Chennai and the citizens reaped the benefits of RWH. The wells and temple tanks swelled with increased levels of water despite most of the buildings not having proper RWH systems in place. Though RWH practices are slowly catching up in parts of the country, Tamil Nadu is the only state in India that has made RWH mandatory for new and existing buildings. The Government of Delhi has made it mandatory for new buildings only.

“Water cannot be taken for granted and the laid back attitude of the urban citizen needs to be rectified”, says Sekhar Raghavan.

He asserts that RWH must be done in rural and urban areas. Rain water can either be used immediately or recharged into the soil to replenish the water table.

Sekhar Raghavan, (Ashoka Fellow, India) directs the Rain Centre in Chennai that creates awareness among urbanites about the importance of rainwater harvesting (RWH) in cities and rural areas to sustain the groundwater resource. He is also the Founder-Member of the Akash Ganga Trust - a voluntary group of dedicated RWH activists.

Their focus is on civic participation and strengthening citizen awareness. Presently, they are also working on ecological sanitation in the rural areas. Since 2006, they have built thirty toilets in Kovalam village. Their total sanitation campaign has harnessed the interest and support from Tokyo.

“We do get support from corporate bodies and Rotary Clubs. However, a sustained support is what we need to execute our activities and maintain the Rain Centre. We welcome volunteers to support and conduct surveys,

awareness campaigns and prepare communication material”, he says .

After visiting the Rain Centre and talking to Dr. Sekhar Raghavan, we felt that each one of us have a responsibility towards RWH. We welcome you to visit, get motivated and do your part in recharging the ground water.

What is a Rain Centre?

Rain Centres are a network of permanent exhibitions to spread water literacy among urban Indians. They portray the significance of rain in the Indian way of life-its influence on the customs, traditions, economy and politics of this country. They define the role played by every Indian citizen in harvesting rainwater and using it to manage the issue of water scarcity effectively.

The Rain Centres provide people the know-how to harvest rain. They equip the civil society to take leadership in the movement to conserve water. They begin the process of rebuilding a society of water literates.

CSE is in the process of setting up rain centres across the country. Local NGO's and citizen's groups are identified in towns and metros as partners to launch.

Modern RWH methods

- Percolation Pit Method
- Bore Well with Settlement Tank
- Open Well Method with filter bed Sump
- Percolation Pit with Bore Method

—**Radha Jagan**

To know more visit www.raincentre.org or contact Dr. Sekhar Raghavan at: No.4, Third Trust Link Street, Mandavelipakkam, Chennai 600028. Ph: 24616134 /24918415. Email: Sekar1479@yahoo.co.in



Cultural Custodians

Villages are our most precious heritage

We Indians are proud of our rich cultural heritage, but how good are we at preserving it? Industrialisation and urbanisation has led Indians to focus more on modern infrastructure and forget many old structures and monuments. We leave the work of conservation and preservation to the Government or the Archaeology department.

Dr. T Satyamurthy, who retired as director of the Archeological Survey of India (ASI), is trying to change this mindset with his Rural Education and Conservation of Heritage (REACH) Foundation. He founded REACH along with a group of heritage-conscious individuals.

The foundation works to preserve and conserve structural heritage. They identify 'heritage wardens' and train them on various strategies to restore heritage sites and temples and also on the dos and don'ts of preservation of monuments. The heritage wardens are

also taught to read the inscriptions which tells the story of the monument.

“There are more than 60,000 dilapidated monuments in South India. How can the Government or ASI restore them? Our villages are the most precious heritage that was handed down to us by our ancestors. I strongly believe that the community around a monument should take ownership to preserve it. I call them ‘The Heritage warden’. They would be responsible for maintaining the heritage site in their neighborhood or village. By grooming them across our nation, we can restore and preserve most of our monuments,” says Satyamurthy.

He adds: “I am extremely happy with our work done at the Uttramerur Kailasanathar Shiva temple. The temple dates back to Pallava period (8th century AD). The temple was in ruins when I visited it a few years ago. But today, with the support of the locals from the village, a few philanthropists, IIT Madras and numerous heritage wardens, we have restored its old charm and beauty. The restoration work was done as per the norms laid down by the ASI.”

A unique course, “Introduction to Inscriptions”, has been launched by the Academy of Archeology and Sciences of Ancient India, AASAI, the educational wing of REACH foundation. This has helped many Chennaites read the inscriptions in temples and understand the evolution of scripts.

“Sometimes, the restoration work for a monument requires a lot of technological intervention. Then, we have a tie up with the ASI or IIT and jointly do the restoration,” says Chandra, an active member of REACH.

“We never came near the temple until last year, as there were a lot of snakes and shrubs inside the temple and

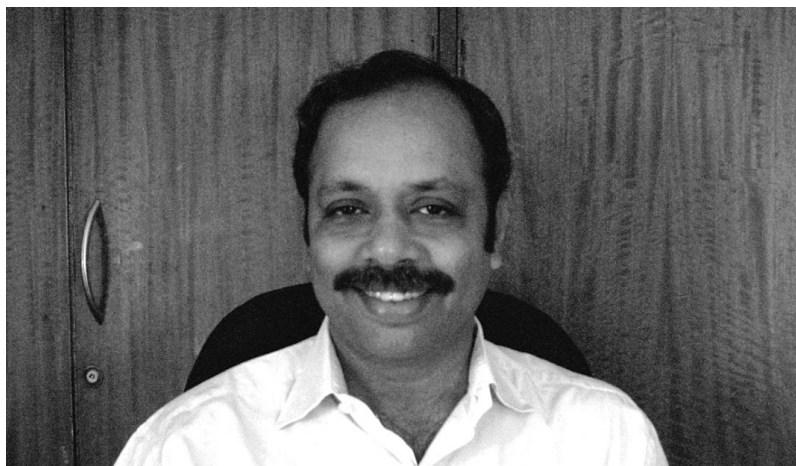
around it. It is quite surprising to know that such a beautiful temple was built in our village a thousand years ago. We will now ensure that the temple will retain its original glory,” says 18-year-old Solaimalai, a resident of Uthiramerur.

Major achievements of Dr T Satyamurthy in ASI

- Extensive excavation in Aadhichanallur, near Thirunelveli. Scientific research conducted on these findings reveal that Adhichanallur existed 4000 years ago and has provided proof to revise the date of Tamil Brahmi scripts. His discoveries were turning points in the research of history of Tamil language and culture.
- Rediscovered and excavated the Sangam period Muruga Temple near Tiger Caves Mamallapuram which was submerged in the sea.
- Thanjavur Big Temple Chozha paintings were digitally documented and displayed in the Big Temple premises. It ensured that the common man could relish and feel proud of Tamil heritage.

—Latha Suresh

Do you want to restore any monument in your hometown or neighbourhood? Contact Mr. T. Satyamurthy at +91 94442 54285 or visit www.conserveheritage.org



The Good Samaritan

When you call him on his mobile phone, what you get to hear first are strains of Vande Mataram. It's not surprising because A. Narayanan has been consumed by a love for the country and a willingness to serve the community ever since he started going to school in Tirunelveli.

The Loyola College graduate who has a diploma from the Loyola Institute of Business Administration worked for a while in sales and marketing before turning entrepreneur 15 years ago – his firm manufactures scientific instruments. However, taking up social issues and advocating change remains Narayanan's first love.

Narayanan realised early that playing the Good Samaritan is not enough and that you need to work for change. "You cannot talk about social change and the future without touching children. You also need to be proactive. That is why, I not only act on issues which I feel are fundamental for social change, but speak and write about them as well.

Through INFORSE (Innovative Network for School Education), Narayanan works for the setting up of libraries, laboratories and lavatories in schools. And through Paadam, he has been fighting against alcohol and drug abuse and against all forms of manual scavenging. He is also against admitting destitute children into orphanages, juvenile homes or dormitories. Adopting a child or encouraging a family to sponsor a child's education, he feels, is the way forward.

Narayanan and his team network with the government education department, emphasising the need for clean toilets in schools in the State. "We send letters and booklets to school education authorities in the Tamil Nadu government seeking basic amenities for schoolchildren. The education tax collected has to be spent on the development of schools; we try and make government bodies accountable. We also fight for the rights of Dalit students who are discriminated against," he explains.

Thinking out-of-the-box to enthuse underprivileged children in Chennai's Corporation schools, Narayanan started a mobile library last year with his own funds, complete with a team of volunteers who would closely interact with children. The mobile library (in a Tempo Traveller) was launched with the local body's help and now caters to children of 10 Corporation schools in North Chennai. The library has 3,000 Tamil books for children, audio-visuals, a laptop and an LCD projector. While Monday to Friday, the van visits the schools, during evenings and weekends it goes to community schools and tuition centres in slums.

The response has been overwhelming. "We wanted to touch upon something fundamental and found that underprivileged

children are deprived of books. We also wished to highlight the importance of reading good books,” Narayanan says. The response has been overwhelming. “Students have improved their communication skills and gained in confidence because after every reading session they are encouraged to narrate what they have read and discuss issues,” he adds.

It was Narayanan’s public interest litigation that led to the Madras High Court banning in November 2008 the entry of humans into sewers and septic tanks to clean them. “It is a human rights violation and caste discrimination. You have the technology to send the Chandrayaan but not for cleaning sewers? I am for a scavenging-free India,” says Narayanan who is advocating the use of eco-sanitation to convert human waste into manure.

Narayanan is convinced that alcohol is India’s No. 1 social enemy. “The WHO says that alcohol will be the third biggest contributor to death, disease and disability in India. Sixty percent of road accidents are caused due to drunken driving and government should bring stringent laws to control this. A person who drinks and drives is a killer on the road.” Running a spirited campaign the past two years, Narayanan has been sending public petitions to the office of the director-general of police seeking severe action against drunken driving and the prevention of employment of juveniles in bars and liquor shops in TN.

Narayan has also filed a PIL seeking a ban on the production and sale of plastic bags and cups in TN. “Ours is supposed to be a progressive state. Then why are plastics not banned? They block water bodies, drains and canals. The result is mosquitoes and malaria.”

—Sashi Nair

This article appeared in The Times of India, Chennai



Cuisine for a Cause

When a woman is educated, a family is educated. When a woman is economically empowered, the family is empowered and a lot of social changes takes place.

This is what YRG Care's social entrepreneurial programs are all about. The objective of their programs is to improve the lives of the poor women who are socially challenged, those affected by HIV/AIDS, and victims of domestic violence. Their eco kitchen and Pi Bag projects are fine examples of empowering women.

YRG's eco kitchen is located at Injambakkam in the midst of a blooming garden. The huge white building has solar panels on its terrace. The kitchen is clean and free from dust. "This enterprise is environment friendly and cost-effective. Even the waste water from the kitchen is recycled and used for the garden," said Sethulakshmi, the manger.

The kitchen has a huge boiler and many aluminium pipes that lead to 11 steel containers - four to cook sambhar, six for rice and one for milk. A pre-heating

tank connected to the boiler generates steam with a bio-mass fuel called bricks made from corn husk, jute waste, mango kernels, and groundnut shells.

“It takes 40 minutes to make 600 litres of sambhar, 10 minutes to cook 400 kg of rice, and the milk boiler has the capacity to boil 60 litres of milk. To cook vegetables, idli and dosa, stoves are directly connected to the bricks. The cooked food is ready by 11.30 a.m and is transported in steel containers to 30 kiosks in Injambakkam, Thiruvannamiyur, Guindy, Saidapet, Nanganallur and Alandur that are managed by women,” says Sethulakshmi.

YRG gives priority to women who have someone in their family infected by HIV/AIDS and those who are economically challenged, abused by their spouse, ill treated by their family members, and above all are interested in earning their livelihood. Training on food handling, hygiene and sales are provided and kiosks, ladles, plates, furniture, dustbins, gloves and uniform are provided free of cost to the women.

Earlier, micro-credit was offered to the women but due to non-repayment of loans, this was stalled. The women now pay Rs. 17 for the meals they consume, though it costs only Rs. 15. In this, one rupee is obtained to meet the transport cost and one rupee is set aside for health care. The women charge their customers up to Rs. 25 per meal depending on the location of the kiosk. YRG outreach teams visit the vendors and collect the sales amount on a daily basis.

The eco kitchen also supplies breakfast and meals to organizations such as Ajuba Solutions and the U.S. Consulate.

The kitchen unit houses a washroom, store room, cold storage and another room which women use to

cut vegetables. The kitchen employs 35 staff, of which six men are engaged in cooking while two women cut vegetables and two women assist in cleaning. The remaining staff assists in the transport and administration. Around 16 cameras have been installed for security reasons and this modern unit is only six months' old.

Another project of YRG Care is Pi Project, which focuses on empowering women. Pi is the Tamil for bag. This project was started in 2008 jointly by Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of public health and YRG care. Women from socially and economically weaker sections are given an opportunity to earn their livelihood by making bags.

The bag-making unit is located at Kilpauk and is housed in an apartment. Kumar manages this unit besides attending to the data entry work of the YRG Care's research unit. Orders for 3000 bags were placed by the organizers of the Global Health Conference, to be held in United States.

Tamim Ansari conducts a one-month intensive training program in tailoring for the newcomers. The bags are made out of cotton and have bright prints on them. Different types of bags - shopping bags, shoulder bags, wine bags - are made to suit various purposes and are named as 'Lakshmi', 'Meenakshi' and such. Orders for wine bags were placed by a famous wine store in the United States. The bag-making unit functions in two shifts. Each shift last for four hours during which a woman can make about four bags and earn Rs. 200. When the bags are sold in the local market, the women earn a share in the profit as well. The Pi bags unit plans to expand its operation to include 250 women in the next three years.

YRG Foundation's Central Research Facility is located in Chetpet, Chennai. Social workers attached to this centre visit several areas in the city to identify HIV/AIDS infected people from the economically weaker section of the society. Pregnant women who are infected by HIV/AIDS are provided counseling and healthcare services. They are provided training to equip themselves and become economically independent.

YRG care's first stated in 1993 at Taramani at the VHS premises, a pharmacy and hospital unit meant exclusively to conduct HIV Test (voluntary test) and HIV test for pregnant women. This institution is led by Dr. Suniti Solomon, a pioneer in HIV prevention, care, training and research who documented the first case of HIV in India. The income earned from the pharmacy and laboratory is utilized for the social projects of YRG foundation.

—P Ambika

For further information, please contact Ms.Sethulakshmi at +91 9381007150 or write to sethu@yrgcare.org



Solidarity in Sobriety

“My father died due to alcoholism, and my husband was an alcoholic. I saw people affected by addiction, and how it affected their lives. I wanted to start a program to help the alcoholics recover,” said Bhanu Suresh Babu, the Founder and Project Director of CONCERN.

CONCERN is a Non-Governmental Organization working in the field of addiction and rehabilitation. Staff and members of CONCERN have enormous experience in dealing with addiction at various levels with both men and women. CONCERN is equipped with academic, professional, and practical experience in the area of addiction and treatment.

Bhanu says: “After my son was born, my husband started drinking. He turned into an alcoholic within a span of seven years. There was a television serial on alcoholism, and it was then we learnt about TTK Hospital (T.T. Ranganathan Clinical Research Foundation). In 1995, I admitted my husband for de-addiction treatment in TTK, and learnt that alcoholism is a disease which can be treated but not

cured. Dr. Shanthi Ranganathan, Director of TTK has been my source of inspiration.”

While Bhanu volunteered at TTK when her husband was undergoing treatment, Dr. Ranganathan encouraged her to pursue higher studies. Bhanu completed her M.Phil in Psychology, and studied various courses related to addiction. She received a fellowship from caregivers of alcoholics, and was personally trained by a doctor from Queen of Peace Rehabilitation Center, United States, on how to use simple methods for de-addiction treatment.

“As a caregiver, I learnt that de-addiction treatment was a lifelong process. I underwent counseling courses, besides reading many books on addiction. I authored a protocol for 15-day treatment, and made the treatment procedure simple so that whoever is willing to give up alcohol can walk into the centre with confidence, and go out with hope,” says Bhanu.

Prior to starting CONCERN in 2008, Bhanu worked with several NGOs that were connected with de-addiction to gain practical experience. She worked with TTK hospital for five years in the area of rehabilitation, and as a Senior Counselor in Freedom Foundation, an NGO working in the field of substance abuse and HIV/AIDS interventions in India.

“People come with a lot of opinions and theories about addiction. This is the challenge we face while providing treatment. Addiction is connected to physical craving and mental obsession. Once a person gets addicted to alcohol, they require professional help, and need to undergo treatment,” says Bhanu.

CONCERN offers motivation to their patients when they arrive at the center. Detoxification treatment is provided for three days, where IV fluids along with multi-

vitamins are given, and the sleep pattern is regulated. Initially, most of the patients have appetite problems. Psychotherapy protocol, based on important books on addiction, is provided to the patients for a period of 12 days. They are made to understand their traits, thinking pattern errors, and their needs that are deprived.

After the initial treatment, patients are provided a relapse prevention therapy for a week, where they are provided detoxification and counseling. In cases of relapse, they are admitted into a transit home, where they are allowed to attend work from the rehabilitation home. They are provided with an anti-abuse treatment before they leave for work. This medication causes allergy to the body when alcohol is taken.

“I used to drink along with my friends, just for fun. Very quickly, I became an alcoholic. My sister came to know about CONCERN, and admitted me for treatment. I used to spend all my earnings to buy liquor, and had a debt of Rs. 80,000, which my family repaid. Now, I am sober for almost a month. I do not mingle with my earlier friends, and even changed my mobile number as I do not want to get influenced. I still have the five-hundred rupees that my mother gave when I got discharged after treatment in CONCERN,” says Senthil, a 29-year-old man who works as a marketing executive in a private firm in Chennai.

CONCERN treats alcoholism in a simple and holistic manner. A 15-day caregivers program is offered to the family of patients. They are advised to take care of their addicted family member, and help them recover.

“Till date, 150 persons have been treated for alcoholism, and there has been a 50% recovery rate.

Most of the people who relapse, return voluntarily, and strive to recover. My husband is sober for over 15 years now, and works for a nationalized bank. He joins me in serving those affected by alcoholism. We named our organization CONCERN because we mean it. We have genuine concern towards alcoholics, and wish to see many families lead a happy life. Our son is pursuing his Masters Degree in Landscape Architecture in Germany, and we have dedicated our lives to CONCERN as our family is settled now,” says Bhanu.

CONCERN also offers outpatient treatment for those who cannot get admitted for 15 days. The charges for de-addiction treatment are nominal, and concession is offered for those who cannot afford the treatment.

(Names of those affected by alcoholism have been changed to protect their identity.)

Ganesh, a 40-year-old businessman in Chennai, has been sober for over one and a half years now.

“I started consuming alcohol because my first marriage failed within six months,” said Ganesh. From 2000 through 2006, he lived all alone in his apartment, which led to depression. He drank regularly and became an alcoholic. He got married again in 2007 and, when he accompanied a friend to an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meeting in September 2007, he was inspired to stop drinking. After remaining sober for five months, he consumed alcohol once again. It was then that his friend advised him to undergo treatment at CONCERN, a de-addiction centre in Chennai.

“None of my family members knew that I was an alcoholic. I was at first hesitant to undergo the

treatment, which was for a period of 15 days. After informing my wife, I got admitted at CONCERN for 10 days. After treatment, I was referred to AA, and I am now enjoying being sober. Parents, siblings, doctors, or wife, nobody can make you stop drinking but you yourself. Without determination it is impossible to fight alcoholism. For this, we need the support of treatment centers like CONCERN who refer us to AA,” said Ganesh.

Ganesh attends the AA meetings regularly. AA does not disclose the identity of its members, and only asks for their name so that the members can greet each other during meetings. Members are not compelled to reveal what work they do or where they come from. AA advises its members to avoid hunger, anger, loneliness, and tiredness. There are 55 to 60 AA meetings in Chennai, and these are organized between 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm every day in each of the centers.

“When I travel to different parts of the country, I attend the AA meeting that is held in the nearby center. People who are affected by alcoholism share their bitter experiences during such meetings. I was alarmed when I heard that many persons have lost their health, family, and property to alcoholism. I also learnt that many have regained their social as well as economic status by remaining sober. It is a miracle to be part of the AA program,” said Ganesh.

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.

Unsung Beacons

There are no dues or fees for AA membership; they are self-supporting through individual contributions.

—Marie Banu

CONCERN is located at 120, Sri Devi Kuppam Main Road, Radha avenue, Valasaravakkam, Chennai – 600 087. For further information, contact Bhanu Suresh Babu at 9840800816, +91 44 24862910 or write to concernrehab@gmail.com



Conscious Corporate

Sujatha entered Kamarajar Arangam with her application to register for employment at a Job Fair organized by Need Trust, in conjunction with the Tamil Nadu Handicapped Federation Trust. The job fair was open exclusively for physically challenged and was inaugurated by Kanimozhi, MP in August 2009. Sujatha waited in the queue amidst eight thousand applicants—all of them physically challenged. After four hours, she reached the registration desk. “What type of job are you looking for?” asked the coordinator. “Any job that would treat me with respect and pay me enough money to take care of myself,” replied Sujatha.

Need trust is a CSR initiative of Sinar Jernih India Pvt Ltd, a corporate house in Chennai. “We thought that we would have less than hundred applicants registering at the job fair. I was overwhelmed with the response and there were over 14 corporate houses who participated in the event,” said Shekar, the founder of Need trust and the Executive Director of Sinar Jernih.

“There was a lady who was deprived of her lower limbs. She was a management graduate in human resources and was arguing that she was fit enough to work at least as a receptionist even if she could not be employed in the human resource department. Such overwhelming experiences were unforgettable for me in my life,” added Shekar.

Sujatha, a post graduate in zoology had applied for a lecturer position in many colleges since 1998. She was always rejected for a job due to her disability and faced a lot of humiliation whenever she was interviewed. Within two months of registering in the job fair, she received a call requesting her to join duties as Business Administrator for Ablejob Visionary Services, a wing of Need trust that provides employment opportunities for the differently abled persons. Ablejob has developed their own job portal and has 1980 applications registered so far. This portal will be launched very soon for use of all employers. All the staff in Ablejob is physically challenged and hence understands the needs of job requirements of similar aspirants.

A corporate house with a difference, Sinar Jernih has effective CSR policies. “More than 65 percent of our staff is either poor or uneducated or unqualified. This inspired me to provide them with employment opportunities, even if they had studied only up to the sixth standard. Besides giving them employment, we wanted to educate them and so set up a specialized training centre—Sinar Academy for Service Excellence,” said Shekar.

Sinar Academy for Service Excellence networks with several NGOs to source candidates and develop their skills in telephone operation, data entry, food and beverages and housekeeping. The trained persons are

offered a diploma certificate which qualifies them for employment. “Some people drop out from the training as they want to earn money from day one. This is a big challenge. So we offer them a part time job to earn and at the same time learn the skills related to the job. They are permitted to pay the fees only after they start earning full time. So far 200 persons have been trained and most of them have been placed in corporate houses. They are now earning a minimum of Rs. 3,500 a month,” said Shekar.

Shekar founded Need Trust to bridge the gap between donors and NGOs and to coordinate the CSR activities of Sinar Jernih. He realized that while NGOs had the technical skills to render service, corporate houses had the funds to support social causes. “The biggest inspiration for me to gain this vision was Dr. V.Shanta of Cancer Institute who said: ‘There are so many needs in the world. But every need cannot have just a good heart, it needs good money. While people like us are busy serving, there should be people like you from the corporate to help us.’ We learnt how cancer can be prevented and cured, if identified at an early stage and we organized campaigns sensitizing people on how to identify common cancers,” said Shekar.

Shekar visited several NGOs and charities to understand their needs and help them raise funds. “There was no purpose in doing service just for any single cause. We realized that each noble cause and service required support. We got like-minded people together and helped NGOs by organizing fundraising events. Within a period of one year, we were able to support several causes. We also strongly believed that money raised should be used by the right beneficiary to its fullest value and so we formed Need Trust,” said Shekar. In true support of

this, Shekar also launched the “Reach Out” fund raising program benefiting one NGO per month with free of cost events.

The key vision and mission of Need trust is to assist unsupported people to be self dependent. The trust’s primary objective is education, empowerment, employment, and advocacy. Recently, the trust has adopted a SHG which coordinates 300 women groups consisting of 6,000 members in Chennai. Four staff have been appointed full time to coordinate the group activities and are provided office space in Sinar Jernih premise. “We now have a comfortable working environment. Earlier, we had to close down our office many a times as we did not have cooperation from group members to pay the rent,” said Jeba, Executive SHG.

Rolina Mary, Vishnu Gandhi and Stella Mary are SHG officers who visit the groups periodically and monitor their books of accounts. Besides this, the team also organizes training programs for the self-help group members in tailoring, car driving, beautician, fashion designing, etc. The training is offered free of cost and a stipend is offered during the training period.

The core objective of the SHG is savings. Each member saves a minimum of Rs. 30 per week and some even save up to Rs. 200 a week. A separate bank account is opened for the group where the savings are remitted. Need Trust facilitates opening of the bank account and enables loans to those who are prompt in repayment. Depending on the savings that the group has remitted, the bank offers a loan amount of Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 1 lakh to the group. A nominal interest of two percent is charged towards the loan and the repayment period varies from 12 to 15 months.

“Savings help us evade the money lenders who charge more than 10 percent interest. Earlier, it was only those who were below the poverty line who were members in a Self Help Group. Now, even the spouse of a Bank Manager is a member in a self help group,” said Jeba.

Dr. Deepak, a counseling psychiatrist heads the CSR programmes of Sinar Jernih. He acted in a movie ‘Maa’ that was a pioneering effort by Mr. Madan Gabriel of the film institute, and was actively promoted by Need Trust. Dr. Deepak is also a disability rights activist and is presently in Delhi lobbying with the government to include more disabled people in the forum that works on the Disability Act. Shekar firmly believes that there is no disability in all these people who work with him as able people tend to display more disability. With Dr. Deepak’s leadership, he is confident that the vision of Need Trust will be executed in the most benefiting manner.

—Marie Banu

For more information about Need Trust, please contact Shekar at: 044 43054836/7/8/9 or write to needtrust@ymail.com.



Citadel of Compassion

Sevalaya - an NGO working for the poor and the deprived as one enters Sevalaya the writing on the gate welcomes you “Please shed all your preferences, prejudices if any, based on cast, creed, colour, religion, language, sex, and nationality before entering”. With this as their basic principle, Sevalaya receive all who need their services, or whoever they want to serve.

V. Muralidharan, a dynamic enterprising software engineer along with a few like-minded friends founded Sevalaya in 1988 when he was 27 years old. The trust was launched in a small hut at Sivanvayil, a small village in Tamil Nadu. Later Sevalaya purchased one acre of land at Kasuva village in Thiruninravur, 40 km west of Chennai.

Now Sevalaya has completed 21 years of service. It has grown like a banyan tree under whose shade and shelter is housed Mahakavi Bharathiar Higher Secondary School, Ramakrishna Paramahansa old age home, Vivekananda home for orphaned boys and girls, Swami Vivekananda library, and Vinobaji Gosala that is spread over 13 acres of land.

Muralidharan has drawn inspiration from all these great men and translated their ideas into reality. “When I was in the 7th standard, I read a Bharathiar poem on the Saraswathi pooja day. The poem talks about the actual significance of Saraswathi pooja. Bharathiar has said that by reciting mantras, offering flowers, and placing books for worship alone, is not Saraswathi pooja. One needs to go to places and start schools where there aren’t any, and educate the poor. These words inspired me and I have fulfilled his dream with the help of my friends. Today, there is not a single town or village in this country without a school—this is true Saraswathi pooja,” said Muralidharan.

After completing engineering, Muralidharan married Bhuvaneswari who was employed at Unit Trust of India. Sevalaya dedicates its service through education, food, and above all love and care.

Sevalaya bases its functions on philosophies of three important personalities: Mahakavi Bharathiar—education for all, Mahatma Gandhi—development of villages, and Swami Vivekananda—food for the hungry. Sevalaya extends its reach to 15 neighboring villages benefiting the deprived through their various projects.

Mahakavi Bharathiar Higher Secondary School, a project of Sevalaya provides free education from Pre-kg to Standard 12. Besides, students are provided free uniforms, books and transportation facilities. Educational tours are organized for the children and tuitions are offered free of cost.

The classrooms are spacious and well ventilated, with 35 to 45 students in each room. Science laboratories are fully equipped and since 5 years, the school has scored 100% results in 10th standard examinations.

During the last academic year, one student scored 481 out of 500, and lost the state rank by 14 marks.

The school adheres to a special syllabus called BGV where all students learn about the lives and works of Bharathiar, Gandhiji and Vivekananda and appear for a competitive examination for this subject.

The Vivekananda Library contains 12,000 books that have been donated by several institutions and sponsors. The students have a library period once in a week and the students from nearby villages are permitted to use the school library as well. A mobile library visits the neighboring villages twice a month. In this way, reading habit is inculcated amongst the students and the villagers. Students who have passed out from the school serve as teachers here. G. Ilayaraja, a software engineer, and a past student of Sevalaya, is now a board member and actively participates in all the development projects.

Free technical education is given to students who are interested in seeking employment after they complete 12 th standard. Professionals from different fields train the students. Kasturba Tailoring Class imparts free training for girl children in the school as well as to the girls from nearby villages to equip them with skills to be self employed or seek employment in export garment houses. Sevalaya also has a placement center, and higher education in professional colleges is sponsored for meritorious students.

Sevalaya offers free hostel facilities for boys and girls who are either orphaned or have single parents. Presently, 160 students reside in the hostel. Food, uniform, clothes, books are provided free of cost to these children. Once a week the children are taken

to a church, temple, mosque, or gurudwara. On every Saturday, a cultural programme called Neelamuttram is organized, where the staff and hostel children spend the evening in the open singing, dancing, and enacting skits. Teachers narrate to the children interesting stories and anecdotes from the lines of Bharathiar, Gandiji and Vivekananda.

On Sundays, a children's parliament is conducted where various issues are discussed and debated upon. The students also spend time with elders in the old age home—Ramakrishna Paramahansa house. There are 60 senior citizens, many of them husband and wife, who lead a dignified and peaceful life here. Free health checkup and tours are organized for the inmates once in a month.

Sevalaya is self sufficient. The premise houses a dairy farm —Vinbaji Gosala—which provides milks for the inmates. The extra milk is sold, and the dung is used as manure and to prepare bio-gas which is used for cooking. Sevalaya has five and half acres of paddy fields, coconut and mango trees, banana plantations, vegetables, and flower garden. Experts in the field of organic farming guide the workers and the students in maintaining the farm.

Sevalaya students have excelled in sports and have won many prizes. A physical trainer trains the students in various sports activities and the students have participated and won prizes at state level for kho-kho, handball, volleyball, and athletics. Recently, two of Sevalaya students have joined the state athletics team.

Sevalaya also plays a great role in the development of the nearby villages. Once in a month, free medical

and veterinary camps are organized and Mahatma Gandhi medical centre offers medical care for the school students and villagers who live nearby. Cultural programmes on social issues are conducted by students and counseling support is offered to villagers.

Sevalaya does not encourage any form of punishment or humiliation for the students. The students and senior citizens are treated with love and affection. The teachers and other staffs are oriented to render service with love.

Sevalaya has received many awards for the service they have rendered for over 21 years. Mahakavi Bharathiar School won the National Award for the Model School in India. Muralidharan and Bhuvaneshwari received the Sathguru Gnanananda award in 2008 for family in social work. Pegasus institute of excellence, selected Sevalaya as the best institution for value based management and was presented Rs. 3,00,000 on July 2008. The school also won the best green campus award in September 2008. Muralidharan has been selected president of NGO Guardian, an organization to fight the onslaughts against NGO. He has been also nominated as convener of Thiruvallur district, Tamil Nadu Sarvodaya Mandal, a Gandhian organization.

With selfless service, Muralidharan and his wife Bhuvaneshwari with many like-minded people move on with their social service to fulfill their dream to launch a university at Kasuva village.

—P Ambika

If you wish to support Sevalaya, contact Muralidharan at: +91 9444167625



Home, but not alone

“Whenever I see a person entering the home, I hope that they are not coming to seek admission.”—**Shantha**, *Trustee, Sri Satyanarayana Charitable Trust.*

“I am 100 years’ old,” says Vidya.

She could easily pass off as one. She walks bent in a right-angle and her face has more wrinkles than the bark of a Banyan tree. She wears what looks like thick magnifying glasses held in place by a string.

“She has been saying that for the last 12 years,” says Ganesh with a fond cackle. Ganesh looks after the 35 orphaned and abandoned elderly men and women who stay in a home run by the Sri Satyanarayana Charitable Trust.

Vidya was abused by her daughter-in-law, and her son brought her to the home promising to visit her every week along with his children. “It has been nearly three months since my son has visited me. I have his phone number and am going to call him now,” says Vidya, not having lost hope just yet.

Like Vidya, there are 25 women and 10 men, most of them aged over 60 who reside in the home. Shantha, a trustee of Sri Satyanarayana Charitable Trust supervises the day-to-day activities of the home, and spends time interacting with the residents.

“Earlier, I used to visit the home once in four days as I lived far away. Now, I have moved closer and spend most of my time here. I find a lot of peace interacting with the residents, and ensure that I speak to everyone every day.”

“When I was 35, I decided to dedicate my life to serve those elderly who lacked family support. Being a Satya Sai devotee, I helped in organizing temple events and coordinating food distribution among the poor. Like me, there were over 300 Satya Sai devotees who convened under one umbrella for which Shekar was the convenor. During the early '90s, when Shekar spoke of his interest in starting a home for the orphaned elderly, I expressed my willingness to be part of the initiative. My husband, currently a supervisor in a catering company, supported the idea. Thus, Shekar and I launched the Sri Satyanarayana Charitable Trust in 1994 along with our friends: P. Sridharan, S. Sridharan and Ganesh,” says Shantha.

The Trust provides care and shelter to abandoned or orphaned elders who have been referred by friends and well-wishers, and does not publicize its work. A thorough reference check is carried out by the trustees before anyone is brought into the home to ensure that they do not have any family support. Separate dormitories are provided for men and women, and each of the rooms is equipped with a television set. The home also houses a Satya Sai temple where rituals are

performed every day, and the residents are encouraged to spend time in prayer.

The residents are active, and can manage their needs on their own. They also share responsibilities in maintaining the premise clean. While some are engaged in cooking, the rest help in managing the daily chores. Speaking about the willingness of the residents to work, Shantha says: "When they are asked to engage in work, they readily agree. They say that they feel at home, and engaging in small tasks keeps them occupied and helps them get over depression."

The residents are served vegetarian food, and congee is provided to those who are ill. "We call it Prashad—a food offered to God. One day, I received a call saying there were no provisions to prepare dinner. I was about to go to the store, when I received another call saying that a donor had visited the home and left behind 5 kilos of wheat, oil and dal," says Shantha.

P Sridharan, a trustee, spends his free time in the home. He coordinates the purchase of rations and consumables and counsels the elders. "When a family lives together, there are differences of opinion. Likewise, in this home too we have, at times, misunderstandings among the residents. We try our best to resolve them amicably. Swami Satya Sai once said: 'Take one step towards a good cause, and I will lead you to a hundred more steps.' This is the ideology that we follow."

"Some elders come to the home after they had a dispute with their family members. First, we console them, and later contact their family. Many a times, their children apologize and take them back to their home on the same day," smiles Sridharan.

"When we started the home, we had only two residents: one was an old man receiving a monthly pension of

1,000 rupees and had no one to care for him, and the other was a young man who was disowned by his family. We learnt that those who are solely dependent on their children have suicidal tendencies when they are asked to leave their home. Therefore, we decided to extend our support to those who have been disowned by their family members as well,” says Sridharan.

The Hindu mission hospital provides free medical care to the residents, and the trust bears only the cost of the medicines. Dr Hariharan, who owns a private hospital in Chromepet, organizes monthly health camps at the home, and extends his services to the neighborhood residents as well. He does not charge his patients, and provides them with free medicines. “Around 42 patients visit the medical camp regularly. The elderly mostly complain of hypertension, diabetes, and arthritis. I source the medicines from clinics that have unused medicine samples, and use them to treat patients here,” says Hariharan.

Besides care for the elderly and medical camps for the under-privileged, Sri Satyanarayana Trust also provides vocational training for children who live in the neighboring areas. “Tailoring, typewriting and computer coaching is provided to students who have completed 10 th standard. The children who attend the training programme are encouraged to spend their free time with the elders, and help them in keeping the premise clean,” says Mahalakshmi who coordinates the training programs.

Kamala, 82, a Keralite had moved to Chennai after she got married. After the demise of her husband, she struggled hard to take care of her eight children. She worked as a construction laborer, and as a domestic maid to meet her family’s needs. Having lost seven out of her eight children, her son found her to be a burden when he got married

eleven years ago. She was thus sent to Sri Satyanarayana Trust. “I am very happy here. I do not have much work to do and I spend my free time in prayer. I do not wish to be a burden for anyone and wish for a peaceful death. Shekar treats me like his mother. When I expressed my desire to eat a mango, he immediately got me few mangoes to eat,” says Kamala.

Ravi was walking with the help of a trolley from the men’s dormitory towards the Satya Sai temple. Although he could not speak fluently, he managed to communicate using signs. He tapped his hand when he wanted to say soda, and pointed a finger at his teeth when he meant tooth brush. “When I was 5 years old, I fell down and hurt my head. Since then, I cannot coordinate my limbs, nor speak normally. My mother spent a considerable amount on my medical treatment, but this did not help. I set up a petty shop in my home, and earned Rs 300 a day. After my mother passed away, I was sent to the home as there was no one to take care of me. Earlier, I used to walk with the help of a stick. Now I have a trolley which makes me move around easily,” says Ravi.

—Marie Banu

If you wish to know more about the trust, please contact: Ganesh at 9444620029 or Shantha at 9962880654.



Starting Things Anew

When Dr. Anu Chandran began a small institute in a garage with ten folding chairs and offered employable skills to women, not many could have foreseen that the humble beginning would blossom one day into an organization that would occupy a special place for women today.

Thirteen years since the Association for Non-Traditional Employment for Women (ANEW) was set up in Anna Nagar in 1997, it is recognized as one of the prime institutes for its role in uplifting women and giving them employable skills to get a well-deserved decent life. ANEW provide skill-based training to over 600 young women every year in nursing, driving, and computers, coupled with soft skills and other skill-based courses such as infant care and spoken English.

ANEW has created a niche for itself in the social service spectrum in Chennai. With over 2,000 of its trainees currently employed, running families, and even educating their children, ANEW has done what

few social service institutions have been able to achieve: create a place in society not only for the women of today, but also for generations to come.

“Circumstances have led these less fortunate and downtrodden women to reach out to social service organizations for help. Most of us don’t realize that if only these women were trained in areas that would get them jobs, they would all lead better lives,” said Dr. Anu Chandran.

What germinated as a thought when Dr. Anu Chandran discussed it with M.K. Kumar led to setting up ANEW that promised to impart nursing skills to lesser fortunate women so that they could get jobs somewhere.

“The first group of women who completed their nursing course at ANEW are still working and managing their families,” said an elated Dr. Anu Chandran. She recalled how a nurse-trainer used to take classes at the institute, and how a tie-up with Sundaram Medical Foundation (SMF) at Anna Nagar helped trainees get hands on experience. As the course progressed, infant care was introduced with the aid of adoption centers. In addition, the nursing course was also certified by SMF.

With the skill-based courses at ANEW gaining ground, and more trainees joining every day, ANEW decided to branch out. A course in computers was started in 2000. “We realized that the girls joining our institute were from diverse backgrounds—some had even completed their graduation,” recollected Dr. Anu Chandran. “We thought we could equip them with a better programme and thus introduced computer training to our courses,” she added.

With 20 girls joining the first batch, and courses such as DCA, DTP and Tally included in the computer

courses, it remains a hit at ANEW as more students join this programme. The certification by Sathyam Computers added value to the course. Recent records show that the number of students who have enrolled in the computer programmes at ANEW is the highest amongst the programmes that they offer.

ANEW didn't stop there. What followed was a course in driving, and trainees were trained in car and auto-rickshaw driving, which continues till date. "The driving programme was coordinated by the Institute of Road Transport. This programme, the most rewarding from the trainees' point of view, is the most challenging for us. Owing to the demand for women drivers, our girls were employed quickly on completion of the driving course and obtained their licenses. But, they found it hard to cope with the cars they were expected to drive since the cars in which they were trained were different," said Dr. Anu Chandran.

"The course was quite challenging from a financial perspective as well. While it took just Rs. 3,000 to train a nurse, we incurred about Rs. 10,000 to train a single driver, and only 37 out of our 97 trainees actually benefited from the training. However, the driving programme has indeed showed several encouraging signs, such as one trainee, Kayalvizhi who is an ambulance driver, and remains so till date—the only woman ambulance driver in a government-run hospital," added Dr. Anu Chandran.

With ANEW having plans to begin a full-time optometry course, certified by the Sight Care Foundation, the importance attached by the organization to the employability of women remains unquestioned. With a host of training programmes and more to come, ANEW continues to pave the way today for women's

rehabilitation and employability. Dr. Anu Chandran said: “We train around 600 young women every year on a charitable basis. We plan to raise this number to 1,000 by the end of this year. In the light of this, donations from people are welcome.”

Spoken English classes, soft skills training and extensive counseling sessions conducted at ANEW have led to holistic skill-based training of women. “Attitudes are changing these days. Equal opportunity ought to be given to young girls, and people will eventually begin to understand that,” concluded Dr. Chandran,

For 13 years, ANEW has strived to lift the status of women and has succeeded. The efforts of ANEW will certainly ensure that women in society start anew—for a better life of peace, harmony and self-sufficiency.

—Jude Sannith S.

If you wish know more about ANEW contact Dr. Anu Chandran at 044-2620 0697 or visit anewindia.org



Documenting women's glory

Prajnya has made considerable progress towards its dream of creating a centre of scholarly excellence that would take its research findings into the public sphere and work with other organisations to make a difference

Speak of women leaders of the past, we remember Rani Lakshmi Bai and Sarojini Naidu; but how many of us have heard of the heroic deeds of Bhima Bai Holkar or freedom fighter Durgabhai Deshmukh? Not many. There have been many women like them, in post-colonial India, whose contributions to Indian politics or as social agents have yielded tangible benefits. However, their work and stories may not have been documented.

The Chennai-based Prajnya Trust aims on creating a comprehensive, continually-updated, publicly accessible data resource centre. It serves as a single-point access for quantitative, and archival data on participation of women in politics and policy structure s of India aand South Asia as well.

Established in 2006, Prajnya trust is a non-profit centre for research, public education and networking; working on areas related to peace, justice and security. Its two main initiatives are: Politics, Security and Women (PSW) initiative, and Education for Peace initiative (EPI).

Through the PSW initiative, Prajnya is working towards creating a statistical database which will compile statistics and lists of women in politics and policy making.

Dr. Swarna Rajagopalan, Managing Trustee of Prajnya Trust says, “Although South Asian women have been active in politics and social movements for a long time, it was only after 1975 that this issue began to be studied seriously. In the Indian scenario, even after more than 60 years of independence, we have incomplete records of women’s participation, beyond electoral politics, in formal and informal decision-making processes. The database seeks to fill the gap created by scattered and unsystematically compiled information in this field.”

Prajnya has also set up an online archive of visuals of such women and their contributions in the public sphere.

The inter-collegiate quiz on women in South Asia, which is organized by Prajnya every year, has successfully regenerated interest among the student community.

Prajnya also undertakes research and advocacy towards eliminating gender violence. In 2008, Prajnya organized its first 16-day campaign against gender violence, to raise awareness on the different forms and manifestations of violence against women. Held every year between November 25 and December 10, the campaign draws the attention of policy makers,

governments and civil society towards gender violence and advocates for its elimination.

Over the 16 days, Prajnya organises programmes and activities at multiple locations across Chennai, innovatively blending theatre, poetry, literature and art, to facilitate and create networks for action. Funded entirely by individual contributions, the campaign is a community effort that has gained momentum with every passing year.

In 2009 the trust released a Gender Violence Report detailing the state of gender violence in the country.

The Education and Peace Initiative (EPI) is yet another important pillar of Prajnya.”EPI focuses on preserving and nurturing the innate peace related values in children through systematic engagement with students, teachers and school administrators,” says Priyadarshini Rajagopalan, Director of this initiative.

A pre-launch research grant from the Sir Ratan Tata Trust enabled Prajnya to undertake research studies that mapped educational administration in Tamil Nadu. It surveyed civil society peace education efforts in South Asia and interpreted the NCERT peace education guidelines to create a framework for EPI.

The initiative will work towards including peace education in the curriculum through seminars, communication workshops, talks, volunteer opportunities and community events. Another unique facet is the use of Peace Tales; retelling fables, folk tales, and mythology, to engage children and adults towards building peace skills.

Since its inception, Prajnya has made considerable progress towards its dream of creating a centre of

scholarly excellence that would take its research findings into the public sphere and work with other organisations to make a difference. “We have done this with the minimum of human, material and financial resources. In fact, we function almost entirely with volunteers support,” says Dr. Swarna Rajagopalan. *Individuals from the community*, she says, have *given* time, money, shared networks, expertise that has brought Prajnya to this threshold.

—Nandini Shanmugam

To know more about Prajnya logon to prajnya.in.



When Opportunities Knock...

What happens when people who normally go about searching for employment have employment opportunities looking for them? That is pretty much the situation that has been taking place for the last three years, now in as many as five villages in South India, courtesy: Desi Crew. “We started this initiative in February 2007,” says Saloni Malhotra, CEO, Desi Crew Solutions Pvt. Ltd., “It started off as a module that was designed to help people from rural backgrounds become employed by taking employment to their doorsteps.” Starting off as an initiative of IIT – Madras, Desi Crew has come a long way in providing employment opportunities for those in rural areas and the company has won accolade after accolade on account of its untiring efforts in providing employment opportunities for village dwellers.

So to start at the very beginning (For it’s the best way to start), the Desi Crew story is a story of rural BPO pioneering and how noble efforts at employment have

led to what is now seen as a commercial success. “We noticed that people from smaller towns and villages were coming to cities like Chennai, Bangalore and Bombay in search of jobs,” says Saloni, “A lot of them would get employed in BPO companies, for a very small pay and what inadvertently jump to another company for a negligible increase in pay – so we thought about taking jobs to them instead of having them come looking for these jobs.” The job profiles for the employees include data entry, file management and regular back-office work, thus providing an ample opportunity to explore their potential and excel at work. “We were initiated into the line at The Rural Technology and Business Incubator of IIT-Madras and also received help from another IIT initiative called Will Grow.”

The business model of the company is startlingly quite simple. Creation of computer based jobs in communities is the first step towards providing employment. Another advantage that the company enjoys, which contributes in a mighty way to its business model is the lower attrition rates for the industry (as people are less likely to leave their jobs given the improved quality of life and option of staying with their families). Lower costs for clients, is also a factor as overheads at these centres are far cheaper when compared to urban counterparts. These features that Desi Crew possesses make for one of the most interesting USP’s that the company has in its arsenal. However, since the workforce is normally from an unskilled background, there exists a need to train their human resources. “We have designed a training programme known as D-touch,” says Saloni, “This is a basic training programme that can be tailored depending on the location and batch that comes in, which varies from 21 to 60 days; In addition to this, on-the-job training is also adhered to for our employees.”

As many as 250 people are currently employed by Desi Crew across villages and towns like Palladam, Kollumangudi, Appakoodal, Thirrukkuvilai and Salem. The age-group of the workforce ranges from 19 to 29 years in addition to team leaders and supervisors. One of the noblest aspects of Desi Crew is the fact that several women receive employment opportunities by way of the initiative. "Women are generally not allowed to leave their homes and villages in search of work," explains Saloni, "Thus, it makes sense to bring them the jobs to their villages – when this initiative started, a number of women came forward to take up jobs with us." The response to the initiative has been quite encouraging. "Initially when we went to the villages, there was a certain trust deficit that we experienced," says Saloni, "However over time, as we built offices and developed infrastructure, we gradually won them over to our fold."

The 16 member strong Desi Crew has painstakingly overseen the process from the start with aid from IIT-Madras which has supported the initiative with a great deal of dedication by providing access to villages and facilitating a place to open the Desi Crew office. Networking with potential clients and introduction to other organizations such as Will Grow by IIT has also helped make Desi Crew a well-networked organization. However, the organization goes above being just a social initiative, "We broke even in March 2009 after starting off in February 2007," says Saloni, "This proves that it's a commercially viable model that also doubles up as a social initiative." The attractive remuneration that Desi Crew provides for its workforce also helps to bring about an increase in savings on the part of the employees. So what's the roadmap ahead of Desi Crew? "The intention is to grow, to bring more villages under our umbrella," says Saloni, "Hopefully; we'll be able to achieve all of that in the shortest time possible with the resources at hand."

—JSS

Trendsetters

*Powerful stories of
social entrepreneurs for
whom humanity matters.*



Land for Landless

“I am an introvert and do not like to talk about myself. I do not even wear a new saree when I go out, as it would draw people’s attention,” says Padmashri Krishnammal Jagannathan in a conversation with Marie Banu.

Born to a landless labourer, I grew up in poverty. We were twelve children, six of whom passed away when they were young. My father died when I was ten, leaving behind my young mother and six children. Our life was predominantly within the four walls of our home. I used to work all night cleaning the paddy husk. I never used to sleep. My mother led a spiritual life and used to begin the day with prayer. I joined her in the rituals and thus became religious.

I always saw women around me who wake up as early as 3 in the morning to do their household chores and

then leave for work. They returned home at 4 in the evening and continued to resume their domestic work. It was a continuous struggle. The thought to resolve this issue was sowed in my mind when I was ten.

I studied up to class 7 in Chinna Kada Theru Palli at Ayyankottai village, Dindugal. I lived in a Harijan hostel in Madurai and continued my schooling here. As I started to learn English only in the 7th standard, I found it difficult to cope with the syllabus. Many times, this made me cry and think of returning home. However, I was determined to pursue my education. I memorised the lessons well and studied hard.

The results proved my hard work. I stood first in class. The headmistress took me to Dr. Soundara Ramachandran who had just returned from (Wadhva) after meeting Gandhiji. She hugged me and said, "I will educate you." From then, she supported my education. I was the first person in my community to pass the S.S.L.C. examination. To celebrate this, the villagers organised a feast. This motivated me to pursue my education further. I studied B.A. Economics in American College at Madurai and B.Ed in St. Christopher's College, Madras.

While studying, I wanted to help the children in the nearby slums. I enrolled 52 children in the nearby school.

Education will only teach us to count $4 + 4 = 8$. Is this why we were born? I asked myself.

I was involved with the Gandhian Sarvodaya Movement and it was then I met Sankaralingam Jagannathan, my husband. He hailed from a wealthy family, and gave up his college studies in response to Gandhi's call for non-cooperation movement and civil disobedience.

I heard about Vinobha Bhave's Bhoodhan movement and joined him. This was a turning point in my life and I was determined not to look back. Vinobhaji walked very fast and to keep his pace I too used to walk swiftly. I was the one to get up first in the morning and had the privilege of holding the light for him. I used to be the first person to wake up, clean the lamp and be ready.

I have accompanied him to Banaras, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. When we were at a conference in Bihar, Vinobhaji directed my husband and me to look after the activities in Tamil Nadu.

Between 1953 and 1967, we played an active role in the Bhoodhan movement and about 4 million acres (16,000 sq km) of land were distributed to thousands of landless poor across several Indian states. After the burning of 44 Dalit Christians including women and children in Kilavenmani in Nagapattinam district following a wage-dispute with the landlord in 1968, we started to work in Thanjavur District on land reform issues and started a non-violence movement mobilising 15,000 women supporters. It was this incident that inspired us to start the organisation LAFTI – Land for Tillers' Freedom.

The purpose of our organisation was to bring the landlords and landless poor to the negotiating table, obtain loans to enable the landless to buy land at reasonable prices. Then, to help them work on the land cooperatively so that the loans could be repaid.

Although the initial response was lukewarm with banks unwilling to lend and the high rates of stamp duty, we managed to go on with the cause and, by 2007, through LAFTI we had transferred 13,000 acres (53 sq km) to about 13,000 families.

Due to severe social discrimination, I was not treated with respect. When I journeyed with the women, I was not offered even water to drink. I used to take rice congee from homes and carry it in a bottle to drink instead of water.

I camped in the villages where I travelled and took shelter in one of the homes. In one such instance, a woman was leaving for work at 5 in the morning I asked her how much she would earn in a day. She replied that she earned a meagre amount of Rs 5 besides leftover food offered by the landlords. I wanted to do something for her. I offered her work with a daily wage of Rs 30. Seeing this, the villagers were interested in working with me.

One day, around noon I saw the villagers walking towards a temple. I came to know that a survey of the temple land was being done and they were offering free butter milk. I compiled information about the temple land and appealed to the Government of Tamil Nadu to allocate land for the landless. Subsequently, 350 acres were distributed to 350 families. This was just the beginning.

Another incident happened when I approached the Chief Minister and requested for land to be provided to families living in poorly thatched huts. The Chief Minister immediately instructed the surveyors in 8 districts of Tamil Nadu to allocate land for the 19 families. This led to strong protests from the landlords who demonstrated their objection by stationing 19 buffaloes in the allocated site.

Although unwell, I walked 3 kilometres and reached the site. About 350 women were waiting along with their children and said that the landlords' men were coming to hurt them. I told them to remain calm and pray.

Men entered the place with knives and sticks, and threatened us. I spoke fiercely and challenged them to kill me. They immediately left the place. However, a boy who was besides me got hurt in the melee.

Around 500 people from nearby slums came to support us. I sought their constructive support rather than a destructive one. They brought building materials and, before sunset, 19 houses were constructed for the families.

From that day, I was determined to finish any task that I initiated.

I have obtained land for 15,000 acres for 15,000 families so far. The land titles are provided in the name of the women. I believe that when the property is in the name of the woman, she is secure and has a better social status.

Through LAFTI we have launched a movement to provide decent housing for all. The first step has been to convert 2000 mud hutments with thatched roof into brick-walled, tiled houses. Each house would be equipped with modern facilities including a bio-sand water filter to ensure safe drinking water. The beneficiaries would contribute their time and labour for the construction. We aim to provide 5000 houses by 2010. The Government has offered a grant of Rs. 60,000 per house and land for construction. However these funds do not suffice, the total cost of construction is Rs. 2.31 lakhs. I mobilises funds from my friends and well wishers.

I have lived and walked with the landless community for over 40 years. I want to give them all that I can and I do not want to see a single hut.

'Krishnammal Jagannathan' is a social service activist from the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. She and her

husband, Sankaralingam Jagannathan, have protested against social injustice and she is a wellknown Gandhian activist. Her work includes enhancing the lives of the Dalits, the landless, and the poor; she has sometimes fought against governments as well as big industries.

She was earlier involved in the Indian independence movement, along with her husband, and was also a close associate of Vinobha Bhave. She has received several awards including the Right to Livelihood Award 2008.

Krishnammal Jagannathan, independently and together with her husband, has established a total of seven non-governmental institutions for the poor. Besides this, she has also played an active role in wider public life. She has been a Senate member of the Gandhigram Trust and University and of Madurai University. She was also a member of a number of local and state social welfare committees and a member of the National Committee on Education, the Land Reform Committee and the Planning Committee.

—Marie Banu



Savithri Vaithi - 80 glorious years in serving humanity

"There is no higher religion than human service. To work for the common good is the greatest creed."

—Woodrow T. Wilson

This is a quote that aptly defines the principle belief of Smt. Savithri Vaithi—visionary and karta of Vishranthi Charitable Trust in Chennai. Turning 80 this month, she is as committed as ever with her zest for life radiating from her face. Social work has been her only passion in life and her calling to serve mankind came at an early age of sixteen. Her hands full with work, she discusses her life, interests, her deep rooted connection with social service. Having visualised upcoming plans she is raring to go, and narrates her vibrant journey with the Conversations team.

Eldest of four daughters, she recalls her childhood days being part of a big family. "My grandfather was a

judge in the High Court, and my father was a leather technologist. When Gandhiji called upon his service, my father resigned from his job and hence I had to start working,” says Savithri Vaithi fondly remembering the pre-independence days and how the ardour for service ran in her family.

Her multi faceted journey began as a welfare worker at the then existing area of Ashok Vihar. “I educated slum dwellers on health and hygiene. My work involved walking for miles or travelling by trams, and I aimed at targeting the grassroot levels in society. I moved on to obtaining a Diploma and working as a medical social worker at the General Hospital,” says Savithri Vaithi.

Like most girls in those times, Savithri Vaithi too could not oppose marriage. She tied the knot with photographer R.Vaithi, and social work took a backseat. She felt that she was wasting her talents as she remained idle all day, and so learnt baking and confectionery at the Catering technology institute. Gradually progressing and innovating, she began conducting cooking classes at home for a group of women.

“I taught women various dishes that they had never attempted at cooking. I wanted to take this group forward and so formed a service oriented club that met every Monday and named it Monday Charity Club,” adds Savithri Vaithi. A born leader, she volunteered to head the club that raised funds for the financial assistance of students. The club later started a book bank, and a project called ‘Oondrukol’ that provides monthly rations to the elderly in slums. All these programs still continue till date.

It was in 1978 that she envisioned a home to care for poor elderly women. With the assistance from Help

Age India and Dr. Natrajan, a geriatrist at the General Hospital, Vishranthi was founded. In the 32 years of its existence, Vishranthi has grown to be more than just a home for the 100 women living there. It is a multipurpose organisation that serves the needs of many. For instance, the inter-mediatory nursing home was started to serve the elderly who required post operative care. Also, under the Malarchi initiative, orphaned or single parent girls are cared for and provided accommodation in the same premise. "A lady approached us with her baby as she was abandoned by her husband. She wanted us to look after her baby as she had to work and fend for herself. This gave me the idea to create a home for such girl children. The presence of children at Vishranthi is an added joy for the inmates as well," explains Savithri Vaithi.

Another home funded by Vishranthi trust is at Irungaattukkottai, near Sri Perambadur. This is being run for the past ten years and is managed as a co-operative house for and by the elderly men and women.

Other initiatives of the trust include caring for individuals with mental disabilities, and eye donation services. Both are run with aid from Lions Club and Rajan Eye care Clinic. "Most inmates feel unwanted and to be of no use. The idea of donating their eyes after their lifetime instills in them a feeling of being of use to someone after they are gone," she adds.

Death is something she teaches the inmates to be fearless about. Recalling an incident she says, "When the first death in the home took place we were unaware of how to go about the ceremonies. The Vettiyan (undertaker) at the cremation ground was drunk. It was then that I decided to light the funeral pyre, and I have been doing it for the 300 inmates that have passed

away in the home so far. It was shocking at that time for people to see a woman take part in the cremation ceremonies, but I had no option,” she says.

The word ‘personal’ has no meaning in Savithri Vaithi’s life. “I have nothing of my own. I have no family and these inmates are my siblings. I can’t help to think of anything else but my work as this is my only hobby,” she says with a deep rooted sense of belonging and affection towards Vishranthi. A lover of books, she has two cupboards stacked with her book collection, but hardly has any time to read! She also collects key chains, a hobby that has been kept alive for the past many years and this is the only thing she refers to as her personal belongings.

Living at the Vishranthi premises for the last 15 years, Savithri Vaithi wishes to spend the last golden years of her life without any difficulties to her close aides. “My life will end here and I wish for it to be as peaceful as possible. I do not want to be a burden to others,” she says.

Recipient of various awards including the ‘Real Heroes’ award by the Ambani group and the more latest, The Lions Club Humanitarian Award 2010; Best Social Entrepreneur Award 2010 by Mohammed Sathak Abdullah College, Chennai, Savithri Vaithi is as humble as ever. She plans on training middle aged women as caretakers and sending them to homes that require elderly care. Clearly, she has her future plans set and retirement is something she hasn’t considered so far. The thought of turning 80 hasn’t changed her outlook to life either.

“I wanted my 80th birthday which falls on 1 October, to be a close affair of my well wishers and inmates, but people insisted that it should be celebrated,” she says.

To celebrate the occasion, a felicitation ceremony was held at the A.V.M Rajeshwari Kalyana Mandapam on the 28th of September. Actor Manorama and Actor Sachu, Villupaattu folk artist Subbu Arunugam, Sri. S. Sankara Raman, Hon. Secretary of the Amar Seva Sangam were among other personalities who attended the function. The inmates of Vishranthi were also part of the celebrations. A documentary which had eminent personalities speak in praise of Savithri Vaithi was screened and the evening drew to a close with a kutcheri by Sudha Raghunathan.

Recognising young talent in her field, Savithri Vaithi has dedicated two awards for young achievers in the field of social work. These awards were presented on the occasion of her birthday celebrations. Giving away the awards she says: "People need to be aware of the excellent services done by P. Kalyani who runs an NGO called 'Neyam' in Coimbatore and Lakshmi who heads 'Anbu-Karangal'in Chennai. Both of them run homes for the elderly and their work has to be recognised. These awards are my personal recognition to their services at the grassroot levels." A life dedicated to serving mankind, Savithri Vaithi is an inspiration to each and every person who has the passion to serve. Indeed here is one person who has walked her talk.

—Nidhi Adlakha



Civic Gandhi

Leading film actor Kamalhassan once said, everyone has Gandhi in us, while it doesn't surface in action in most of us, in some, it does. This is true of our hero of the month, DR. M.B Nirmal, founder of the ExNoRa movement.

M.B. Nirmal began his career as a dispatch clerk in a Nationalized Bank during the early 70's, and has completed Bachelor's Degree in Law. Today, he is the founder of 29 organizations—all dedicated towards social change. Nirmal is the founder of ExNoRa, a non-governmental organization which aims at creating a cleaner, greener, and environmentally friendly world.

Born in a family with rich ancestral property in Chennai, he faced difficult times when his family lost all their assets. The financial crisis burdened him with a debt of 15 lakh rupees and he found himself in a slum in 'Giriappa Road' at T Nagar, Chennai.

"Be the Change"

Nirmal believed in making declarations. One such was: "You must make an affirmative statement to yourself on

any mission that is important in your life.” One day his aunt asked him, “Can’t you go to a better place?” He replied, “I can’t go to a better place, but I can change the place where I live now”. This sowed the seed for his revolutionary idea and made ExNoRa to what it is today.

Nirmal worked with the people in his neighborhood to keep the environment clean. He realized that it wasn’t important to know about environmental management but instead know how to involve people in the cause. Gradually he expanded this movement beyond Giriappa Road.

An Honour Student

Although Nirmal was an average student, his alma mater, Pachaiyappa’s College published his name amongst a list of 150 outstanding Students of the College. The list also included two former Chief Ministers C.N. Annadorai (Tamil Nadu) and Brahmananada Reddy (Andhra Pradesh).

Leveraging the Sixth Sense

During the early days of his career in the bank, he often helped officers who had difficulty in tallying the books of accounts. To everyone’s surprise, he would reconcile the accounts within three minutes. He believed that everyone has a powerful sixth-sense, and with keen observation anyone can perform with higher efficiency.

Nirmal realized that he often de-motivated himself with what he called ‘the fragility developed due to peer comparison in the community.’ Fortunately this positive declaration helped him and he progressed to the position of an officer, and later as Manager at Indian Overseas Bank.

Training Trials

When Nirmal was the manager, his direct superior recommended him to a high level training program at 'National Institute of Bank Management' (NIBM), but his application was rejected. It was then, Nirmal made another declaration—he aimed to make it into NIBM at the earliest.

He succeeded in his declaration and within 6 months went to NIBM, not as a trainee but as a Trainer. Training is yet another portfolio that he handled during his career. He trained people on what he believed, and he became a great motivational trainer.

You Have 48 Hours a Day

Over the years, he has developed modules to address specific needs. To name a few: 'Spot Spark', 'Spot Success', 'Fashion your Passion', 'Motive Action', 'Study Smarter and Not Harder', '48 Hour Day'. He conducted a wide range of programs for corporate and general public as well.

Two Decades of ExNoRa

Many years after the informal movement at Giriappa Road, Nirmal founded ExNoRa in 1989. He had a clear vision: 'to mobilize and empower communities to participate in preserving nature and preventing environmental degradation, and to improve the quality of life of common man.' ExNoRa's fundamental philosophy states 'environ-mental protection or management is meaningless unless it is a conscious choice of all, or a substantial portion of people.

The mismanagement of waste is the most important cause of environmental degradation, and affects poor people, the most. The inability of the local bodies to

manage the waste is due to the sheer volume that is generated and due to the lack of resources. This problem needed a solution that involved the people's participation.

The success of Exnora is in its ability to motivate people and involve them in sanitation activities. People were brought together through neighborhood communities called 'Civic ExNoRa'. Over the past 15 years, ExNoRa has motivated and formed thousands of Civic ExNoRas' across India, who are involved in maintaining their surroundings clean.

ExNoRa firmly believes that it is possible to develop different kinds of replicable models to suit different places and situations. The various prototypes developed by ExNoRa are indeed replicated everywhere today. ExNoRa's vision is to promote sustainable human settlements, through the promotion of waste management as an income generating opportunity. Practices today by Civic ExNoRa include Solid Waste Management, Liquid Waste Management, Rain Water Harvesting, and Recycling, amongst others.

The Innovator

Nirmal promoted new ideas like the ExNoRa Innovators Club, Civic ExNoRa, and Home ExNoRa, to ensure that the concept reached everyone. He believed that social transformation is possible only when like-minded and socially conscious people came together. This led to the formation of management committees and operational teams who performed, while he remained as a mentor.

Nirmal is an atheist (if that's how one who believes 'divinity is within you' is to be called) who says prayer is more powerful than the god. He attributes his success to three women in his life: his mother, wife, and daughter.

Star Fish Can Regenerate

It is a difficult task to write about such a person in one article. Just like a star fish can grow into another star fish, if a part of its body is cut, every social transformation thought of Nirmal gives birth to an organization, a model, or a team. His greatest strength is the 'emptiness' that bubbles with ideas often. He conceives the idea, operationalizes it, hands it over to the beneficiaries, and moves on to with his next mission.

Relevance of contextuality over the purpose of continuity

Nirmal believes in addressing issues and not creating organizations. Organizations are the medium to address the cause. He also believes that social organizations must address contemporary issues, whatever might be the purpose of its birth.

Apart from his path breaking work in environmental protection and cleanliness, he is also working on various missions against corruption, alcoholism, and women empowerment. Realizing the need for synergy among the social activist organizations, he has developed a networking model and is in the process of operationalizing it. The focus points of his networking model are Employment, Education, Environment, Entertainment, Energy and Ethics.

What is Voluntary Sacrifice?

Environmental Catastrophes have become the order of the day. One of the most serious problems is Global Warming. There is a very urgent need to cut down on carbon emissions all over the world but no one wants to do so. Nations prefer to increase industrial activity in order to overcome economic problems. Governments

promise to take care of their citizen's welfare, but focus on politics instead. In such a 'never before seen situation', issues related to the environment takes a back seat.

There are 6 'P's that parents give children from day one:

- Power / Strength
- Prayer – fear in God
- Personality (Individual Development)
- Pupilage (Education)
- Possessions (Wealth)
- Position (Post)
- Nirmal reminds people that parents forget the 7th 'P' which is Planet.(Saving the planet & protecting the environment)

The 7th 'P' is a collective responsibility for all to work on. Every parent and citizen should take the following pledge, 'All Good Things Begin with Me', and act so. Saving the Planet is one's collective responsibility and we should all work together.

Nirmal says: "Joy is in giving and not holding to oneself". As a true Gandhian, Nirmal plans to handover all his responsibilities to his team by next year and settle down in a village.

—S. Deenadayalan and S.Rajalakshmi



Evangelist of Village Growth Economy

In an era of frenetic urbanization, Rangaswamy Elango chose to evangelize village-centered development. The first Dalit engineer from his village Kuthambakkam, 50 km from Chennai, he had many opportunities to stay away from his village and become wealthy. But his urge to empower his fellow villagers made him quit his job as a scientist at Council of Scientific and Industrial Research to work for the development of his village. When the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution revived Panchayati Raj, Elango was excited. He won the Panchayat elections in 1996 and was elected as the Panchayat President of Kuthambakkam village which had a population of around 5,000.

Elango won the elections with an enormous support from the Dalit villagers. His first agenda was to stop the practice of brewing illicit arrack in his village and offer novel ways to create new jobs for the poor and landless villagers. Realizing that people's participation was key to the success of village development, he prepared a five-

year plan for holistic village development in consultation with the villagers. He ensured that all the villager's participated in the Gram Sabha (village level parliament) and offered their ideas.

Using his technological experience and innovative thinking, he evolved simple and effective plans for his village infrastructure development. The village built its storm water drain by using leftover granite slabs from a nearby granite factory. Local villagers were employed for the purpose.

His next dream was to build 'Samthuvapuram', a township of equality. He decided that the only way to stop the caste conflicts rife in his village was to set up a housing colony for poor families who belonged to different castes. Today in Kuthambakkam, a village with strong caste divisions, stand 50 twin houses, with one Dalit and one non-Dalit family in it. Now, even disputes are resolved together. It's this unity that has been Elango's biggest success.

Elango used eco-friendly low-cost mud bricks that were made by mixing local sand and small quantities of cement. The villagers were engaged in the construction of their own houses and also contributed 10 percent of the cost. This model has become a huge success and many other villages in Tamil Nadu are adopting this concept.

Elango, being a true Gandhian, introduced the Gandhian economy model in his village. He believed that sustainable employment generation could be made possible in villages by value-adding to the products which are produced locally. In a door-to-door survey done at Kuthambakkam village, he found that the village consumes over Rs 50 lakh worth of goods and

services every month. Elango discovered to his surprise that nearly 80% of these goods could be produced in the village itself. Since then, he has been evolving a network economic theory involving a cluster of villages. In this, seven or eight villages formed a cluster or a free trade zone and each village identified and produced goods and services without duplication of effort. They consumed each other's produce. This led to a boost in the local economy and the money remained within the villages.

“As the producer and the consumer belong to the same area, genuine business transactions happen instead of unhealthy commercial business. This is a way for villages to become self-reliant and this was the view of Mahatma Gandhi,” says Elango.

He has made use of his technical skills and has started some small industries in Kuthambakkam. “By using the village produce like paddy, dhal, coconut and groundnut, we are producing gingelly oil, groundnut oil, soap and coconut oil. From this, we have attained a high level of sustainable economical development and employment,” he adds.

He also initiated the Trust for Village Self Governance (TVSG) to support the activities of the Panchayat, to generate funds and to get technical support from outside. It also helps the Panchayat to implement schemes related to women, education and social development and to network the Panchayats to strengthen local self-governance.

Kuthambakkam, a model Panchayat, has become a learning centre for the other Panchayats. Elango started the Panchayat Academy to train about 25 Panchayat presidents every month. The training is on the activities

done in Kuthambakkam; ongoing projects; rights of Panchayats; duties; planning at the Panchayat level; disaster management and mitigation; rural industries; changes in India and in other countries.

“It is my hope,” says Elango, “that Kuthambakkam will serve as a model, one whose social and economic achievements are so obvious that people will clamor to replicate it elsewhere in the nation too.”

—Latha Suresh

For more information about Samathuvapuram, please contact Mr. R. Elango at +91 9940682201 or write to panchayat@yahoo.com



You are Immortal

Yes most of us can live after our death, be useful to the society; be valuable for long, and leave a legend behind. This is the main vision behind **MOHAN Foundation**.

About Dr. Sunil Shroff

Dr Sunil Shroff, the founder of **MOHAN** Foundation is also the Professor and HOD of Urology and Renal Transplantation at Sri Ramachandra Medical College, Chennai. He pursued his MBBS and MS (General Surgery), got his FRCS from, UK. He did his urology specialisation from University College, London. His expertise lies in the areas of endo-urology, renal transplantation, and andrology. He has won several awards to his credit; like the award for the best paper on organ donation that involved 5008 Patients, and many accolades that he considers insignificant compared to his life's mission.

MOHAN Foundation operates from Chennai, Hyderabad, Coimbatore and Vizag.

The foundation's objectives are: to create awareness among the general public about brain death, cadaveric transplantation of human organs, and to eliminate the commerce involved in organ transplantation in India.

In UK and other European countries, cadaveric organ transplantation is highly respected and popular. In India, most of us know about donating blood or kidney when one is alive, and eyes after life. In the case of cadaveric organ transplantation, the donor is a brain dead person. This means that only the heart is keeping the body alive, and that too in most cases with a ventilator.

Middle Class and a Great Social and Indian Class

Dr. Shroff hails from a middle class family. His father was a businessman, a social activist, and a Rotarian. When asked about his birth place, Dr. Shroff was quick to reply 'India'. He prefers this identify, instead of being identified by the place of his birth. He believes in serving the human kind as a 'human being' instead of giving importance to their 'Identity' that is based on place of birth, nativity, religion or other factors.

Dr. Shroff despite his busy schedule has allocated two hours of his time to consult patients at MOHAN Foundation office on Thursdays, and contributes the consultation fees to MOHAN foundation. "I am just doing something which is close to my heart. I am not sure if this is a big thing, and if it will be of inspiration to someone," he expressed this when he heard that he was being written about.

The “EGOLESS”

What Dr. Shroff has initiated is definitely great work, and reflects his immense contribution to the society and humanity. When more people, especially younger generation learn about his life and accomplishments, they would definitely get inspired to take up something equal or bigger initiatives in their life.

Renaissance through KIDNEY SCANDAL - RIDICULE

Dr. Shroff was living in UK, practicing medicine and surgery. In early 1990s the media in UK were highlighting the scandals related to kidney transplantation in India. He happened to face his English friends who were making fun about the kind of commerce and the (least) value for human life in India.

Dr. Shroff felt very ashamed about the way organ transplantation—especially kidney transplantation—was becoming commercial, and the way in which value and respect for human life was depreciating. It was at this moment in life he decided to head back to India, and thus he started **MOHAN Foundation in 1995**.

He organized a survey on organ donation in which over 5000 people were interviewed. Based on the findings, he planned the objectives of MOHAN Foundation.

Karma Yoga

Dr. Shroff said that he had several role models in his life, but what drove him to start this organisation, and relentlessly work for its growth and expansion is the philosophy of ‘karma yoga’. He never expects any acknowledgement, appreciation, motivation, or even a

reward, but continues to do the work that is close to his heart.

When asked how he managed to overcome the hurdles in the journey of establishing MOHAN foundation, he said that there were still a lot of hurdles that his team is facing. Some of the problems are: repeated calls from people volunteering to donate organs for the sake of money, logistical problems within hospitals like postmortem, police verification, death certification, short of finance resources for various initiatives and awareness programs, and portrayal of organ transplantation in movies impacting (negative) public awareness.

Obstacles are opportunities

Some of the steps that Dr. Shroff has adopted to overcome these barriers include good team effort and coordination, training counselors, and obtaining community support.

When asked about fulfillment of his ambitions in life, Dr. Shroff acknowledged three major milestones. They were:

1. Making the doctors realize that this concept of cadaver transplantation works
2. Paradigm shift in people in South India on organ transplantation and donation
3. National Registry Network for recipients and donors merged with that of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh

Daughter – 12 year old, the First Donor

His twelve-year-old daughter was the first to register as an organ donor in his family. He reiterated that creating awareness was his role and he never went to convince

people. Out of 1,500 cadaver organ transplantations in the past one year, 600 were coordinated through MOHAN Foundation. So far over half a million people in South India have registered as organ donors.

MOHAN Foundation first formed a network with six hospitals including the Apollo and CMC Vellore, and operated through this network for eight years. In 2008, the Tamil Nadu Government formed an Advisory Committee, and a network of 52 hospitals across the state was formed. Six hospitals out of these were merged with the government network. Tamil Nadu has thus become a leader in organ transplantation with 150 cadaver organs. The Hyderabad chapter of MOHAN Foundation was formed in 2003 and has contributed to the expansion work in south India.

Looking Ahead – Lord Ganesha, the guru of Organ Transplantation

Responding to future plans to make a greater impact, Dr. Shroff shared that the Education Minister has agreed to include chapters for 9th and 10th standard students on organ donation.

Quoting the example of Lord Ganesha as the ultimate accomplishment in the organ transplantation perspective, he says that the ultimate perfection of transplanting the head of the elephant to a human body means aiming to reach the stars, while human efforts have managed to reach the moon.

Talking about the drive and motivation he gets in his work, Dr. Shroff highlighted that the smile he sees in his patients' face, the sense of satisfaction that his contribution has made a difference in the society, the

happiness in the families of the donors and recipient, is the drive that motivates him to do something more.

Dr. Shroff has started a website on medical information. This was initiated as a hobby and has now become the world's largest highly ranked website on medical information. It is being managed by a team of over 20 people and is still growing. Dr. Shroff has created leaders here too, and shares that 70 percent of the traffic is from abroad while 30 percent is from India.

MULTI TASKING – Not a Jargon, but a way of Life

Dr. Shroff attributes his success is due to multitasking, team work, and the courage to choose and face challenges in new areas. "There are demands from Visakhapatnam and Delhi to start branches of MOHAN Foundation. This is a sign that Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh have set standards, and are role models for the rest of our country", said Dr. Shroff.

Dr. Sunil Shroff is the Managing Director of **Medindia Health Network Pvt Ltd.** and also an office bearer of the Medical Computing Society of India (MCSI) which has its own website and aims at promoting computer awareness among doctors and also tries to focus on telemedicine related issues.

—S. Deenadayalan, Venkatesh and Vivekanandan

MOHAN Foundation is located at 3rd Floor, Toshniwal Building, 267, Kilpauk Garden Road, Chennai-600 010 . For information, write to mohanfound@gmail.com, or call 044 - 26447000 / 94446 07000, or visit mohanfoundation.org



Echo off a cloth heap

Anshu Gupta is establishing a culture of sustained donations in India by creating a mechanism for second-hand clothes and goods to pass from the wealthy to the poor.

Come every disaster, peoples' first instinct is to bundle old clothes to give away. It's a quick and easy way of feeling good. The first time Meenakshi and Anshu put their pile together, they stopped in their tracks. Then they sat down and pondered the message behind the pile: "Here we are, a young family of two adults, new home-makers for just three years, not wealthy by any means and we have 67 pieces of good, usable garments we don't want any more. Yet, but for the disaster we wouldn't be giving them away."

Goonj [meaning “Echo”] was born that moment in 1998. The Guptas resolved that they would collect old clothes round the year, sort them and target them precisely to the needy, who must receive them with their dignity intact. Meenakshi had a job with the BBC that could support them. Anshu quit his at Escorts to build Goonj.

His mission was to facilitate an economic bridge between urban, wealthy India and impoverished, rural India by simply sharing the surplus of wealth. Anshu decided to focus on clothes as an effective entry-point for his mission. Clothes are essential, yet often unaffordable for the poor, and donating old clothes is an activity familiar to Indians. Anshu initiated Vastradaan, a nationwide ongoing clothes donation movement to familiarize donors with the concept of conscious and sustained giving as a response to this problem. Goonj is now channelising more than 40,000 kgs of material every month.

From the beginning the centrality was receivers’ dignity and not givers’ pride. Goonj does not accept torn or undergarments. They must be usable pieces given with care and deliberation. Goonj encourages people to audit their wardrobes regularly and not wait for disasters, as the need for clothes is steady. It organises neighbourhood meets to which people bring their old clothes. At these day long get-togethers, a sense of community builds up and enthusiasm rises. “It’s the sort of exercise that gives, at the end of a single day, a sense of fulfillment”, says Anshu. Invariably someone puts up a hand offering to organise a meet in another’s neighbourhood, a friend’s or a relation’s. So the movement has spread, first in Delhi

and now to other cities - Mumbai (Including Navi Mumbai & Thane).

Care is in the detail:

No cloth is ever wasted. Torn clothes are set aside for conversion into usable products. They are converted to school bags, tote bags, quilts, and mats. A great quantity is converted into narrow tapes to be used as drawstrings for petticoats. The ultimate, unusable waste is chopped up and stuffed into pillows and quilts.

Good but dirty clothes are removed for washing. Then, requisitions from organisations are taken up. These contain requirement by gender, age and size. These are selected and packed in used sacks. Sacks are numbered and the numbers recorded in a database. And finally they are on their way to close to 200 destinations around the country.

Perhaps, the most poignant of all products that Goonj makes are sanitary napkins of its own design. Each set has three parts: a waist-string, a small absorbant pad and a palm wide strip to hold the padding in place while its ends are tucked under the waist-string. Ten sets are packed with care into a drawstring pouch for a women to receive without embarrassment.

Anshu's strength lies in creatively finding and engaging new partners for all aspects of Goonj's work. The volunteers in Goonj's collection drives include several working professionals who joined Goonj after participating in a local collection drive. Several corporations support Goonj by organizing collection drives on their premises and bringing their regional offices into the net. Anshu's excellent negotiation skills have resulted in some cost-cutting coups like rock-

bottom transportation fees from long-distance carriers and procurement of jute bags for packing from grain merchants. Recently, Anshu has identified garment exporters who possess extensive surplus stocks as a resource he plans to tap. Most of his local partners are Citizen sector organizations. Anshu has even collaborated with an army regiment to send woollens and blankets to inaccessible villages in Kashmir.

Cloth as currency:

A social entrepreneur, he has an innovative strategy for fund raising. He plans to charge Rs.1 per garment from the donor. He wants to scale the operations to 3 million pieces, and this plan would help him in the financial sustenance of Goonj.

In many instances, the monetisation of clothes doesn't benefit Goonj but creates public good. In another remarkable innovation, Goonj demands voluntary labour in return for good clothes. It is a hearteningly successful experiment. In Moregaon, Assam, 120 villagers laboured a full day to repair an approach road and received clothes in payment. In Vidharbha, Maharashtra villagers built fences around their school and temple. In Kuthambakkam, Tamil Nadu, a water body was cleared of weeds. Again in Tamil Nadu, quarry workers in Kundrathur have agreed to clear drains in their settlement in return for clothes. In Sunderbans, Bengal clothes were given in return for total cleaning and sprucing of village environs. 50 villages in Maharashtra have queued up for the clothes for work programme.

In his 'School to School' initiative, city children send their good and used water bottles, school bags and other materials of use to school going children in rural

India. Goonj is also passionate about reuse of discarded photocopy pages. These invariably have a blank side which Goonj converts into usable stationery.

Goonj has played an active role in reaching relief material at the time of any major disaster across India. Having worked on earthquakes, floods, cyclone, Goonj took up the pioneering project of turning the Tsunami rejected cloth into a resource for the people of Tamil Nadu and for the rest of India.

—LS

Interested in donating clothes? Contact: Mr. Vimal at 9092877543 or Mr. Andrew at 9790911001.



Terrific Ramaswamy!

Traffic K R Ramaswamy—the no nonsense man that many commoners cherish and the nuisance man to those with vested interests. Meet Chennai City’s notable social worker, public interest litigant, whistle-blower and arbitrator — all rolled into one.

‘Be the change you wish to see in the world,’ is what Mahatma Gandhi said. Here is a man who follows this adage on a daily basis. Working out of a 150 square feet office cum residence, Traffic K R Ramaswamy is a die-hard fighter seeking social justice. A former mill worker in his late seventies, Ramaswamy is a founder member of the State’s Home Guard and a self-appointed traffic policeman and social activist from Chennai.

Early days and humble beginnings

As the eldest son of his household, Ramaswamy’s childhood was like any other. He graduated from

Pachaiyappa's College, and began his career in 1952 as the Personal Secretary for Minister K Venkatasamynaidu. He then joined as an office boy in B&C Mills and moved on to becoming a clerk. Alongside, he did a course at AMIE and grew as an Assistant Weaving Master in the B&C mill.

The evolution of "Traffic" Ramaswamy

After 20 years of service in B&C Mills, Ramaswamy opted for voluntary retirement and took up an initiative to control the city's chaotic traffic. The local police were so pleased with his efforts that they provided him with an official identity card. That is how he acquired the nickname "Traffic Ramaswamy." Later, he became famous for filing many public interest lawsuits. He tasted victory for the first time in 2000 when he won a case against the Tamil Nadu Government resulting in cancellation of one-ways in the Madras High Court roads.

Over the years, Ramaswamy has fought political parties, bureaucrats, the top echelons of the police and who's who of the state who have a finger in the pie of corruption. Ramaswamy single-handedly brought many public interest lawsuits in the Madras High Court. In one recent case, his opponents' lawyers attacked him on the steps of the courthouse. This was not the first time though. In 2002, he was assaulted after he obtained a ban on the use of motorized fish carts, thereby damaging his sight.

The PIL Hero

If T. Nagar's Usman Road and Ranganthan Street are a shopper's paradise, it is due to Ramaswamy's Public Interest Litigations (PIL) that pulled down high

rise buildings, removed the hawkers and regulated unauthorized constructions.

It is because of his efforts that the Porur Lake is a pleasant sight—Ramaswamy's PIL led to the removal of encroached huts and colonies. Along similar lines, he ensured that the Cooum River stretch at Maduravoyal was back to its full breadth. In 2004, when advocates were boycotting courts in Tamil Nadu, his PIL in the Supreme Court upheld his contention and 160 advocates were arrested. When lawyers were on strike blocking traffic for more than 35 days, he filed a PIL against the same, and as a result there is a case against 10 lawyers pending in the court. His PIL against malpractices ensured a re-election in 100 booths in the Chennai Corporation, and hiked the auto fares from Rs 7 to Rs 14. He also stalled the production of 'Periyar,' a film financed by the Government.

With another PIL, he sought to restrain highway authorities from collecting road toll on the Chennai-Calcutta highway. He pointed out that the four-lane highway was not constructed by L&T and said that toilets, rooms, pedestrian underpass, service roads, and by lanes had not been completed before the toll collection had started. The toll gate near Karanodai did not have a canopy and lacked light, he said, adding that there were no uniform fee collections as well.

Fighting for prevention

Soon as the news of a possible swine-flu epidemic broke out, Ramaswamy filed a petition in the Madras High Court saying that all people of Tamil Nadu should be given masks to protect them. As expected, the court partly ruled in his favour. The final judgment was that if people asked for free masks, the Government would

provide them free of cost through all Government and Corporation Hospitals.

Terrific Traffic Ramaswamy

In 2007, Ramaswamy's PIL enforced the Motor Vehicles Act section 129, and made the wearing of helmets compulsory throughout the country. He brought out the dormant rule to the light that motor vehicle companies should include a helmet along with the purchase of the two-wheeler itself. This gave way to a Government order that directed RTOs across India to register a vehicle with a helmet. He says that he will one day sue the common man for not wearing a helmet, as he considers the common man's life to be extremely precious. The urge within him to achieve the truth and goodwill for people drives him to continuously fight for what is right. He is concerned about the society at large, irrespective of caste, creed, or religion. According to him patience and confidence are the mantras for his astounding success.

—S Deenadayalan

Traffic K R Ramaswamy can be contacted at 044-25381801 or trafficramaswamy@gmail.com.



To Live and Let Live

Solayan of Positive Friends Welfare Association (PFWA) is living proof that anyone with AIDS can live a normal and healthy life. He travels around the district with this message to spread hope: “Any person with HIV can live normally. All he has to do is consume ten times the nutritious food a normal person has,” he says.

The PFWA was set up by Solayan and six others living with HIV in 2003 to help spread awareness about the condition, to teach those who are infected to lead normal lives and to monitor the spread of the virus.

“I was born and brought up in Madurai but when I was diagnosed with AIDS, I ran away fearing exile to Thiruvallur, wanting to commit suicide. I met a friend here who told me that I have a gift and that I must use it to become an example to others like me. I found six more people who were dedicated to the cause and together we formed PFWA. Today, there are more than

2000 people involved and everyone who works here is HIV-positive,” he explains.

With AIDS awareness centres all over the State, the NGO, has spread its wings wide, being predominantly funded by Population Foundation of India (PFI). They set up awareness camps in various villages, conduct activities to increase condom usage, and induce survivors to come forward to inspire others. This, they hope, will change people’s attitudes towards AIDS and get tested voluntarily.

“If I tell them that they can live normally, they tend to believe it. Most people don’t admit having HIV because they fear of being isolated by the community. We diagnosed around 30 to 50 people with HIV every month; and this are those who voluntarily agree to be tested upon. There are hundreds more, who never do,” he adds.

PFWA also works with the government hospital in various districts and other AIDS awareness NGOs like the Integrated Counseling and Testing Centre (ICTC) to monitor the spread of the virus. According to Solayan, more than ten thousand people are likely to be infected in Thiruvallur alone.

“The richer patients don’t come to us. They get treated privately and ask not to be included in our survey. So, we will never know the exact number. We do what we can and counsel them on how to live with their condition,” says Anitha, a volunteer.

Since there is a sizable infiltration of commercial sex workers into Thiruvallur from the Andhra border, the looming threat spreading of the disease worries Solayan. And according to a latest survey by the PFWA,

commercial sex workers are the main cause for AIDS in the area.

“We have approached the sex workers and asked them why they don’t insist on the use of condoms by their customers. They tell us that clients pay more if they don’t have to wear one. The girls end up giving in to the prospect of earning more.”

Solayan feels that if the stigma attached to the disease is eliminated and people with AIDS begin to gain social acceptance, the disease will stop spreading.

“People with AIDS aren’t eligible for surgery for the fear of it spreading through the instruments. So, they hide their condition to survive, in turn spreading it inadvertently. If society accepted them and treated them normally, then the spread of the disease can be arrested,” says Solayan.

—Anusha Parthasarathy
Asian College of Journalism



A Porter Turned Entrepreneur

“I was happy and privileged to sit by his side to understand further about his dreams. India needs many leaders like Shanmugappa” – *Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam*

As Management consultant, I take some guest speakers with me to address top management team members including CEO's and to them, somebody who is not from Michigan, or Harvard, or those whose books are not published few million copies—these are not worth even to talk about. I have been of late working with outstanding native intelligent achievers.

Recently, I took a gentleman, who worked as a porter in Bangalore railway station to address the CEO and his Management committee members of a Tata Company. I had requested the CEO to keep the speaker's name confidential. The speaker agreed, but gave me a last minute refusal and I had to therefore cancel the dinner meeting. The speaker said “NO” because he could not speak in English. I persuaded him and in this group, we

were discussing the Sand Box theory of C.K. Prahalad's, and working the business targets.

The speaker came and spoke in Hindi, Kannada, and Tamil and kept the 10 senior management committee members spell bound. He also gave them inputs on some major business directions. CEO and the senior executives of this Tata Company were zapped, and what theories, and voluminous pages of book conceptualized, he explained in simple words. He also spoke about how we could fight corruption, take on a government, run businesses, and still remain to be value based—a reality, and a rarity.

The speaker was none other than G.R. Shanmugappa.

G.R Shanmugappa, failed in 10th standard, from the Pudupet school of Natrampalli Taluk in North Arcot district of Tamil Nadu. For him, that was not the end of the world but the starting point. Armed with two rupees that his father gave him, he took a lorry to Krishnagiri, and from there walked to Bangalore. Earning to survive was the only dream as he started as a porter at the Bangalore railway station. He hails from a family of five brothers and two sisters, and for his father, who was a small time betel-nut vendor the best that he could offer his son was just two rupees. His mother was a housewife and although living in a poverty stricken condition, taught her son the virtues of dignity of labour. When Shanmugappa moved to the goods shed, loading and unloading became his core competence.

It is interesting to see this native, writing a letter to the son of a boat man, saying that there are several such achievers—who need to be show-cased much more than the bollywood actors. This is the story of one porter getting a call from the son of the boatman,

who was then occupying the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The person extending the invitation was none other than the former Indian President, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. The invitation from the highest office of the country was however not because of the current status of Shanmugappa as President, Federation of Karnataka State Lorry Owners and Agents Association. Recently, he was been elected as the National President for the All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC), a national body governing the interests of truck operators.

Shanmugappa as an Economist

Shanmugappa's economic theory is astounding. He says that next to agriculture, it is the truckers and their supply chain movement that contribute the most to Indian Economy. An amount of Rs. 1,78,000 crores is the value of money that is financed by private financiers to buy trucks, while the financial institutions that are run by the government hardly finance one-fourth of this amount. He strongly believes that this unorganized sector of truckers is the real backbone of the economy, and if efficiencies and delivery mechanisms are streamlined, the country can grow to greater heights. Credit worthiness of the truck owners are far better than many of the white-collared senior executives, and that is the pride for him. Also, there are only five government driver training schools all over India, whereas there is a need for at least 500 such training schools to bring in safety awareness, lesser accidents, and for safe driving.

Other concerns that worries him is bribery and diesel theft. If the delivery mechanism is properly managed, the energy savings and funds for country's development will be huge.

The Humane Resources Manager

Shanmugappa's meeting with the President was for a HR cause; and HR professionals would do well to pick a leaf from his native intelligence. Seventy eight truck drivers die of accidents and natural causes everyday and their families are not only on road but majority of the widows take to prostitution. Through the former President he espoused the cause for bringing an insurance scheme for truckers. Truck owners are now paying Rs. 375 premium per annum, and in the event of the death of the driver the family would receive Rs. 1.5 lakhs towards rehabilitation.

Shanmugappa is concerned that a majority of these drivers are affected by HIV/AIDS and that government funding on AIDS control does not reach those who are really affected. This is his next mission and his third mission is to make the spouses survive and stand on their own feet.

Role Model for Entrepreneurship

Shanmugappa represents the land of equal opportunities that India is in letter and spirit, even as he symbolizes entrepreneurship at its best. The young boy, of course, thought differently and did not mind what he did to get a start in life. His is the story that Dr. Kalam never tires of recounting: "I would like to share how he faced life and has grown to the present position", he says whenever he has the opportunity to interact with the Indian youth. The first six years of Shanmugappa's life were spent on understanding the transport industry even as he explored the other channels of enterprise that were opened up to him in the course of his work, and that would transform him from being a porter to a professional; and a leader of enterprises. His first trip

to Germany, many would have thought, he would have taken time off to see Germany around, but he took time off, to drive trucks for 18 hours to understand the supply chain and truck management.

Transformation: Learning on the Job

His core competency was loading and unloading and hence from being a Porter in the Bangalore railway station in 1971, he became a loader and unloader in 1972 with Sasikala Transport Company. He later took up a job as labourer in Brooke Bond India factory at Whitefield at Bangalore. Between 1975 and 1977, he worked in a transport company called Ramani Rangarao at Vijayawada, where he was loading and moving coffee trucks to different places in the country.

To go by Dr. Kalam's account: "During this seven year period, with his hard work and devotion he had a savings of Rs. 4,000. With this money he bought an old van in 1978 and started running the van with the help of his brother Sri Basavaraj who was a driver, and he served as a cleaner. With the savings that he generated by running the van, he purchased an old Ashok Leyland truck in 1979. From 1980 to 1986, he kept purchasing one or two trucks each year. During this period, he continued to work in Ramani Rangarao Transport Office. Within a decade and a half of failing in his tenth standard examination, Shanmugappa was ready for the third phase of his career. He was ready with his big investment plans.

Warrier – the doyen of Hindustan Levers (now Hindustan Unilever) gave him a small opportunity to blend tea. Today, he is blending and packing 10 tones of coffee per day by employing around 600 laborers. In 1999, he entered into the premix coffee business and engaged in production of small quantities of 100 to 200 kg per

day. Based on that experience, he went into production of 10 tons per day of premix coffee, and 8 tons per day of premix tea by employing more than 700 labourers. Yes, he leveraged his core competency and built around it without going to any management institution. Today, his brother Basavaraj is also an industrialist!

Today Bon Coffee is available even outside India and this is supplied from his factory. Yes, he is the dedicated contract manufacturer for Unilever and has participated in some of their unique product patenting and in building the blending machine indigenously. While competition lured him, he stands by Unilever for they gave him a new lease of life. In the days of commercial ethics, here is an exceptional human being!

Acquiring Excellence

Given the quality of sophistication in the transport industry, Shanmugappa realized that his operations would have to be raised to international standards, especially if he was to handle milk production and transportation. He was already a big truck fleet owner but it was the quality of transportation that would be of the essence. Dr Kalam says: "In 2003, he bought 100 trucks for hiring to certain mines, coffee transportation, and sub contracting to Larsen & Toubro. Thus, he became a fleet owner. In 2004, he converted the trucks as milk transporters for the milk dairy. In 2005, he visited Australia with his son who is an MBA student for establishing a milk dairy as a joint venture with an Australian firm to handle 9 lakh liters of milk per day".

Through the association, he fought for setting up a good driver training school which has now been established in Delhi. He desires, through telematics, to put a check on diesel and truck theft, prevent accidents by stopping driving between 2 A.M. and 3 A.M. and also desires

that vehicle should not move if the driver is alcoholic. He addressed the senior executives of Tacco Sasken to work on this R&D.

Forward Integration

Simultaneously, he has established a factory which produces 100 tones of corrugated boxes per month for packaging premix coffee and premix tea. Today, he is employing around 1,200 persons for running the trucks and also running premix coffee and tea business.

Transformation: Leading Industry

Having satisfied his entrepreneurial spirit, Shanmugappa took on the mantle of industry leadership. Who else could be better positioned to do so than the man who has first hand knowledge of the workings of the transportation industry – from the lowly porter, driver, or cleaner, to a single truck owner to fleet management? Shanmugappa leads from the front now; representing industry; negotiating on its behalf. Dr. Kalam says: “Through this example, we can see how enthusiasm, hard work with devotion and above all the will to succeed made Shanmugappa, a successful entrepreneur, indeed he is a role model for people in any level of society. On his invitation, I inaugurated the Motor Transportation Congress, of which he had become the Chairman; I am happy and privileged to sit by his side to understand further about his dreams. India needs many Shanmugappa-like leaders”.

Cultural Revolution

The contrast between the Bangalore of 1971 and the Bangalore of 2007 pains him as Shanmugappa wants to usher in a cultural revolution by channeling the youth with the help of HRD networks to partner in fighting cultural degeneration. English is his only limitation,

but that does not thwart the man who is fluent in Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, and Hindi. Several educational institutions have sought his assistance.

The English-speaking HR fraternity needs to learn HR in its true spirit. Living values, to him comes from life's learning. His going to jail, sleeping on the pavements and the sufferings of the families of many departed lorry drivers, his own wife's death, his son ably supporting him, threats from vested interests have all made him mentally stronger. He is humble and not all his wealth has made him hand up his tools. Even today, Shanmugappa wants to lead the "hard work revolution".

"I was happy and privileged to sit by his side to understand further about his dreams. India needs many leaders like Shanmugappa" – Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam (February 25, 2007; addressing students of the Nathajirao G Halgekar Institute of Dental Sciences, Belgaum, Karnataka)

—S. Deenadayalan



Gandhian Communists with balanced capitalism

Visiting Pragathi Nagar, a village panchayat makes one feel what a misnomer it is to call it 'Village Panchayat'. It is a model urban town in Hyderabad and the only ISO certified village in India.

Located in Quthbullapur mandal of Ranga Reddy district, the village has two thousand houses, and the road leading to the village is built on the tank bund greeting the visitors with cool and cleanwater on either side of the road.

The architects behind this transformation are all ex-union leaders—with more communist leanings—and have become role models for even the communists to balance capitalism, spiritualism and holistic wellness.

Community of Kurians (Mr. Kurian of Amul) with a difference this urban village has cement roads with beautifully laid green platforms, lawns as road dividers, and green trees on either side of the roads.

Every household maintains greenery in the house, and also takes care of at least two trees on their street.

The Village Panchayat encourages growing avenue plantations and has an annual ecological balancing target of adding 500 plants every year.

Every member of this village community has access to: excellent schools, library facilities, protected water supply from Manjeera River Parks, playgrounds with well laid Cricket pitches, basketball and tennis courts, swimming pools, modern gyms. The village has a ban on sale of alcohol , gutkas and even cool drinks. The Panchayat arranges collection of bio-degradable and non-bio degradable garbage separately. Further, the Panchayat has enforced ban on usage of plastic covers by convincing the shopkeepers and are consciously enforcing the laws of environment protection.

Specific sites for the construction of Temples, Mosques and Churches have been allocated and the Panchayat ensures security in the village by deploying private security services. They have introduced a penalty system and this has resulted in near 100% collection of house tax and water bills. Affordable Health care and quality Medicines are easily accessible and Rain Water Harvesting is made compulsory in every household.

Allwyn closes – But ALL WIN (the 720 supervisory employees)

Dream come true for the progressive young leaders—some of them affiliated to communist ideology through the ‘Allwyn Employees Housing Committee’ that was founded in 1990 for the welfare of Allwyn employees. On one hand, the supervisory union was fighting with Allwyn Management through the Board for Industrial Financial Reconstruction to take over and run the factory on a co-operative basis, and on the other hand,

'The Housing Committee' identified an ideal habitat for its members. Crisis creates opportunities.

Unity in Diversity

Pooling together 720 Minds in a multiple union environment is something un-imaginable. Concurrently driving a stringent value system, transparency and people participation, calls for a new hypothesis on managing processes in crisis.

The Leader and the championing team behind it is Dayakar Reddy, who made this unique miracle happen with the support of his team members—Ch. Sudeer Reddy, R.Sreeramulu, P. Chandra Sekhar Reddy , D.A.Chowdhary, M.Srinivasa Rao, Surya Prakash, M.Krupa Sagar, B.Venkateswara Rao, J.S.S.Varma, and J.Mallikarjun.

Like any other union leader Dayakar Reddy wanted to outsmart the non- communist leaders and chose the root of 'Own your own house scheme'. The dream was to create—a community of difference, cost effective, value based, and future proofed.

Enhancing the gulf

Dayakar Reddy had to confront people and face challenges in construction like issues related to multiplicity of minds, black cotton soil, improper roads, land owner delaying development works, and sky rocketing tenders from external vendors. The team hired almost 500 construction experts, masons and builders.

Value added mantra resulted in procuring timber and teak logs from Bhutan and Nagaland and bulk purchase of cost effective cement from Raasi Cements. In-house brick making and steel fabrication, and the ABC

analysis of this supply chain mechanism contributed not only to cost effectiveness, but also sturdy houses.

Roti – Kapada - Makan

Simultaneously, the union were fighting their job survival war. Amidst job insecurity, the dream colony 'Pragathi Nagar' was happening from the money people had saved, and the LIC Loan and Provident Fund, to build their Houses in a serene habitat in the rural part of Ranga Reddy District.

Fighting the Challenges by evolving new strategies became a cakewalk for these people. When the residents moved into their new houses, having access to basic amenities was a problem, and their co-operative collaboration resulted in bulk procurement of milk, and vegetables. Access to cost effective health care and drinking water was their next challenge, and a collaboration of the members resulted in them investing 50 lakh rupees to lay pipes.

The Village rivalry and Legal Battles

Pragathi Nagar was part of the Bachupally Village which later became an independent gram Panchayat. The Collector disowned the collective spirit of this Panchayat, but the political will and support of the then ruling party and more so the then Telugu Desam Party (TDP) Minister Mr. Devendar Goud facilitated the release of a government order in 1995 recognising Pragathi Nagar a separate Village Panchayat. Pragathi Nagar Village Panchayat (PNVP) was thus born in 1997 with Mr. R. Sreeramulu becoming the first Panchayat President.

Self Help is the best route to excellence

This was the time when TDP came up with the Novel program – Janma Bhoomi. PNVP took complete

advantage of this initiative and constructed cemented internal roads. Greenery in surplus land and real estate appreciation was positively channelled to mobilise funds to build a school.

Sustainable Succession

Dayakar Reddy wanted more public accountability and without limiting to only housing activity, formed a charitable Trust called 'Peoples Progress Trust' which has five Trustees. The objective of the Trust was to run a school, hospital and an old age home. Pragathi people demonstrated the wisdom of collective good and a society free from materialistic interest.

The Gram Panchayat planned for the sustainable development, and the first project was to seed the concept of 'Rain harvesting'. This was done much before the issue of water shortage confronted the Hyderabadis. A Sports complex was constructed and events like cricket, tennis, and athletics were organised.

Lessons to Learn for better tomorrow

The village development committee considered social activism seriously and banned sale of liquor, cool drinks and gutkhas. Also they controlled the use of plastic. On October 2nd, as a mark of respect to Gandhiji, they distributed 3,000 reusable cotton bags and dustbins free of cost to households which has the slogan: 'SAY NO TO PLASTIC'.

The Only ISO 9000 Certified Village in India

Pragathi Nagar Panchayat brought in a high quality of life in the village through well-orchestrated and planned development of infrastructure facilities. Pragathi Nagar has a quality policy, ISO 9000 certification and an elected panchayat, but the unity among them is

amazing. Caste, religion, gender, or age has articulated differences for excellence and not divisiveness.

Lakshmi Kumari, the first women Panchayat President says, “Service excellence is my first priority and future generation’s safety and ecological security is the decision criteria. Some children have now settled in western countries, but Pragathi’s ethos is getting seeded wherever they go.”

Prosperity in Poverty

Rising cost of real estate, schooling, and increase in cost of living and exhausted savings posed yet another challenge for the residents in Pragathi Nagar. They were permitted to add stories in their building without diluting the Pragathi Ethos —regulations to raise their individual prosperity as well as collective prosperity.

A 300-bed hospital is being planned followed by vocational streaming of education.

The INVISIBLE GURU

Sri Satyanarayana Garu, Chairman, Emeritus, of HRD Network who was heading the personnel function in Allwyn only two years; is the Chairman and a permanent Trustee of Peoples Progress Trust.

He does not own a house here as this true Gandhian believes that too much of assets will disturb mental peace . He is the guiding spirit of the village and is the adjudicator, arbitrator and the Gandhian who does not take sides, but brings in reconciliation constructively.

Creditably Credible

To the question: ‘Can this Model be replicated?’, the answer was ‘NO’ from Dayakar Reddy. He reasoned saying: “We can do, only when we are transparent,

sincere, trusting people, and above all have confidence in team work. We are not corrupt, but I cannot guarantee that we have achieved this without greasing hands here or there, but the saving grace is its minimalism”.

Dayakar Reddy may be right as we could not replicate a Kurian, or the Dubbhawalas, and the challenge is before all of us to prove that Dayakar Reddy is wrong.

—S.Deenadayalan and Ms. P. Srilatha

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Perspectives

Growing... Reflections for deep change

A series written by

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*Intellectual nourishment by
Dr J M Sampath and Dr. Kalpana Sampath
for social entrepreneurs to enable them
reflect on their mindset.*



Learning as an integral process to 'Growing'

'Growing' is a continuous process...something we are all so used to, that we take it for granted. Learning is an integral part of growing. Having been through a situation or having read through passage learning as an automatic outcome is assumed. But how many realizations do these situations leave behind? Is life only so many years of existence or every year a significant period of 'growth'?

Some disciples once complained to their Guru, "You tell us stories but you never reveal their meaning to us". The Guru replied, "How would you like it, if someone offered you a fruit and chewed before giving it to you". (*Sampath.J.M., story 1. Discovery - 3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998*)

Learning requires effort and it is a very personal journey. But many of us feel we have 'learnt' something

when we have actually only stored information about it. But isn't it true we need to see the world from our own point of view and we cannot see it through other's eyes? Why do we want someone to think for us? Don't we all like it to enjoy eating the fruit ourselves?

This journey of growing into a social entrepreneur is a very interesting one. This calls for many explorations that each one of us has to do internally as well as with the society at large. This learning can happen only when we 'understand' what we learn.

Nasruddin used to visit a saint everyday to seek knowledge, though the saint was silent and did not speak anything. One day Nasruddin asked him, "I have been coming to you again and again, expecting that you will say something but you have said nothing. And unless you do, I cannot understand. So just give me a message for my life, a direction along which I can move." So the saint said "Neki kar, kuyen mein daal: do good and throw it in the well". An old sufi saying meaning 'Do good and forget it. Don't expect anything in return for the good you have done'. The next day, Nasruddin helped an old woman cross the road, and then pushed her into a well- "Neki kar kuyen mein daal". (*Sampath.J.M., story 3. Discovery - 3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998*)

Every experience shared by someone is only knowledge until we don't put in the efforts to understand the same. Every person aspiring to be a social entrepreneur wants to 'help'. But how much does one understand what 'help' is?

Understanding happens when we follow an enquiry process – The 5W 1H.

- What does help mean? – an answer to this will give the meaning of help, and what kind of help has to be given

- Where should I help? - will give the exact location where help should be given
- When should the help be provided? – will give the timing when help has to be given
- Why should the help be provided? – will give clarity on the cause that propels the need to help
- Who should provide help? – will give clear accountability as well as define the target group
- How should help be provided? – will map the process steps of providing ‘help’.

Answers to these questions will provide clarity and if we are willing to stay with this, it will lead to emergence of certain ‘Insights’ within us. These insights come when we ponder upon the answers that we find, formulate and understand. These ‘insights’ are closer to consciousness since they emerge from a deeper level of understanding the context as well as our own selves.

Pointers for Reflection:

- What is the basis of my learning? What I hear or what I understand?
- What motivates me to learn to be a social entrepreneur?
- How much do I enquire into all that I learn?
- How aware am I to collect the ‘Insights’ that emerge with me?

Introspection, first step towards 'Growing'

When and where does this "Growing" happen? Many a time all of us are so focused on the outside, that the inside becomes dormant. What is obvious is never considered important. Growing does not begin until there is a foundational shift from 'outside in' to 'inside out'. What does 'Inside out' mean? For everything that is happening to the self many times we search outside and therefore real growing does not happen. The results are so difficult to perceive that one feels that a lot has to be done to 'Grow'.

Nasruddin, carrying his lamb on his shoulders, was going around asking people if they had seen his lamb anywhere. A friend told him that he had seen it in the well at the northern corner of the village. Nasruddin rushed and peered into the well, and saw in the reflection that his lamb was on his shoulders. *(Sampath.J.M. story 7. Discovery - 3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998)*

Most of the times, we are lost in searching for that; which is very much within us. 'Inside out' means the ability to be self focused, to understand the outside world and its happenings. It is an ability to be self aware. Especially in the process of becoming a social entrepreneur there are many a time, pain, anguish, helplessness, anger towards the society and a lot of courage is required to ask questions such as 'what can I do about this'? 'Why do I feel the way I feel'? Instead of asking 'what are the others doing or not doing, what in me can make a difference to the situation?

To respond to these questions, it requires a serious and deep introspection. We cannot wait for others to

continuously point out what is obviously there within us. Even if we have the good fortune of finding such people the strength does not last. It will exist only till they are present and, when they move in life our trust in self moves away too. But if a continuous search into self is set, irrespective of the others the trigger would continue to be from within.

Introspection allows growth in many ways -

- It enables a person to be inward focused and draw out newer understanding of self.
- It builds in an inner mechanism to correct oneself and that gives a direction to life.
- It makes one non judgmental with an ability to accept multiple perspectives.
- It enhances intuitiveness and makes us reflective.
- It enhances the ability to see and connect, thereby recognizing patterns in life and its implications.
- It brings a sense of accountability to one's life and enhances action orientation.
- It does not allow us to become a victim of circumstance and, gives the courage to overcome the blocks

Introspection enables growth and evolution. Every person in life requires space to dialogue with self. As a social entrepreneur who intends to make a difference to others one has to begin by making a difference to self.

The pupils of the Tendai School used to study meditation before Zen entered Japan. Four of them, who were very close friends, promised one another to observe seven days of silence. On the first day all were silent. Their meditation had begun auspiciously;

but when night fell and the oil lamps were growing dim one of the pupils could not help exclaiming to a servant “Fix those lamps!”. The second pupil was surprised to hear the first one talk, “we are not supposed to say a word,” he remarked. “You two are stupid. Why did you talk? Asked the third. “I am the only one who has not talked”, announced the fourth pupil. (*Sampath.J.M. story 75. Discovery - 3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998*)

Pointers for Reflection:

- What prevents me from looking within?
- Why do I fail to be inwardly focused?
- How do I start focusing inward and look within?
- How much time do I give myself in a day to “GROW”?

Fear – a roadblock to ‘Growing’

We have explored ‘learning’ and ‘introspection’ in the last two ‘Growing’ series. For growing, one of the key restrictive values is ‘Fear’. There is not a single one of us who has not experienced fear. Each one of us thinks we know fear but actually what we know is very little of what is hidden. After a lot of explorations to understand fear one of the simple, yet profound meanings was that given by The Mother - ‘Fear attracts what you fear for’. This says it all. Each of our behavior is governed by the beliefs that we hold within us. Therefore, the fear within us governs our behavior that furthers our fear rather than allows us to get out of it. For example If we are afraid of making a mistake while addressing an audience, that fear itself will grip us, and make us dysfunctional allowing further mistakes to happen.

Fear takes its own toll on any initiative which is different from the routine. Becoming a social entrepreneur is not an easy task. It is even more difficult when one wants to move away from the known to the unknown. As a social entrepreneur one could be confronted with a host of issues and the tendency of the mind is to run away. If one’s ability to deal with fear is limited then they easily succumb and give in. At such times it is important to work with one’s self and build the capacity to deal with the fear within.

While it is easy to understand ‘Fear’, the tough part is to identify ‘Fear’. Fear caused by external stimulus is easy. But Fear caused by the unknown emerging from the inner resistance to change from the routine is very difficult to identify and deal with. It creates a lot of defenses and is projected as constraints and roadblocks onto the outside world and does not allow action. The defenses make exploration even more tedious. That

exploration requires at the minimum, a deep sense of accountability and acceptance of self.

To work with fear, we have to understand the nature of fear. Fear holds us from taking decisions; it limits our ability to think and at times paralyses the mind; it prevents us from exploring alternatives; Fear further limits the capacity of an individual's potential; it keeps us thinking about past experiences and future implications and not allowing us to be in the present and deal with it. Unless we are willing to work with 'self', Fear cannot be removed.

"According to an ancient Indian fable a mouse was in constant distress because of its fear of the cat. A magician took pity on it and turned it into a cat. But then it was scared of the dog. So the magician turned it into a panther whereupon it was full of fear of the hunter. At this point the magician gave up. He turned it into a mouse again saying, "Nothing I do for you is going to be of any help because you have the heart of a mouse." (*Sampath. J.M. story 67 Discovery – 3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998*)

In life, stepping out for first time from the cocooned security of our jobs to become a social entrepreneur we are likely to experience fear. While meeting and interacting with several other social entrepreneurs, each of their struggles and past experiences can instill several doubts about the path that we choose to embark. This fear stems out of several uncertainties that we would encounter and are likely to encounter in this journey. At that time we will have to first learn to deal with one's fear. Identify the fear within us and accept it to be able to work with it. It is important to ask what are my beliefs about life, security, self worth and trust in my own consciousness.

Pointers for Reflection:

- What is the basis of my fear? My experiences or hearsay?
- How and when does my fear surface and what does it do to me?
- What all cause fear in me?
- How do I deal with my Fear?

EGO – a deterrent to ‘Growing’

Most of us who get into social entrepreneurship, nurture a feeling that we are the saviors of the world and we are better than the average person. This feeling and attitude starts pumping one's ego. Over a period of time the person starts becoming more powerful than the idea he/she is serving. There starts the point of decline of furthering the idea the social entrepreneur is working on. While efforts and hard-work takes you high, EGO pulls you down.

The biggest question a social entrepreneur needs to ask is 'Am I serving the Idea? Or is the Idea giving me the opportunity to serve?' While the relationship between the server and the served starts at one point, over a period of time it changes. Initially, the one who wants to serve feels good about the possibility of serving. As the idea grows and becomes large and the reach increases, the environments begins to project the server as the important person, the relationship begins to change. To work on a social idea and further the same is a great opportunity one has got; the humility with which one serves the idea actually furthers the growth of the idea and influence the larger system.

There was once a scientist who discovered the art of reproducing himself so perfectly that it was impossible to tell the reproduction from the original. One day he learnt that the Angel of Death was searching for him. So he reproduced a dozen copies of himself. The angel was at a loss to know which of the thirteen specimens before him was the original scientist, so he left them all alone and returned to heaven.

But not for long, for being an expert in human nature, the angel came up with a clever plan. He

came back and said, “Sir, you must be a genius to have succeeded in making such perfect reproductions of yourself. However, I have discovered a flaw in your work, just one tiny little flaw.”

The scientist immediately jumped out and shouted, “Impossible! Where is the flaw?” “Right here” said the angel, as he picked up the scientist from among the reproductions and carried him off. (*Sampath. J.M. story 41 Discovery – 3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998*)

There are certain symptoms that can indicate that Ego is taking over. They are -

- Developing a feeling and demonstrating that you know everything.
- Believing that you have a solution for everything.
- Resisting ideas from other sources.
- Unwilling to learn and easily entering into arguments than explorations.
- Attending too many functions that glorifies one’s achievements
- Canvassing for winning awards and lobbying to be seen as someone doing a lot.
- Building a larger than self image.
- Unwilling to collaborate for larger good.
- Subordinating the idea to one self then subordinating the self to idea.
- Engaging in more than required PR.
- Getting to be more directive than collaborative in team work.

The danger that many social entrepreneurs’ experience is that they are not aware of the cycle that they have

got themselves into. Their ego's doesn't allow them to see the problems created by their ego. By the time the awareness dawns the damage is done and one has reached a point of no return.

The rising Ego can be recognized through Self-awareness. While there could be several indications from the environment, Ego sometimes forms a strong cloud which can mask the awareness. Many times, Ego is confused with rise in self confidence and self esteem and therefore goes untapped. At that time, mechanisms to keep one aware enables you to quickly detect your own folly and respond to that. The important question is what is the gratitude you offer everyday to have the space to serve others?

Pointers for Reflection:

- What is the nature of 'Ego'?
- Where does my Ego come from?
- What are the events that trigger my Ego?
- When my Ego is questioned how do I react?
- How do I deal with my Ego?
- What ways can I adopt that ensures that my Ego is at the effective zone of self esteem?

GIVING – as a receiving process of ‘Growing’

In the last ‘Growing’ series we explored the power of Ego. This time, we are going to explore one of the important dimensions that trigger this Ego. That is ‘Giving’.

Social entrepreneurship has most of the times been correlated at the essence level with a sense of ‘Giving’. This ability to give and the need to give pushes people out of the box and makes them move in order to reach out to the larger world. But, ‘Giving’ develops a dangerous feeling of superiority. It slowly makes an inroad into a person’s psyche that fosters a belief that the “Giver is superior to the receiver”. This leaves behind an expectation that the receiver should acknowledge this unsaid positional hierarchy.

What is ‘Giving’ in reality?

When a sanyasi reached the outskirts of a village and settled under a tree for the night, a villager came running up to him and said, “The stone! The stone! Give me the precious stone!”

“What stone?” asked the sanyasi.

“Last night Lord Shiva told me in a dream that if I went to the outskirts of the village at dusk a sanyasi would give me a stone that would make me rich forever.”

The sanyasi searched his sack, and pulling out a stone, said, “He probably meant this one, I found it in the forest yesterday. Here, it’s yours if you want it.” The man gazed at the stone in wonder. It was the largest diamond in the world. All night he tossed about in bed. At daybreak he woke the sanyasi and said, “Give me the

heart that makes it possible for you to give this stone away.” (*Sampath. J.M. story 31 Discovery – 3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998*)

Giving is a state of being which comes naturally without any expectations attached to it. The characteristics of ‘Giving’ includes -

- A deep sense of humility within.
- Thankfulness or gratitude for the people who create an opportunity to give.
- It is nothing more than sharing and this has an orientation to bring balance in the eco system.
- It is a complimentary process of reaching out with what one has, to another who requires it.
- ‘Unconditional’ or ‘No expectations’ would be easy to use words; but very difficult to ‘live’. Because, when there is an ‘expectation’ for ‘unconditionality’, it robs the essence of unconditionality itself.

Therefore, a relationship of “giving-receiving” between the social entrepreneur and the community, is a mutual process. Unless community exists, there is no opportunity to reach out and unless they allow and value the ‘reaching out’ one cannot experience the ‘value of contribution’.

Many a time a giver also gets into the obsession of reaching, failing to understanding the context and what is required to be given.

Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day.

Teach him how to fish, and you feed him for a life time..... (An Ancient Chinese Proverb)

In giving can there be empowerment? This is critical in developing the community. If giving makes the

person dependent on the giver, it ceases to be a value adding process. When Giving is approached in the way described above, there is a higher possibility for growth and evolution for the individuals and society at large.

Points for Reflection:

- What in me makes me want to 'give'?
- How much do I care to understand others before deciding to 'give'?
- What is the nature of 'Unconditional Giving'?
- How do I distinguish what they want vs what I think they want?
- What dimensions of my giving leaves the receiver empowered?
- How do I show my gratitude to the receiver for giving me an opportunity to give?

ASPIRATION – the springboard for action

A few years back in one of our workshops, during a discussion on personal vision and aspirations in life, one of the participant said she has had an aspiration in life for the past twenty years; to start a school of her own for the under privileged. This is something that she had formulated when she was twenty years old and for the past twenty years several things have happened in her life...but she is still living that aspiration in her mind... but insisted that she is on the path of her vision!! This is a very interesting space in life. We get caught with a nice thought or an idea and continue not to lose that idea all through life but there is no action with regard to making it a reality.

There are several ideas that many people hold for life in their minds but life continues in a separate track by itself. Some of us also join social entrepreneurship forums and courses but do not take much action with regard to converting the idea into a reality. Society needs social entrepreneurs who will act and pursue their dream as though it is their very life. If it remains in mind, it is like the person in this story –

One day a disciple came to sage Ramakrishna and said, “Oh sage! I hear you say that depth of aspiration is the springboard to the discovery of truth. I don’t understand what you mean.”

Ramakrishna asked the disciple to come with him to the river and take a dip in the water with him. The disciple thought that the master was going to give him a special initiation. He readily went along and as the master had requested, and put his head under water.

Ramakrishna just held the disciple's head under water and would not release his hold until the man almost drowned and his struggle became a frenzy. As he rose up, the sage remarked, "When you aspire for truth the way you did for a breath of air, you'll not rest until you've discovered it." (*Sampath. J.M. story 68 Discovery – 3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998*)

Until an idea is not something that is as close as the next breath of air for a person, the passion does not get ignited. Every successful social entrepreneur displays a passion that is arising out of the aspiration and vision that is embedded deep within. This passion when kindled gives the enormous amount of energy that is required to rise against the tides, tread the un-trodden path and emerge with the power to make a difference to oneself and the society. Being interested in society and its development is not a fashion to be followed. It calls for efforts, dedication, sacrifices, and actions, leaving no stone unturned with sometimes zero expectation on the rewards and returns. Sometimes it is a set of pure actions because one feels that it is what will make a difference. The belief is strongly embedded in the person and the power of that belief converts the thought or the idea into reality. People with high aspirations do not seek reward or praise for the work that they do since they are internally anchored and their motivation comes from within.

In order not to admit that it is one's passion that is lacking, people find enough justifiable reasons and excuses on why they cannot pursue their idea rather than finding one good way on how they can act on their idea and convert it into reality.

“All the beautiful sentiments weigh less than a single lovely action” (*Rousseau and the Sentimentalists, quoted in John Bartlett, Familiar Quotations, 14th ed. 1968, p. 695.*)

Points for Reflection:

- The idea of making a difference to me and society is in my mind or in action?
- What are my expectations from the society and others in return for the efforts that I take?
- What prevents me from putting all my efforts to achieve what I aspire for?
- What are the things I am willing to stake for converting my dreams into reality?
- Are the ideas that you nurture in mind merely idea for a long time or have you taken concrete actions to realize the same in reality?

OBSESSION – the bane of passion

Being passionate is one of the essentials not only for every social entrepreneur but every human being. In the last growing series we had spoken about aspiration and passion as an essential outcome of the depth of aspiration; but there is a danger to passion and that is obsession. When passion blinds the person to the context, that person begins to work towards shaping the context to their requirement, akin to the boy in this story.

A little boy was heartbroken to find his pet turtle lying on its back, lifeless and still, beside the pond. His father did his best to console him: “Don’t cry, son. We’ll arrange a lovely funeral for Mr. Turtle. We’ll make him a little coffin all lined in silk, and get the undertaker to make a headstone for his grave with Mr. Turtle’s name carved on it. Then we’ll have fresh flowers placed on the grave each day and make a little picket fence to go all around it.”

The little boy dried his eyes and became enthusiastic about the project. When all was ready, a cortege was formed—father, mother, maid, and child as chief mourner—and they began to move solemnly towards the pond to bring in the body. But, the body had vanished! Suddenly they spied Mr. Turtle emerging from the depths of the pond merrily. The little boy stared at his friend in bitter disappointment and cried out: “Let’s kill him!” (*Sampath. J.M. story 25 Discovery – 3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998*)

Initially the turtle was a loving pet. But the minute the excitement of the funeral function occupied the boy’s mind, the love for the pet was forgotten. Many a time

when the social entrepreneur begins, there is a real need to reach out to the identified group. In the initial days, the person begins by responding to the context and formulating ways to reach the needy. Over a period of time, to find the viability and sustainability of the idea, it is encased into an organizational set up. But as the organizational issues grow and popularity begins to emerge, instead of sustaining the original intention of the idea, the person becomes larger than the purpose. Then the person instead of responding to the context begins to work towards taking from the context. At this point of time, the obsession takes over, sadly, many a time killing the very purpose of the original idea.

How do we identify if obsession is taking over? The nature of obsession is:

- To blind the person to understand the context. The person begins to interpret the context in relation to his/her ideas.
- Obsession makes the person feel insecure. This insecurity limits the person in resource utilization.
- Obsession makes the person risk averse. There begins a trend to repeat the success stories.
- The need to maintain the image of self and organization overtakes the need to reach out to the needy.
- Only those serving the obsession are allowed to become part of the group and feedback is not welcome.
- Obsession itself becomes the stimulant of the downfall of self and organization thereby killing the purpose and intention in due course.

Points for Reflection:

- How do I constantly become aware when my passion starts becoming an obsession?
- Why do I get obsessed?
- How do I deal with my obsession?
- What are the actions I can take on a regular basis to ensure I serve the purpose and not the purpose serving me?

Conditioning – stuck to comfort

What is that one thing that makes every ‘let go’ a difficult process after a period of time? Whether it is the boon or bane of human behavior, this is a process that makes people form patterns so easily that it makes doing a few things easy on one hand, but makes ‘letting go’ difficult on the other hand. This is the process of ‘conditioning’. Here is how one can best describe the process of conditioning.

A man once read in an ancient book about a black stone on the shores of the Black Sea, which could on contact, turn any metal into gold. The stone would be warm to touch. So, he went to the Black Sea, and found a heap of black stones. He was convinced that one of these would be the miracle stone.

He picked up a stone, felt it on his cheek, found it cold, and flung it into the sea. The second stone too was cold and followed the first one into the sea. He did this from morning to evening, every day for weeks, months, and then years. Three years had passed. One day, he put a stone to his cheek, threw it into the sea and then realized that it was the very stone he was looking for! (*Sampath. J.M. story 61 Discovery – 3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998*)

In these three years, the man had got conditioned to the process of searching for the stone. Being aware of conditioning makes growing an effortless process. For a social entrepreneur, moving away from the known to the unknown, there would be several uncertainties which life will present. The conditioning to the known world does not allow the person to easily move and evolve in the unknown. While conditioning process takes time and effort, moving away from the conditioned space also involves time and effort.

From our childhood, there are several conditioning processes that becomes a part us of, that many times makes living in any other way seems almost next to impossible. The conditioning does not allow us to see the realities in front of us. It makes us formulate truths that are convenient to us, rather than those that question and reflect our shortcomings to us. Conditioning process also makes us justify and find ways of being in the same space. Conditioning creates a pattern and that pattern becomes our identity. The more one tries to break the identity, more the effort it takes. When it becomes threatening to the identity itself, we tend to mask the realities creating stress and anxiety within.

It is also a peculiarity of human that they can consume anything that the world offers. This has been seen from the urbanization process in the last century. This makes the step towards social entrepreneurship even more difficult. There is an unsaid conclusion in many minds that if they can reach out to others in the society without having to change, or give up anything that they already have, they will be willing to step into social entrepreneurship. This is not just limited to materialistic possessions, but even to the concepts, perspectives, thoughts, experiences, and philosophy of life. Unless one is willing to shed all that one knows, and moves into the space of the unknown, a real social entrepreneur cannot be born. Growing happens when the society and its existence presents itself within and not outside. This growing cannot happen unless one is willing to get out of all the conditioning one has got into. Growing entails the person to see social entrepreneurship as a process, to deal with all that is presented within self, and not just with the society.

Then, there is an evolution that one goes through in this process of living, being aware of the self and also of the society within self.

Points for Reflection:

- What are the comfort zone indicators that I am caught up with in life?
- What are the conditioning processes that I can identify within me that stops me from moving away from the comfort zone?
- What defines me—my possessions or my behaviour?
- What prevents me from seeing each experience in life as an independent one?
- How do I break the patterns I have got into?

Time – the elusive but decided

One of the biggest facilitative as well as restrictive factors for ‘growing’ is TIME. When used effectively it becomes very facilitative. But when wasted it becomes a very costly commodity. This is because of its non-retrievable nature. Especially in the case of a person exploring to be a social entrepreneur and who is thinking when to begin his life in reaching out to others, TIME assumes an important space. Many times when in doubt we begin to postpone our decisions. The thought of change exists at the back of the mind, but it never translates into action. It continues to exist in thought only. Time never waits and so it continues to move too. How many times do we realize that every passing day is a day less to do what we intend to do in life? For most of us moving away from deadline driven corporate jobs into becoming self driven social entrepreneurs, one of the most challenging issues is how to sustain motivation, discipline, zeal, giving.... Sustain Growing? A sense of time is very critical. None other than self can bring in the sense of urgency in life.

The doctor’s waiting room was crowded. An elderly gentleman who had been waiting for almost an hour, said to the receptionist, “I cannot wait any longer, would you kindly give me an appointment for another day?”

One woman in the crowd whispered to the other, “He must be at least eighty years old. What sort of urgent business can he have that he cannot afford to wait?” The man who overheard the remark, said, “I am eighty-seven years old, lady, which is precisely why I cannot afford to waste a single minute of the precious time I am left with.” (*Sampath. J.M. story 94 Discovery – 3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998*)

When the intension and methodology is right, but timing is inappropriate the entire opportunity is lost. The appropriateness of the timing is lost when we evaluate the present moment with the eyes of the past experiences or with future anxieties. We are also then not able to focus fully to understand the context as well as respond to them. The learning from the past can enable us to know the implications of varied responses; but it need not be the base on which the current response is developed. The anxiety of future can help create the readiness within to face several situations, but it does not have to limit the response to the present situation. The response to the current situation needs to emerge from an objective space taking into account the maximum number of contextual elements in the present. While the past gives the preparedness the future gives the possible direction to journey. Every current situation also has an immediate past and immediate future.

Once the clock master while fixing a clock heard the pendulum plead, "Please sir leave me alone. Think of the number of times I will have to tick day and night, 60 times each minute, 60 minutes an hour, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for year upon year .. I could never do it."

But the master replied wisely, "Don't think of the future. Just do one tick at a time and you will enjoy every tick for the rest of your life." And the pendulum decided to follow the master's words and is still ticking merrily away. (Sampath. J.M. story 83 Discovery – 3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998)

In today's world context what matters is the speed of response and that cannot be achieved without being in the present moment. Learning to be in the present moment requires a disciplined life of reflection,

meditation, openness to life, awareness to prejudices and bias and a willingness to flow while having clarity on the inner structure based on principles. While moving into being a social entrepreneur may seem a huge decision, when we spend time in the present giving the best that we can give, the journey becomes a satisfying one. Responding at the appropriate time becomes the key to making it satisfying as well as successful.

Points for Reflection:

- How much am I aware where I spend my Time in 24 hours of a day?
- How much do I value my Time?
- What are my priorities in life and how often am I aware of them?
- What are my past fears and future anxieties that are not allowing me to take steps faster in life?
- What practices do I follow that can help me respond to context by being in the present?
- What does 'here' and 'now' mean to me?

Contentment – inner stability for growth

While exploring the process of growing there are some typical questions that come to our mind – is an unsatisfied mind really necessary for growth? Will it take away my sense of contentment? Will I become complacent if I feel content within me? What is the dividing line between contentment and complacency?

The Lord chided one of his devotees: “I am weary of your never-ending petitions. So, I shall grant you three wishes and no more.” Immediately the devotee made his first wish, “I want my wife to die so that I can marry a better woman.” It was granted. But, at the funeral his friends and relatives gathered and recalled the virtues of his wife. The devotee realized his mistake, and his second wish was spent in getting her back to life. Not wanting to waste away his final boon, he consulted others. People advised him variously—to ask for immortality, health, wealth and friends.

Years passed and he was still undecided. Finally, he asked the Lord himself for advice. The Lord understood the man’s predicament and laughed. He said, “Ask to be content, no matter what you get.” (*Sampath. J.M. story 22 Discovery – 3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998*)

Contentment is considered a virtue. It is many times also thought to be the foundation for peace. The person who is content with what he has is said to have everything in life. But, the issue with growing is that there has to be a space that we identify where we need to grow. How do I identify that kind of spaces if I am content with myself? How does the action of relentless pursuit happen?

The word contentment has been used in varied dimensions to suit different people. It is sometimes used to cover up the complacency and laziness within. It is also used as an opposite for avariciousness. Somehow contentment has been strongly associated with materialism. So, people in pursuit of materialism have been seen as lacking in contentment. Whenever growth has been perceived as material growth alone, the need to be content has been emphasized.

But, the nature of contentment is of high action-orientation with deeper level acceptance of all results that comes with it; the ability to perceive and foresee the implications of our behaviour; and the equanimity of mind to accept the changes in life. This famous parable of king Ashoka says it all.

Once upon a time there lived a king who was very powerful. His court was always full of wise men from many lands. One day he called the wise men to his court and said, "I wish to test your wisdom. Bring for me, before sunset, a gift that will make me joyous when I am unhappy and sober when I am indulgent."

In the evening he called for the wise men to see what they had brought for him. The wise men paid their respects to the king and placed before him a ring on which was inscribed, "This too shall pass." (*Sampath. J.M. story 89 Discovery – 3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998*)

Contentment from deep within allows us to flow with life, therefore bringing in opportunities as what we need than what we want. We may want several things in life at a point of time, but consciousness is aware what we actually need. Contentment is in accepting what comes and acting upon it. This leads to a higher level of emotional consciousness thereby giving space for

speed in action. Contentment in several ways is the ability to balance and flow. When there is flow in life, the expectations and attachment to results is reduced, and the focus on efforts is increased. The actions are not directed towards what we will get at the end of it, but they are directed towards what needs to be done to get the best that needs to be got. Though this can be spelt in words easily, it is the most challenging part of growth. It changes the paradigm from which a person is able to respond to life.

A social entrepreneur needs to continuously respond and flow in life if they have to make a difference. If there is no contentment within, there is pressure on getting what they want rather than responding to what they get, because they require that. This makes it possible to move from focus on self to focus on what others require. Contentment therefore reduces conflicts within, bringing synergy in life. Then, even the money and cause in the hands of such a person finds a higher order purpose thereby allowing simultaneous detachment and growth.

Points for Reflection:

- How aware am I of my expectations in life? Are they what I want, or what I require?
- How do I respond to what happens to me in life?
- What are the issues on which I am discontent, and how do I deal with my discontentment?
- How aware am I of the high energy my contentment gives me, and what do I do to grow this within me?

