

Conversations

A Chronicle of Social Currents

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Cover Story >> Pg 6 Land for landless

Krishnammal Jagannathan fights for the cause of the landless farmers. She was 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 Right to Livelihood Award 2008.

From the Editor

Dear Readers,

I thank all those who attended our celebration of social work last month. It was indeed the most cherishing day for most of us present.

Each social entrepreneur, who had excelled in their sphere of work, had a story to share. I got reminded of Ramana

Maharishi's saying, "To see is to Know, To know is to Become, To become is to Be. When you become 'Be' and become one with God in you, you achieve the utmost bliss. In this state you become connected to the universal super conscious abundant energy and deliver the unconditional energy of love and

affection to one and all." This I think is the foundation of Social Entrepreneurship Excellence and it is reflected in each of our awardees and the individuals featured in Conversations. Hope you start a conversation with your friends about us.

—P. N. Devarajan

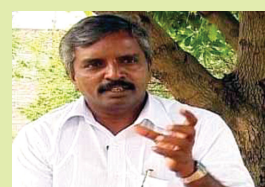
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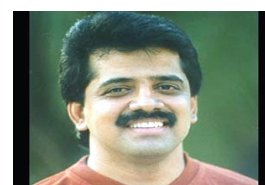
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Gopalaswami IAS



Bhargavi & Kaviya



Book Release

Sadguru Gnanananda Awards

The eleventh Sadguru Gnanananda national awards function was held on 13th March at Narada Gana Sabha, T Nagar, Chennai. The award is instituted by Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani (MSDS), a public charitable trust founded by Mr P N Devarajan in 1999. The Chief Guest for the event was Shri. N. Gopalaswami, I.A.S., Former Election Commissioner of India and the Special Guest was Smt. Krishnammal Jaganathan.

The celebrations were divine. The wonderful event proved to be a catalyst for inspiring the 800 plus audience. Bhargavi and Kaviya, weaved magic through their eloquent narration of the events and the awardees in Tamil and English. The awardees were further motivated to carry on with their initiatives with renewed zeal.



Awardees

The awardees - Sister Lalitha, Jeevodaya Hospice For Cancer Patients, Chennai, Smt Phoolbasan Bai Yadav, Maa Bamleshwari Jan Hitkari Samiti, Chhattisgarh, Mrs Latha Rajan & Mr K Pandia Rajan, Mafoi Foundation - spoke briefly about how they started their social work.

Smt. Phoolbasan Bai of Chattisgarh, rendered an

inspiring power packed song in Hindi, which moved many to tears.

The Fellows - Ms. Rubina Mazhar, Safa Society and Mr. S Saravanan, WakeUpIndia. net, Jawadhu Hills, expressed their gratitude to MSDS for the support in their initial phase of work.

The 84 year old young Smt. Krishnammal

Jaganathan narrated her story of gifting land for the landless.

Shri. Gopalaswami lauded MSDS Trust for celebrating the work done by many unsung heroes of the nation.

A book titled 'Musings of a Social Entrepreneur', written by Mr. P. N. Devarajan was released on the occasion.

ADD SPARKLE TO THE SEASON WITH A
TOUCH OF THE ORIENT AT **China Town**
A SIP OF SCINTILLATING SPAIN AT **Zara**
A TINGE OF EXOTIC THAILAND AT **Benjarong**
A MESMERISING SENSE OF NORTH INDIA
AT **COPPER CHIMNEY** A SPLASH OF COASTAL FRESHNESS
AT **Kokum** A MÉLANGE OF SPICES AT **ENTÉ KERALAM**
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Arokiyadas's story is that of courage and will. He overcame serious physical and financial difficulties to rise like a phoenix and work with missionary zeal for his fellow beings.

Born with congenital deformity of limbs, life was not easy for Arokiyadas. He came from a poor family with only his mother to take care of him. He had to drop out of Nungambakkam School before he could complete Class X.

Abject poverty, and then a government eviction notice for his house in the slum clearance board for not paying taxes, caused him depression. He ran from pillar to post when a friend took him to a NGO. Usha directed him to C.J. Paul who gave Arokiyadas two letters - one for Narayanan at ECOMWEL and the second one for Padmini Subramaniam who coordinated an NGO for women.

"There was a time when I did not have money to have one meal a day, but today I have 75 kg of rice in my office for donation. Most of these trust funds are sourced from individuals"

"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," says Arokiyadas. "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 at least equal to others and so I worked hard. The next year when everyone got Rs 5 as increment I got Rs 7.

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

"I used to commute on my tricycle to most parts of the city, distributing pamphlets and condoms to auto rickshaw drivers and

One-Man Army



Arokiyadas receiving the CSIM certificate from Dr. Poongothai Aladi Aruna, Social Welfare Minister

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 the CAN project ended, I worked for Ecomwel's project located at Kaveripakkam Village. 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, attending to bank work.

When Reena Perolin, the funding donor from Switzerland, visited the office, she was impressed with my enthusiasm and hard work and appointed me 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 had 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 Kaingarya.

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. I also pursued the SEOP course at CSIM to develop better management skills.

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 under-privileged children. There was a time when I did not have money to have one meal a day, but today I have 75 kg of rice in my office for donation. Most of these trust funds are sourced from individuals".

There's a sense of pride and happiness as Arokiyadas sits in his small 40 office (40 Sq. ft). On one side of the room, there are cupboards where he stores his files. 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 to the differently abled and providing them with aids and appliances, educational and medical support, employment referrals and coordinating self-employment projects.

Arokiyadas plans 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 are 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", says Arokiyadas.

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.

—P. Ambika

For more information about Snegithan, contact Arokiyadas at No. 99, T.P. Chatram, 1st Street, Shenoy Nagar, Chennai - 30. Phone: 044-26442912 / 9884292630 Email: snegithan4all@rediffmail.com.



“We wanted to touch upon something fundamental and found that underprivileged children are deprived of books”

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



“You have the technology to send the Chandrayaan but not for cleaning sewers?”

This article appeared in The Times of India, Chennai

The Needle Woman

Village health nurses play a vital role in reducing infant and maternal mortality rates by monitoring health through the nine months of pregnancy

The children recognised the crisp starched white sari from a distance and rushed towards her cheering, "Hey! Pachaiamma akka paaru da!" Pachaiamma's smile widened as she greeted the children with open arms, enquiring how each of them was doing. The women stood a little away watching their children, waiting for Pachaiamma's attention.

"Amma! Can you give me a tablet for fever?" asked a frail looking lady who was visibly weak. "Maragatham, didn't I ask you to come to the clinic? I don't have medicines now. Come tomorrow to the clinic," said Pachaiamma, with an unfading smile.

She patiently attended to everybody and finally sat down to talk about herself and her life as a village health nurse (VHN).

"I began 22 years ago as an ICDS worker in Salem. I was then posted at village health nurse in Vizhupuram and for the past 6 years been at Valodai" said Pachaiamma. The job as a village nurse revolved around mother-child health care, where pregnancy, delivery and women health care. Immunisation for school children and distribution of iron tablets for girls is also taken up by the village health nurse.

"Earlier I used to go to homes to attend to deliveries, but now women are brought to the Primary Health Centre (PHC). We refer complicated cases to hospitals in Chennai or Chengalpet" began Pachaiamma when asked about delivery duty. Pachaiamma explained that the duty for a village health nurse began with pre natal care, such as checking for pregnancy, testing the Rh factor, testing the mother for AIDS and monitoring health through the nine months of pregnancy. The nurse also ensured that the mother made five visits to the doctor, and that scan was performed in fifth month of pregnancy. "Earlier, if we insisted on scanning people used to run away from us thinking we harmed the baby, by insisting on scanning the mother. Now people respect us and even seek our advice on their own" said Pachaiamma who felt that increasingly more people come to PHC's now than ever before.

"The biggest duty of a VHN is to tell people about government health policies" said Pachaiamma. She said that the people needed to be told about benefits of Government schemes like money they get for sterilisation, immunization and procurement of health cards. She recollected the times when people had to be forced to undergo sterilization. "Now, times have changed. Most women themselves ask for a copper-T after their second delivery. Earlier, villagers used to treat me like an outcast as I used to speak to them about such intimate issues like contraception and sterilization" she said, explaining the difficulty in talking of such issues in rural areas.



Village health nurse Pachaiamma with Vijaya and her new born baby

Pachaiamma said that the PHC distributes free condoms and contraceptive pills. She said that a village nurse has to build a profile of that of a mother, more than a trained nurse. "Unless I am able to connect to them like a family member, people won't come to me with their issues" she said. Hearing Pachaiamma talk about her job reflects a passion that is an antidote to the poor perception one holds about government health

"If clean water is given for the SC dwellings, I will almost have no work with children as they will stop suffering from typhoid and fever"

nurses and doctors. She said that, of late there have been cases when young and unmarried girls come to her asking for contraceptive pills and condoms. She stuns one with the understanding she displayed when she said, "I need to handle the situation with care. If I scold the girl and send her away, she will still have sex and may get pregnant. But giving her the condom makes me feel guilty. I talk to such girls and ask them to bring the man they are in love with and ask them to wait till they get married." She said, adding that on one occasion she had spoken to the parents and got their consent for marriage for a young couple.

Speaking about issues of safe sex and contraception, Pachaiamma felt that things would improve if the homes in the villages had more privacy. "Since most villagers, especially the scheduled caste dwellings were small and overcrowded, there is a lack of privacy for sex life," she explained why some men tend to seek sexual pleasure from other women. She added that talking about such issues is uncomfortable as the very act is hushed up due to cultural and spatial constraints.

Talking about poor housing conditions set Pachaiamma on a different track as she expressed her concerns about rising health issues due to poor living conditions. She said that the SC dwellings were most vulnerable to diseases and that they frequented the PHC with skin diseases, malaria and typhoid. She said that the villagers did poultry farming in their homes, as an alternative income source. This, in her opinion gave rise to infection among children, as the chickens and hens dirtied the place. "If clean water is given for the SC dwellings, I will almost have no work with children as they will stop suffering from typhoid and fever." She said, insisting that it is due to unhealthy drinking water that children in the village fall sick very often. She recollected how three months back, three streets of the village were down with diarrhoea and that it demanded her to work day and night as many people fell sick. She said that, even now there are people who have not recovered from the weakness, as nutrition is a problem for the villagers.

She talked about conducting education programs for mothers every Friday. As we talked,

a lady waited patiently behind us with a bundle of clothes in her hand. When Pachaiamma looked at her, the lady brought the bundle and thrust it on her hand. The lady moved the cloth gently to reveal a baby. Pachaiamma cuddled the baby as she said, "This is Vijaya's third delivery. Since it was a very complicated case, I had referred her to Chennai Government hospital. She just got back yesterday with the baby." I gathered from Vijaya that she had delivered a still born baby first and the second time, the baby died due to lack of nutrition. "The seven months that I was here, Pachaiamma took care of me like I was her daughter" said Vijaya beaming. The baby weighed just about a kilogram, and Pachaiamma instructed Vijaya to feed breast milk till the baby is normal in weight.

As Vijaya took the baby home, Pachaiamma pointed out, "I can only give them advice. These people don't have the money or infrastructure to follow the advice. In two months, Vijaya has to go back to work and the child will be given other food." The warmth with which Pachaiamma has made a family out of the village makes it easy for one to almost forget that she could have a family of her own as well. When asked about her home, she said that her unemployed husband, stayed in Chennai. She has two married daughters, one of whom delivered recently. Earning 15,000 a month,



Villagers seeking advice from Pachaiamma

Pachaiamma travels from Valodai to Chennai as often as she can to take care of her family. "My work makes the entire village her family. Earlier I would feel like running away to my home at the slightest excuse as people would shun me. They would hide their children from me fearing I harmed them. But now, they respect me so much. They treat me like I am one among them. I like it this way," said the lady, who breathed life and health into so many lives in Valodai.

— Nisha Subramaniam
Asian College of Journalism



"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 Padmasri Krishnammal Jagannathan in a conversation with Marie Banu.

Land for Landless

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 Thuru Pali at Ayyankottai village,

"Education will only teach us to count 4+4=8. Is this why we were born?"

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 Wardha 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. 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



'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 well-known Gandhian activist. Her work includes enhancing the status 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.

including women and children in Kilavemmani 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 huts into houses 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 supervising the construction work at Ramar Madam village, Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu



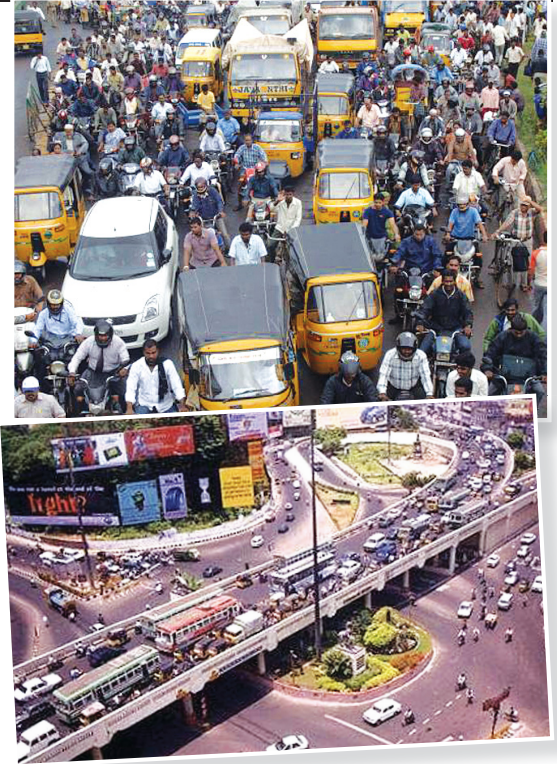
Krishnammal with the women landless labourers campaigning for land allocation at Valivilam village Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu



Krishnammal with Martin Luther King in Chennai



Halt and Go



I ventured to get a first-hand experience on the Roads of Chennai. My first shot was a two-wheeler ride. However sensible one tries to be, the 'trend' on the road has to be followed!

This not being enough, I ventured to seek more enlightenment. I journeyed in a city bus. There is no distinction between young or old, literate or illiterate, male or female, everybody gets in through the exit and gets off through the entrance! Even if the bus is not full, there should be footboard travellers. The buses stop where the drivers fancy and the frustrated conductors practise rampant verbal abuse on passengers! My escapades in a car were even more eventful. With two wheelers, autos and cyclists darting towards the car, I was at my wits end and gave up pretty soon.

Present day road users follow rules framed by the citizens and not the rulers! Here are some popular rules.

- Even if you don't have the green signal to proceed, if no vehicles are intersecting your path, you can ignore the red and move ahead.
- Show all your energy and dynamism at traffic signals. Start moving even before the amber turns green. Remember you are on your way to defuse a bomb or perform an emergency surgery or on a high alert task! (I would like to ask them why they don't hurry while crowding around a consumer durables shop to watch a sensational cricket match).
- Ambulance? Don't bother. They will find their way.
- Lane discipline. What's that? Some kind of extinct species? Or a movie title? Or a brand?? God knows what! Especially in a country where most roads do not have proper lane demarcation.
- Survival of the fastest. Whoever moves fast should be permitted to do so. If you compete, it is at your own risk. Bikes, buses, school vans, the competition is open to all!
- Get into everybody's way and cause nuisance. If you map the trail of a bike, it would be marvellous to note that on a straight road, bike riders drive like they do on a mountain road!
- If there is space in between two vehicles, PACK! This rule applies for stationary and moving vehicles.

Whether you are at a signal or moving on a busy road, overtake and cover spaces even if you are not supposed to be using that lane.

- Overtake. Doesn't matter whether it is left or right. Just do it.
- Metropolitan Transport Corporation buses can stop anywhere, obstructing the traffic. They are beyond signals. They can move if the path is clear. Size matters – they are the big bullies.
- According to College, school and chartered buses – only they exist.
- Auto and share-auto drivers can see only prospective passengers. Others on the road should take care not to be hit by them.
- Jump signals, whatever you ride or drive!
- Be known to some Minister, MLA, senior Police Official or anybody influential. You needn't know the road rules!!
- However high the median may be – climb over. Never use the subway or pedestrian.
- Who said driving on the wrong side is illegal?!
- Two wheelers can carry any number of people.

Almost all of us would be experiencing these on the roads every day. Wherever we may live or work, roads are like arteries that carry us through our work, life, recreation, vacation et al. Since it connects us to all nodes in life we should know how to use the roads. Know to use the roads? What does one need to use the roads? Everything that one needs to live in a society; Knowledge, comprehension, empathy, patience, compassion, discipline and the list grows on.

We would agree to the fact that as road users, we are becoming uncivilised by the day. We diligently break all rules, cause chaos, practise rank indiscipline; road users do not express mental health and hygiene... No. Don't point the finger at others. We are all to blame. We all have a responsible role in this social issue. Before we set out to do this, we should realise that it is not the sole responsibility of the Government, Police or any other governing body, but it is very much OUR responsibility. So, let us shut the door which leads to the blame room.

News on traffic snarls, bad roads, road indiscipline, tend to take a negative stand. For a change, let us try taking the positive route. Let us not talk about the erring pedestrians, cyclists, motorists, car, van, bus and lorry drivers. Let us make problem statements and concentrate on how to overcome the problem.

It is cumbersome task. But if we put our minds together and think, we will realise that there is so much that we can do as individuals. The 'I don't care' attitude nurtures the problem by the day.

Here are some starters:

- Sincerely practise road rules, follow lanes and motivate people around us to do so...
- Conduct awareness and sensitizing programs for employees working in our organization...
- Catch them young – the school and college children teach them to use roads responsibly...
- Conduct widespread awareness programs for auto, van and taxi drivers...
- Create short films on how each one of us can play a role to civilized road usage and telecast them periodically...
- Sensitize bus drivers and conductors on road discipline...
- Inculcate good social behaviour...

Initially, we thought of this as an article in Conversations. As the discussions grew, we realised the magnitude and varied dimensions of the issue and have decided to devote a column. We welcome you to come forward with your opinions, views, and ideas to combat and contain this social issue. We would be glad if we can evolve a platform for all road users to be sensitized and civility restored in our Indian roads. Write to us at csim.conversations@gmail.com or call us at: 044-24867565. We will carry your contributions in the subsequent issues.

If we believe in us, we can make it happen.

— Radha Jagan

Evangelist of Village Growth Economy



Rangaswamy Elango

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 'Samathuvapuram', 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

Innovative houses are constructed with these compressed mud blocks. With just 6% of cement, this mud block is highly environment friendly. As these blocks are made after continuous curing in water, it's stronger than the conventional brick. Kuthambakkam Samathuvapuram is built completely with these blocks.



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



Hammocks manufactured for export through export houses

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.



Production of first aid kits by village women

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,
contact Mr. R. Elango at
+91- 99406 82201
panchayat@yahoo.com

Photo caption contest



Can you think of a caption for this photo?
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Who is a Social Entrepreneur?

Social entrepreneur 'is an apt description of a person who is involved in leadership and management of 'the divide' in society caused by deep and wide disparity between 'haves' and 'have-nots' amongst people.

The social entrepreneur, in true spirit, is one who aims at delivering the results through a process which can be customized, localized and replicated across geographies, communities and demographics.

The social entrepreneur works for bringing a balance between Equity, Economy and Ecology, in the process of bridging the gap in the social sector by practicing the right blend of technology, self esteem, empathy, heart and head, unconditional love and commitment.

The social entrepreneur places importance in training and development, planning, near perfect execution, continuous improvement and risk definition, risk mitigation and measurement of impact and goals.

The social entrepreneur exemplifies by practice being a 'servant leader' than a power leader, they encourage 'leadership' at all levels and getting all stakeholders to the commitment of

their quality Time, deep Talent, dear Treasure with an exemplary Touch.

The social entrepreneur encourages as much 'Scale out' of the services to reach out larger audience at their doorsteps, so to say, than 'Scale up' which has inherent blocks in bureaucracy and rigidity in structures, resulting in monolithic nature, whereas 'Scale out' brings in micro enterprise concept with great need for relationships, effective communication and room for replicability, through practice mode and good documentation.

The Social Entrepreneur creates a peoples movement. They make people become alive, become more connected, more accountable, and more involved.

The Social Entrepreneur knows that the best way to predict the future is to create it and the best way to create momentum..

Social Entrepreneurs believe that beautiful life does not just happen. It is built daily in prayer, humility, sacrifice and love. They develop best practices in the delivery mechanism. Best practices are processes that change in line with changing environment.

—P.N. Devarajan

GROWING...REFLECTIONS FOR DEEP CHANGE

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)

—J.M.Sampath & Kalpana Sampath



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Musician Srinivas shares his societal concerns with Marie Banu and Latha Suresh

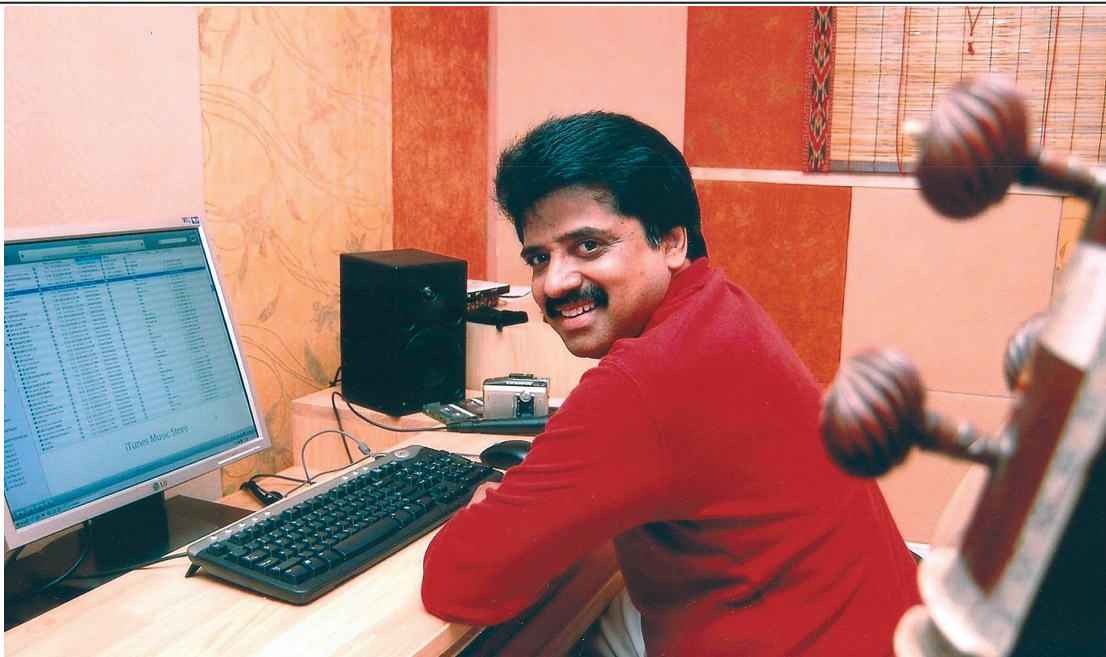
Music invited us to Srinivas's lounge. The kids were at home, and yet it was quiet. We sensed discipline all over the place. Srinivas, who had just returned from a recording session, stood in the balcony admiring the scenery. He welcomed us with his charming smile.

We have heard a lot about your social work. But why is there no media coverage? What inspires you to engage in charity?

No, it is not that. We actually don't do as much social work as we can. Most of us are selfish and greedy. At least when we get opportunities we can be a good person. This is what everybody should be doing all the time. The world we see today is wrong and we are in the rat race. We do not have a choice. But you happen to be in this world which is materialistic. If I can contribute in a small way, I will do it. And why media hype? Doing something good is a natural thing that people should do without any publicity rather than project it as doing something out of the way.

Is there a difference you feel when you sing for charities and when you sing for your regular music concerts?

I feel very good when I perform for charity. There are people who exploit



Passion and Percussion

charity for personal gain. It is important to sift the fake and the genuine. So I do a concert for free only when I am sure that the people and the cause are genuine.

Which is the song that you like to sing in every music concert?

There are certain songs I want like to sing but am not sure if the audience want to hear them. Azhagae sugamma is one song I always like to sing. There are people who really like that song but a larger audience might not. Songs like Kaiyil midhakkum, Minsara poove and Ooh la la, I have to sing whether they are my favourite or not.

Do you feel that songs would influence patriotism?

May be it can. 'Vande Matram' really inspired the youth. When you hear Rahman's 'Vande Mataram' you really feel energised.

Which social causes are you passionate about?

Our world is full of issues. Ultimately we realise that we have also contributed to the problem. So, why not help to resolve the issue?

Education for the underprivileged is crucial for a country like India. We can save the world if we can educate the children now.

Religion has become a social issue! Religion which is supposed to be a saviour for mankind is turning against mankind today. I don't think we should have religion at all. We should realise that all human beings are equal. Let us not say that I am a Hindu, or a Muslim or a Christian.

Your memorable achievements?

I think it is yet to come.

Do you intend to start your own charity in a few years from now?

I do charity in a small way and care more for my family and children and immediate circle. I hope I become a little more enlightened and start my own charity.

Does your family also get involved in your social work activities?

They do not have any objection in me doing charity. My wife and my daughters empathise with the causes I support, while they have their own causes that they are passionate about. I would like my children to be humane.

Your advice to social workers?

They are great and have an enviable attitude. Corporates, celebrities, businessmen, politicians and all of us should change their approach to society completely to make the world a better place to live in.

Feedback

Dear Editor

In this era of sensational magazines, I admire CSIM's conviction in publishing Conversations. Each story has a real time hero or heroine doing great acts of kindness and bringing about transformation in society. The column on "Growing" in the last issue was excellent. It has triggered a lot of Conversations within me and I thank the Sampaths for it. Looking forward to reading more such inspiring articles.

—Radha Mohan

Dear Editor,

I have been privileged to read the three issues of Conversations. The content is excellent. You are serving the service organisations. It is of great help to all NGOs. It is very interesting as you have not only covered service but other aspects like interviews.

This tabloid has filled in a big void and it is very good. Over a period of time, this would become like a Readers digest, a NGO digest. NGOs will draw inspirations. You will serve as a bridge between NGOs and Corporates and that CSR is going to be made compulsory, introducing NGOs to corporates through CSIM, will be like an ISO certification. It has to become popular among the NGOs as well. Using internet media, you should broadcast your content through online communities.

I was interested to go through it and am going to keep it in my office so that people who visit me can read the tabloid. My best wishes!

—MB Nirmal
Exnora International

Dear Editor,

I am very impressed by your tabloid. I have read all the three issues and would like to congratulate you on your initiative. It is very inspiring to read about the work done by youngsters like Ayappan, Logammal, Egamparam and stalwarts like Savithri Vaiti, Shekar Raghavan, Satyamurthy etc. I admire the wide range of people that you write about and this has given me a totally new dimension to social work. Thanks for enlightening me. I keenly look forward to reading every issue.

—KS

Editorial

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu
Radha Jagan
Sashi Nair