

# Conversations

*A Chronicle of Social Currents*

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**Nothing About Us, Without Us**

**Disability laws, participation, equal opportunities, and more**

## From the Editor

Dear friends,

We are happy to launch the 12th edition of *Conversations* this month. It has been a wonderful experience for us—conversing with people who are selflessly working for the society, and narrating our conversations in a story form to you.

I have now derived a different meaning

for the word 'service'. It means 'to serve with ease'. None of the change makers we have featured so far have ever complained about the hardships or difficulties they faced in achieving their mission. On the contrary, they only spoke about the joy and satisfaction that they experienced. The ease with which they render their act of kindness without

expecting anything—personally or monetarily—in return, is an admirable quality each individual should try to imbibe. For achieving this, one has to be first happy with oneself and align with one's consciousness.

Please do continue to read our stories and be inspired. Happy reading!

**P. N. Devarajan**

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**Mr. P. N. Devarajan** on behalf of  
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391/1, Venkatachalapathi Nagar,  
Alapakkam, Chennai - 600 116.  
**Phone:** 24867565/66  
**Website:** www.csim.in

# Events Update

We would like to share a few memorable events at Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM), Chennai.

CSIM has partnered with the Suzlon Foundation in November 2010, to facilitate its partner NGOs to prepare their Social Accounts and Audit. GREDS & Ekoventure from Pondicherry, the Community Health Project of Salvation Army from Nagercoil, BIRDS and NEEDS from Karnataka are the five partner NGOs of Suzlon whose Social Accounts would be audited in April, 2010.

The School of Politics & Public Administration, Tamil Nadu Open University, organized a National Seminar on "Transparency & Accountability in Public Administration" in Chennai on 9th November, 2010. Over 60 papers were presented on topics like Corruption, Public Accountability, Right to Information, E-Governance, Social Audit, etc. by eminent academicians, research scholars, and social

workers. Latha Suresh, Director, CSIM, presented a paper on "Social Audit amongst NGOs" which was well received amongst the gathering.

CSIM in collaboration with the Zonta Club of Madras, organized an awareness program on Domestic Violence Act for 200 women belonging to various Self Help Groups in Ashok Nagar on 27th November, 2010. Ms. Sheelu Francis, Director of Women's Collective, and a women rights activist sensitized the women on the various implications of the Act, and how abused women could protect themselves.

Mr. Pushpanath Krishnamurthy, Global Executive Social Business & Markets, Oxfam GB, visited CSIM Chennai and interacted with the prospective social entrepreneurs at CSIM. Mr. Pushpanath who is involved in a research study on social enterprises was inspired by the projects done by the CSIM students, and offered to publish a few case studies of their work in his report.

## Upcoming Events

Centre for Media and Development Communication (CMDC), the communication wing of CSIM is organising a workshop on 'Improving Media Relations for Development Communication' on 10th and 11th December 2010 at Asha Nivas, Chennai.

Faculty from Asian College of Journalism, leading media persons, communication experts and website designers would handle the sessions. Development professionals; social work students; Heads of NGO, corporate employees in charge of their company's CSR projects are encouraged to participate.

Workshop sessions include: Principles and Ethics of Effective Communication, Drafting Press Releases, Handling Media Interviews, Corporate Communication, Effective Communication with Communities, Speaking for Radio and Television, How to Create and Manage a NGO web site, etc.

The registration fee is Rs. 2500.00 per participant. Accommodation for outstation persons would be arranged on request, at an additional charge. More information about the workshop is available in our website [www.csim.in](http://www.csim.in). If you wish to enroll, contact CSIM at 9884700029 or write to [cmdc@csim.in](mailto:cmdc@csim.in).

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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# Sowing the Seeds of a Bright Future

**“We want to create a conducive social environment where the individual can lead a peaceful and splendid life”**  
—Komala and Sujatha, Founders, Iniya Udayam Charitable Trust



Meeting with two live wire 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 Udayam Charitable Trust’. We owe our thanks to Mrs. Latha Suresh, Director, CSIM, who relentlessly persuaded us to start an organisation of our own. ‘Iniya Udayam’ 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 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 Udayam 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

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 Udayam'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.



Computer training programme for youth

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,

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 visit them at: No.2 Periyar Nagar Azhagirisamy Street, Avadi, Chennai - 600071, or call 94444 23600, or write to [iuct\\_etc@yahoo.com](mailto:iuct_etc@yahoo.com)

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 Villigro."

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, Thirukkuvilai 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

**"We noticed that people from smaller towns and villages were coming to cities like Chennai, Bangalore and Bombay in search of jobs"**



The Desi Crew team who have led several villagers to be employed at their doorsteps

## WHEN OPPORTUNITIES KNOCK...

**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**



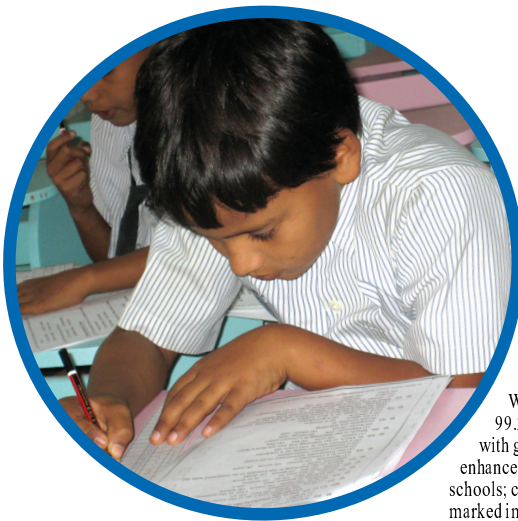
Employees of Desi Crew going about their jobs - Desi Crew's rural BPO pioneering has led to a rise in employment opportunities in rural areas in South India



# Compulsory PASSING SYSTEM

## a hurdle to higher education

*"The problem in Tamil Nadu is quality, and not access of education, with the student-teacher ratio being the main issue"*  
—Dr Balaji Sampath, Secretary and CEO of Aid India



**The school seems to be functioning pretty well, and I am happy. All my three children go to school and with the implementation of the noon meal scheme, things have become easier for us**



Government initiatives of providing primary education have proved beneficial to students, but the grading and passing system affects their higher secondary education. The National Family Health Survey – 3 indicated that 22 per cent girls and 10 percent boys, aged 6 and above, in slums have no education, compared with 14 percent of girls and 4 per cent of boys in non-slums. With Tamil Nadu boasting of over 99.2 percent children in schools, and with government policies that have enhanced the functioning of corporation schools; child literacy levels have seen a marked improvement over the years. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan targeted the problem of access to education and has been addressed successfully. As stated by Dr Balaji Sampath, Secretary and CEO of Aid India, Chennai: "The problem in Tamil Nadu is quality, and not access of education, with the student-teacher ratio being the main issue. The average student-teacher ratio in Tamil Nadu is 1:40 which is very low." Although conditions have improved, there are concerns that need to be addressed.

The Corporation Primary School at Giriappa Road, T.Nagar accommodates 85 students from classes one to five, and has a teacher student ratio of 1:20, with one teacher for a particular class. Majority of the students studying in the school are from the nearby slum that extends from Giriappa Road to Thyagaraya Road. Dwellers of the adjoining slum although have a positive outlook towards educating their children, many still continue to send their children to work in the nearby residential areas. Pavitra dropped out of school in 2008 after failing in her tenth standard examination, and her mother refuses to send her back to school. "What is the point in sending her back to school? She finds it tough to cope with the studies, and we cannot afford the tuition fee. As my husband refuses to work, it is better that she works for a few years until we get her married. It adds to our family income," says her mother Nagamma who is the sole earning member of her family of five.

The problem of coping with studies at the higher secondary level for many children like

Pavitra stems from a deeper issue. As per a government policy, teachers in corporation schools have to compulsorily pass students from classes' one to eight. K. Anandhi a teacher at the Corporation School at Giriappa Road says, "We have to compulsorily pass all the students from class one to eight as per the government order. We are aware it creates problems for the children in their higher secondary education, but we do not have any other option." Teachers claim to provide special training and tuitions for weak students, but in reality this is difficult. Nagavalli, who stays in the Giriappa area slum says, "I could study only until eighth standard as my father passed away, and I had to start earning for the family. Children in higher classes find it difficult to cope with the subjects. The government teachers used to take tuitions, but they haven't been coming for the past few years. This is why many children drop out after class eight."

Funding however has not been an issue with the school. The Principal, T.Rama, who

out of school for various reasons, and presently has around 15 students. "We provide them with uniform and school bags, and have a special instructor to train them for a year. After this, we admit them in eligible classes," adds T.Rama. The school has adopted various teaching methods, and trains students in basic computer skills as well. B. Maheshwari has been a teacher for the past ten years at the corporation school. She says: "The activity based learning method introduced five years ago has proved to be much better than the rote learning method. Children take interest in learning how to use the computer, and are regular to school."

Parents do not seem to complain as long as their children get primary level education. Vanaja, who works as a maid says, "The school seems to be functioning pretty well, and I am happy. All my three children go to school and with the implementation of the noon meal scheme, things have become easier for us." Many say that when compared to areas such as Kannagi Nagar and Kodungarayur,



Photo Credit: Pranati Bhalarao

teaches two subjects for the third and fourth standard says, "The government supplies us with floor mats, desks, and good drinking water. After completing fifth standard girls are admitted to the Guntur Subaya Girls School, and boys to the Ramakrishna mission school, ensuring that they do not discontinue schooling. The food supplied in the noon meal scheme is good, and the parents have no complaints."

'Alternative schooling', is a service offered by the school. It functions as a separate training section for children who have dropped

this slum has the least of problems. "We send our children at least to primary school, and our housing conditions are good. Other areas face a lot of water problems, and lack drainage facilities as they are mostly garbage dump yards. We are much better off," says Meena, a vegetable vendor.

Access to primary education seems to be the least of worries of this slum. Unless efforts are made to provide adequate higher secondary schools the purpose of creating plans for long term and sustainable education is defeated.

—Nidhi Adlakha

This is what echoes all through the animated discussion on the working draft of the new bill that is being formulated for upholding the rights of persons with disabilities.

#### See the person, and not the disability

I am meeting Dhanasekar and Ummal Khair. Dhanasekar works with the Disability Legislation Unit of Vidyasagar, Chennai. His team comprises of Rajiv Rajan, Muralidharan, S.S. and Shanthi. Ummal is a law student, who is actively engaged in studies pertaining to 'Accessibility' and 'Inclusion'.

"The UNCRPD is the most progressive document on the rights of persons with disabilities. However, even after being one of the first countries to ratify this convention, India has not changed or modified the laws governing the same," says Dhanasekar.

Currently, there are four laws that primarily focus on people with disabilities: The National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999; the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) (Equal Opportunities, protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995; the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) (1992); and the Mental Health Act (1987). Any government, upon ratifying any of the conventions of the United Nations, is obliged to modify existing laws or make new ones to satisfy the principles that the convention requires it to adhere to. As is the case with most other countries, the statistics to make matters simpler for itself by introducing minor changes and by creating new volumes that are mere shadow of the requisite changes.

On 30th April 2010, following a pan-India campaign, a committee was formed to create a bill for a new comprehensive law for persons with disabilities. Ironically, the 27 member committee had merely three people with disabilities. This very act goes against the spirit and motto of the UNCRPD. "Nothing about us, without us." A protest was staged outside Shastri Bhavan, New Delhi, where representatives from all thirteen went on a hunger strike demanding greater representation. However, around the same time, six more people were appointed to the committee and one of them was Rajiv Rajan from Chennai. Yet, there was no representation of persons with hearing and speech impairment. After the first day of the protest, a special invite from the said category was included in the committee. On 11th June 2010, the committee convened its very first official meeting.

#### A historic legislation in the making

"The committee, engaging in some 'come-in-if-you-agree' debates, is teeming with contrasting opinions," says Dhanasekar. "Presently, there are members who are fighting to have a majority representation of people with disabilities representing those who are content with the status quo. However, the committee as a whole agrees that the new bill must adopt rights-based approach rather than a welfare approach, in the way the law treats persons with disabilities. The first working draft of the new bill will be opened for public viewing from 30th of November 2010."

How different is this bill from the PWD Act? "This will be a landmark bill in every sense," says Dhanasekar emphatically. "As the global attitude towards disability is fast changing, the existing laws are increasingly becoming redundant. Efforts are being directed towards making this new bill so comprehensive that the older Acts can be repealed."



Participants at the disability sports event organised by Tamil Nadu Handicapped Federation Charitable Trust in 2009

# "Nothing About Us, Without Us" (of Disability Laws, Participation, Equal Opportunities, and more)



For the first time in the history of our nation, the Civil and Political Rights of a particular category of people are being clearly discussed" adds Dhanasekar.

Here are a few teasers from the working draft of the new bill:

#### 1. Legal capacity

There has been much passing of the buck on the 'legal capacity' of a person with mental disability. Till date, persons with mental disabilities have been deemed unfit to make any (and especially) legal decisions on their own. The National Trust Act focuses on guardianship as the key to resolve this issue. However, Dhanasekar asks: "Why bind a person's individual freedom with a compulsive bond of guardianship? Do all the rest of us solely take decisions without the advice and counsel of those around us?" The draft of the bill therefore focuses on support systems that will help, but not bind the individual in making his or her own decisions.

#### 2. Political Participation

"Speaking about independent decision making, in the world's largest democracy, which practices 'secret ballot' to ensure confidentiality of a citizen's political leaning, where is the secrecy of the individual if they have to be assisted by their guardian or a helper while voting?", demands Dhanasekar. "The systems of postal ballots that is currently available for defence personnel can be useful to persons with disabilities also. Simple

braille or embossed ballot pads may also be used to help people participate better," he suggests.

#### 3. Accessibility issues

The definition of 'public spaces' as of now refers only to government owned buildings and sites. This definition is to be widened to the extent that any space that is likely to be visited or used by civilians, whether owned by the government or privately, should adhere to all the conditions of accessibility required of a public space.

#### 4. Employment opportunities

On the employment front, currently a 5% incentive is offered to any enterprise that employs persons with disabilities. Discrimination continues on various levels, whether overtly or covertly. As many may be aware, the laws on disability are enforced under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Often officials refuse to cooperate with people seeking assistance. The committee is working out a schedule in the draft of the new bill which will have to be issued and timely obeyed, irrespective of which department or ministry the petition or complaint may go to. Also, recommendations are being made to make amendments in all other Acts which are of relevance to this category of persons.

#### 5. Immediacy of action

"The draft of this bill speaks of strict punitive measures at such and every level at which the UNCRPD principles may be violated. This should help improve accessibility and inclusion of persons with disabilities to the tune of at least 80 to 90 percent. The draft talks of a fixed timeframe for the implementation of its clauses. For instance, all existing infrastructures are to be made accessible in the next ten years," says Dhanasekar. "Many people still fear overly people with disabilities. Those and more stereotypes have to be vanquished completely and thoroughly," says Ummal.

#### Counting the disabled

With the National Census coming in 2011, the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP), a DPO (Disabled People's Organisation), in collaboration with the Census Commission has been working on upgrading the census questionnaires with regard to

**Why bind a person's individual freedom with a compulsive bond of guardianship? Do all the rest of us solely take decisions without the advice and counsel of those around us?"**

identifying persons with disabilities in the count. Until last census, the question on disability appeared as no 15 in the questionnaire, which mostly went unnoticed by the enumerators. In order to take better notice, and also in order to make the count diversified and therefore realistic, the NCPEDP has come up with the following measures: (a) The question on disability now appears in the 9th position, even before the question on mother tongue; (b) Earlier, only four 'umbrella' disabilities were covered. Now the list comprises of eight categories, namely, Visual Impairment, Hearing Impairment, Speech Impairment, Mobility Impairment, Mental Illness, Mental Retardation, Multiple Disabilities, and Any Other.

Rajiv and Dhanasekar are national trainers. Dhanasekar says, "The training of Master Trainer Facilitators is presently going on in Thiruvananthapuram. This training is for trainers of trainers, on how to view Question no. 9, and how to train enumerators to be sensitive while asking this question. This DPO is taking a two pronged approach to spread the importance of Question no. 9 by training facilitators in regional centers across the country, and also spreading awareness amongst all stakeholders. Just as much as asking the question, answering it is also important. The enumerator has no hesitations to probe about the disability, and households must refrain from hiding information."

For a society that is to a large extent reluctant to accept persons with disabilities as individuals first, and capable ones at that, may the above developments serve as a primer that will help us understand these individuals better. For, those who are already hot on its trail, are vouching with bated breath even as a new milestone is being crossed in history.

—Archana R

The United Nations brought out the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in the year 2006. It has been in force since May 2008.

The general principles of the UNCRPD are:

- Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons;
- Non-discrimination;
- Full and effective participation and inclusion in society;
- Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity;
- Equality of opportunity;
- Accessibility;
- Equality between men and women;
- Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.

(Source: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=134> pid=150)



# You are Immortal

*"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"*

—Dr. Sunil Shroff, Founder, Mohan Foundation



Thiru V.K. Subburaj IAS Secretary, Dept. of Health and family welfare felicitating Prof. J. Mohanasundaram, Dean MMC on World Organ Day



Dr. Sunil Shroff with Actor R. Sivakumar who expressed his support for Organ Donation

**Y**es 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 identity, 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



Mrs and Mr K Raghuram receiving the Real Heroes Award instituted by CNN-IBN. The award was in recognition of the fact that the Raghurams donated their son's organs when he passed away

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

*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*

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



*Tamil Nadu Governor Surjit Singh Barnala felicitating families who had donated their organs*

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.

#### MULTITASKING – 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 tele-medicine 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](mailto:mohanfound@gmail.com), or call 044 - 26447000 / 94446 07000, or visit [mohanfoundation.org](http://mohanfoundation.org)

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Come December, it is time to celebrate Christmas. We would like to share with you an inspiring conversation about Jesus Christ and Christianity between Ramana Maharishi and Major A.W. Chadwick, his ardent English devotee.

**D: Why did Jesus call out "My God! My God!" while being crucified?**

**M: (Ramana Maharshi):** It might have been an intercession on behalf of the two thieves crucified with Him. A *jnani* (enlightened one) has attained liberation even while alive, here and now. It is immaterial as to how, where and when he leaves his body. Some *jnanis* may appear to suffer, others may be in *samadhi* (deep spiritual contemplation which is beyond all expression), while others may disappear from sight before death. But that makes no difference to their *jnana* (enlightened knowledge). Such suffering is apparent only to the onlooker and not to the *jnani*, for he has already transcended the mistaken identity of the Self with the body.

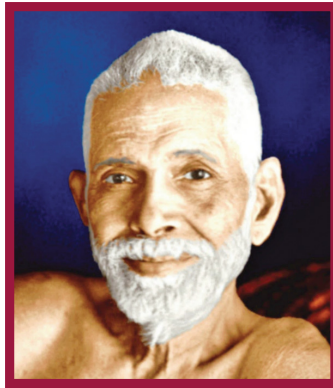
**D: What is the significance of Christ in the illumination of St. Paul?**

**M:** Illumination is absolute, not associated with forms. After St. Paul became Self-conscious, he identified the illumination with Christ-consciousness.

**D: But Paul was not a lover of Christ then?**

**M:** Love or hatred is immaterial. The thought of Christ was there. It is similar to Ravana's case. Christ-consciousness and Self-realization are all the same.

# Inspirations



**The Trinity was explained:**

God the Father represents *Ishvara* (personal aspect of God)

God the Holy Spirit represents *Atman* (soul)

God the Son represents *Guru*

*Ishvaro gurumatmeti murti bheda vibhagine vyomavad vyapta dehaya dakshinamurtaye namah*, meaning that God appears to his devotee

in the form of a Guru (son of God), and points out to him the immanence of the Holy Spirit. That is to say that God is Spirit, that this Spirit is immanent everywhere and that the Self must be realized, which is the same as realizing God.

**D: Why do religions speak of Gods, heaven, hell, etc.?**

**M:** Only to make people realize that they are on par with this world and that the Self alone is real. The religions are according to the viewpoint of the seeker. Take the Bhagavad Gita, for instance: When Arjuna said that he would not fight against his own relatives, his elders, etc., in order to kill them and gain the kingdom, Sri Krishna said, "Not that these, you or I, were not before, are not now, nor will not be hereafter" and so on. Later, as he developed the theme and declared that He had given the same instruction to the Sun, through him to Ikshvaku, etc., Arjuna raised the doubt, "How could it be? You were born a few years ago. They lived ages ago." Then, Sri Krishna, understanding Arjuna's standpoint, said: "Yes, there have been so many incarnations of myself and yourself; I know them all, but you do not know."

Such statements appear contradictory, yet are

correct according to the viewpoint of the questioner. Christ also declared that He was even born before Abraham.

**D: What is the purpose of such descriptions in religions?**

**M:** Only to establish the Reality of the Self.

**D: What does Bhagavan think of the "lost soul" mentioned by Jesus Christ?**

**M:** Think what there is to be lost. Is there anything to lose? What matters is only that which is natural. Such must be eternal and cannot be experienced. That which is born must die; that which is acquired must be lost. Were you born? You are ever existent. The Self can never be lost.

The ultimate Truth is so simple. It is nothing more than being in the pristine state. This is all that need be said. Still, it is a wonder that to teach this simple Truth there should come into being so many religions, creeds, methods and disputes among them and so on! Oh, the pity! Oh, the pity!

**D: Should we read the Gita (Indian spiritual text) once in a while?**

**M:** Always.

**D: May we read the Bible?**

**M:** The Bible and the Gita are the same.

**D: The Bible teaches that Man is born in sin.**

**M:** The man is sin. There was no man-sense in deep sleep. The body-thought brings out the idea of sin. The birth of thought is itself sin.

— Excerpted from 'Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi'



No. 5, Third Main Road,  
Kalaimagal Nagar  
Ekkaduthangal, Chennai – 600 097  
Phone: 044-43542210.  
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# PLANNED TO PERFECTION

# Contentment—inner stability for growth

*A Series on Growing-Reflections for Deep Change*

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

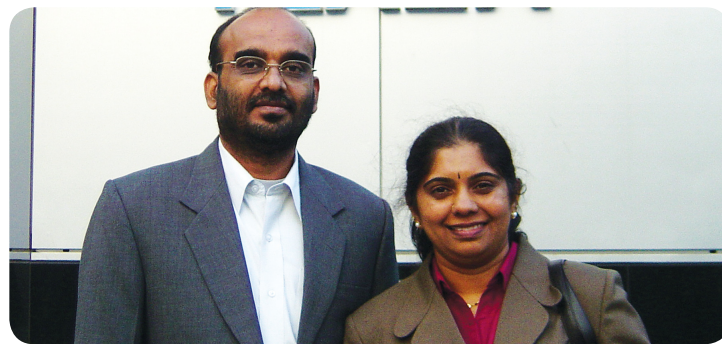
we identify where we need to grow. How do I identify that kind of spaces if I am content with myself? How does the action of relentless pursuit happen?

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?

—J.M.Sampath, & Kalpana Sampath

## Power of Positive Thinking

This power is the power of the servant leader. Positive thinking is an attitude to possess all the time. Positive is the direct opposite of negative. Negative thinking leads to a defeatist mentality, results in failing to achieve. Negative thinking leads to lack of self-confidence; positive thinking leads, knits a team, a task force, reinforces oneness and leads to success in each and every effort or activity.

One has to discipline the thinking and visualise the processes and goals for achievement. Even to negative thinking or expression, one should react positively. Learning lessons from adverse circumstances and reactions, you build a strong positive ‘Now’ and deal with it; then the future will fall in place, leaving you to look for changes that may be occurring. Winners visualise the rewards of success.

You can stand up for others, be their counsel, mentor, guardian and advocate. When you share what you have, with others, the balance that stays with you multiplies and grows manifold. Positive thinking leads you to the great quality of Giving and Sharing. When you get a little, give a little.

(The philosophy of “Each one reach one” gets a strong hold of you in that practice)

You can give immediately, and now—‘a smile’, ‘a kind word’, ‘an applause’, ‘hope’,



‘happiness’, ‘cheer’, and ‘a loving response’. These responses come out of the heart, emotionally integrated, and therefore leaves a lasting, positive feeling and response. It is an unending chain of relationship.

You try and abandon ‘the pity in you’ and ‘the pride in you’. You are on your way to become a positive thinker incarnate.

## Some interesting quotes:

Conviction about conviction  
The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams. – Eleanor Roosevelt  
You should refuse to accept anything but the best. You most often achieve it.

Create a chain reaction of goodwill and positive mental attitude when dealing with others in your team, community, neighbourhood and society.

Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing.

– Albert Schweitzer

Peak performers are people who approach any set of circumstances with an attitude that they can get it to turn out the way they want it to. Not once a while.. Regularly. They can count on themselves.

—Charles Garfield.

Do all the good you can  
By all the means you can  
In all the ways you can  
In all the places you can  
To all the people you can  
As long as you ever can.

—John Wesley

My philosophy is that only you are responsible for your life, but doing the best at this moment puts you in the best place for the next moment.

—Oprah Winfrey

Your greatest prayer lies in the power of prayer.

—W.Clement Stone

—P.N. Devarajan



# Paragon of Virtue

*Dr. V. Irai Anbu, an IAS officer of the 1985 batch, is the Secretary to Government, Environment and Forest Department. He holds more than half a dozen degrees, and is presently pursuing his second Ph.D in Comparative Literature. An able communicator in English and Tamil, he is a writer and author; poet and educator; counselor and motivator—in short a multi-faceted personality. He has written over 20 books covering short stories, creative parables, poetry, and essays apart from contributing articles to various publications. In an exclusive interview with Marie Banu, Irai Anbu shares insights to his success and social issues of today.*

## V. Irai Anbu IAS shares with Marie Banu insights to his success and social issues of today

As Secretary of the tourism department, you had launched innovative programmes, and were instrumental for the department to win eight National awards and one International award for Tourism. In your present portfolio as Secretary – Environment and Forests, what are the innovative programmes that you plan to launch here?

In every department, there is scope for innovation and in the Environment and Forest department there is plenty of scope too. I have just joined two months ago and am studying the functioning of the department. I want to start eco-friendly clubs in each and every village. These clubs can work on tree plantation, sensitise the villagers on the importance of ecology, avoid use of polythene bags and plastic, and provide environmental education. We are looking at introducing guides at Vandalur zoo, and are conceptualising on a lot of projects.

There are several NGOs working on environment related issues. In which way could they associate with your department?

I am an easily approachable person and I am ready to spend any number of hours with them, if it is going to do something for the cause of the people. I have the experience of being associated with some NGOs in various places. We started moonlight schools in Kancheepuram. I keep track of the functioning of these schools which is meant for children above 14 years working in the looms. We are ready to liaise with NGOs and work in the coastal villages.

A lot of pressing social issues affects our day-to-day lives. Which of them disturb you?

The cost that we are paying in the name of progress is very high. All these could be attributed to lack of work culture and laziness in a few important sectors. I feel that the

problem that India faces today is not climate change, sea level rise, population, or poverty. We have started deteriorating in work culture. Many do not have passion for the work. They don't enjoy it. We spend more time on wasteful entertainment and meaningless work.

The focus which we had 1000 years ago is missing. We cannot construct another big Temple today, although there is so much of technology available. We have become money oriented. Easy money and quick money has become the way of life. This bothers me because anything else can be retrieved, but not the loss of character.

After completing half a dozen degrees and a doctorate already, you are presently pursuing your second doctorate in literature? What motivates you to keep studying?

It is a kind of motivation that I have fixed for myself over a period of time. Initially when I joined the university I wanted to pursue a doctoral degree. Later, I understood that working in a university may not provide opportunities that will suit my taste. I am more a generalist and like to work with people, travel a lot, and understand the psyche of people. I am not a research oriented person and cannot work with machines. So, I decided to come out from the University.

Immediately after college, I joined the department as an Agricultural officer as I did not want to depend on my parents. I moved to a village called Rayakottai, which is around 30 kms away from Krishnagiri, where one should order for an English newspaper a week in advance. My journey for civil services started there. I cleared the Civil Service Exam in the first attempt. I joined IRS. In the second attempt, I got the 15th rank and first place in Tamil Nadu. Hence I entered into administrative service.

Academic pursuit helps a person to perform his job in a better manner. Your ability to communicate improves, and because of this you will be able to excel in your curriculum and impress people who come to talk on business lines with you. The gift of gab is always essential for an administrator, more so in the present times, where it is a conflict oriented society and various interest groups are continuously working for a common cause.

Your books for youth to encourage them take up IAS examinations have been well received. What is your advice for the youth of today to take up civil services?

In those days, when I had appeared for the Civil Service Examination, there was not enough study material. Particularly in Tamil Nadu, not many people were available to give inputs, and even book shops were not available. That is why I wrote books to motivate students of Tamil Nadu to take up this examination

and come out successfully.

Youth are in a better position today, and need not have to sweat out searching for information. They can just ferret out the information from the website. Planning, prioritisation of time, preparation, and presentation are very important. There are four aspects for the selection in civil services: selection of optionals, collection of materials, preparation, and presentation. Now, for the first two, a lot of information is available and there are a lot of people to guide students and institutions are available to train them. For preparation and presentation aspects, they will have to work hard.

What were your learnings and experience while working for the fisher folk at Mudhaliar Kuppam, a coastal village at Villupuram?

Tsunami has taught us that we should have more awareness on environment and we should live in harmony with nature. We should understand nature, appreciate nature, and we cannot fight against nature. Whatever development that we do should be holistic.

The courage of the fisher folk was tremendous. No other community would have had such resilience to come back to normal life with so much of speed. Danger was not new for them. As Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said, the fisherman could be rightly called as people who live dangerously. There are some basic problems that are associated with their lives but that require a lot of education. As we know, earlier there were about 70 percent of people dependant on agriculture, but today, this is not the case. Similarly, dependency on fishing should get reduced. Alternative livelihoods are to be discovered and implemented.

Your advice for NGOs to improve work culture?

There are many NGOs who are working for the cause of the people. There is no point in having a confronting attitude towards the government, because you have lot of well meaning government servants also. No one should have extremism in anything. My point of view is to work on the holistic development of the people. We should focus on education, awareness and educate the people not only on their rights, but also on their duties.

There is no networking amongst NGOs. If there are integrated efforts of NGOs, the results would be tremendous.

## Editorial

Latha Suresh  
Marie Banu

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