

# Conversations

*A Chronicle of Social Currents*

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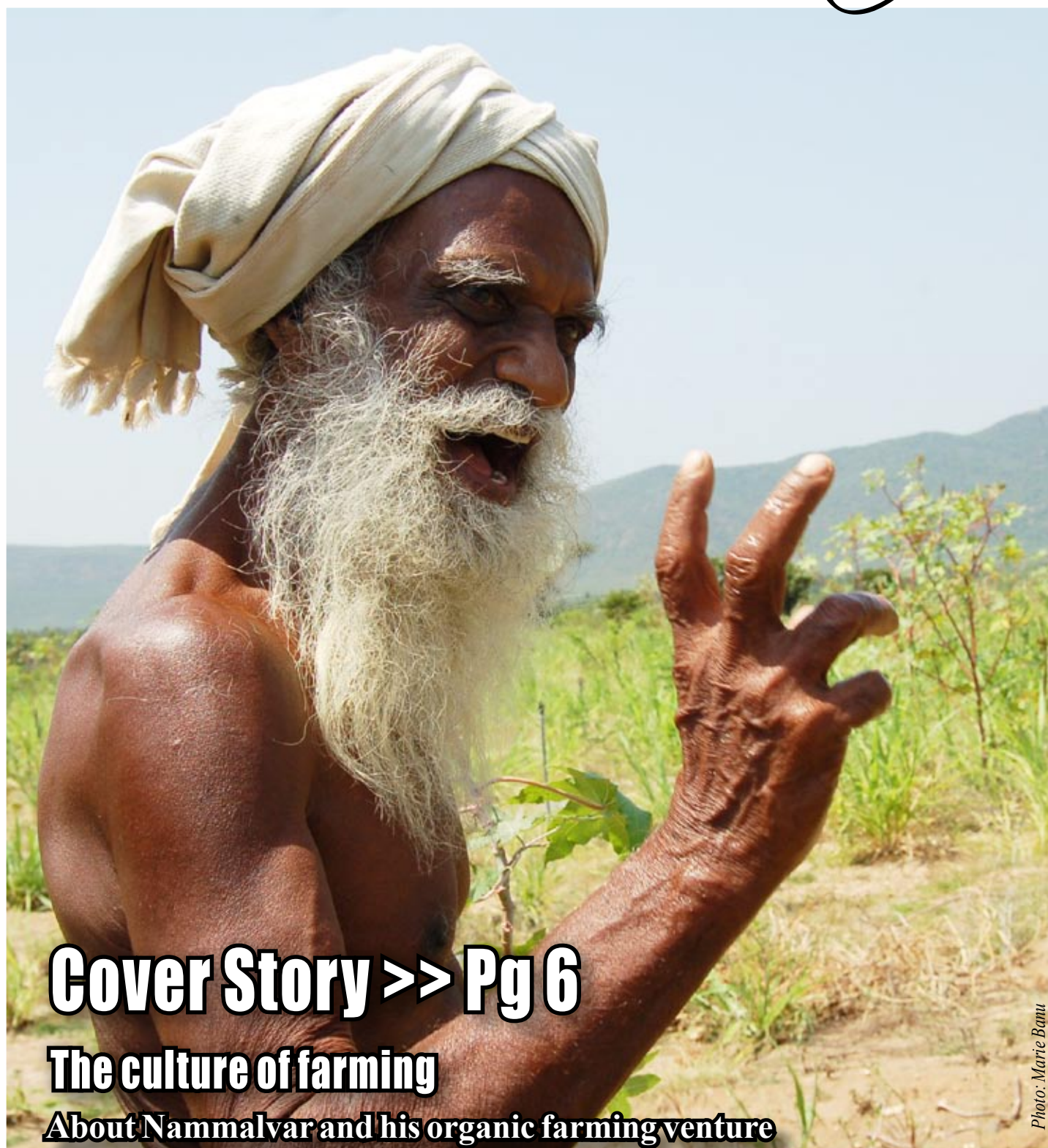


Photo: Marie Banu

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## From the Editor

Dear Friends,

The place of Guru is of paramount acceptance. The Guru Shishya relationship is deep and sacred. The Guru gives an opportunity, guidance, and mentorship to the *shishya* on his path to self-discovery; looking inwards-discovery of truth.

The sublimation of intelligence, action, and knowledge is the emergence of truth. Thus looking inwards free of negative influence, reveals one's own inner consciousness, thereby completely harmonizing with universal consciousness.

The stories featured this month talk

about different social entrepreneurs who have donned the hat of a Guru enabling many children across India to unleash their hidden potential.

May this trend continue and lead our nation to an enlightened path.

Happy reading!

**P. N. Devarajan**



# Prospective Social Entrepreneurs



**T**he Prospective Social Entrepreneurs who were completing their Postgraduate Diploma in Social Initiative and Management at CSIM, Chennai presented their project proposals on 4th May 2011 to a three-member panel. The panel members consisted of Mrs. Bhanu Suresh, Founder & Director, Concern; Mr. S. Padmanaban, Senior Manager (Retd.), Bank of India; and Ms. Marie Banu, Head-Communications, CSIM.

#### About the projects

Mr. Vidhyapathi plans to start a Mother and child health improvement initiative.

He wants to train the youth in the Police Boys club to conduct awareness programs on maternal health. He plans to network with the family Planning Association of India and launch the program in Virugambakkam shortly.

Ms. Bhavani is very upset with the growing numbers of adolescent girls who were victims of unwanted pregnancy and early marriage in her neighborhood in North Madras. She thus plans to launch an NGO that would guide and counsel adolescent girls and make them plan their future in an appropriate manner.

Ms. Vijayashanthi plans to offer counseling services in schools to children

and parents to prevent suicide amongst school children. She is going to launch her first project in the government school at Ashok Nagar, Chennai.

Mr. Manikandan and Mr. Chandrasekar are young farmers from Tiruvallur district. They are eager to try new farming techniques in their farms by adopting Organic Farming and integrated farming techniques.

Ms. Sornalatha, belonging to the Irula community, proposes to launch the integrated farming concept in the 3 Acres of land given by the government to the tribal community. She envisages this as an income generation project for the women

of her community.

Ms. Backiarani works for the Prince of Peace Trust. She plans to launch a Digital literacy program at Nerkundram, wherein the urban poor youth would be trained in computers and other soft skills.

Mr. Karthikeyan disturbed by the growing number of alcoholics in his neighbourhood -Vadapalani, plans to launch awareness programs and de-addiction counseling sessions along with Concern, an NGO that offers de-addiction service.

—Latha Suresh

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**  
AND VEGETARIAN GOODNESS AT **Cream Centre**



# A TURNING POINT FOR EVERY CHILD

*"The environment maketh a man. What children need is not just a school to go to and a roof over their head, but a conducive environment for their personalities to develop holistically."*

Whilst still a teenager, Morarji Desai realized his innate leadership qualities, when during his high school days he would volunteer to read for the visually challenged. While pursuing his Bachelor's Degree in Tamil Literature, he volunteered at several charitable organizations which gave him ample exposure to the grinding life in the slums in and around Chennai. Before you wonder, we are not talking of the illustrious national leader of the yester generation here, but an equally promising social worker who was born to a patriotic police officer and raised in a selfless, service oriented familial environment.

Talking enthusiastically of his background, Desai says, "During 1995-1998 I studied at Loyola College, Chennai, and enrolled in All India Catholic University Federation (AICUF). It was through AICUF that I started working part time in 'Nesakkaram', an organization which promoted education awareness in the slums in collaboration with the police. I also worked for a while with 'CHOLAI' an organization that worked with at-risk children in Thiruvanniyur." This, he says was the turning point in his life, as working with at-risk children deepened his passion for child welfare.

Desai continued to work in the slum areas for a couple of years until tsunami hit the sub-continent in 2004. As tsunami heightened the proliferation of slums and poverty, he began to grow increasingly concerned about the future of the children who dwelt in them. "What will happen to these children if they were to rot in the squalor of these slums?" wonders a fervent Desai.

"The environment maketh a man. What children need is not just a school to go to and a roof over their head, but a conducive environment for their personalities to develop holistically. For that, starting from a young age, they need to be nurtured in a safe, healthy and balanced environment that is based on values," he explains and has set out to practise just that, through his organization called Turning Point Charitable Trust.

Registered in 2008, Turning Point was started under the guidance of Morarji Desai's mentor, Rotarian Gopinath. Currently funded by the multinational company Grundfos Ltd., the trust works for the promotion of quality education among children in slums, focusing in the slum at Rotary Nagar near the Marina Beach.

"Initially, a group of volunteers worked full time to add momentum to our work. We have always strived to maintain cordial relations with the police. Inspector

Rajalakshmi, who is one of the most dedicated police officers I have known, introduced me to Rotary Nagar," says Desai, who regards police support and contribution as being pivotal to the success of his endeavours. He has garnered enough goodwill through his multitudinous slum interventions.

Travelling rearwards and recollecting his journey in promoting child welfare, he says: "I always knew how to care for children. My various volunteering exercises and a short stint at 'Childline' taught me the nuances of child care really well. However, after two years of running Turning Point Charitable Trust, I found myself struggling with the whole burden of responsibility towards the Trust. Though I was leading a small team of workers, I held most of the reins up to the minutest detail. I also required to learn a lot about major things like finding financial support and running the



***I have to thank CSIM for equipping me with the necessary skills to efficiently run the organization*** ”

organization from a larger perspective."

Desai joined CSIM's four-month certificate course on Social Entrepreneurship in 2010. "I have learnt some of the most valuable lessons

pertaining to running of an NGO from this course. I have to thank CSIM for equipping me with the necessary skills to efficiently run the organization," says a grateful Desai.

When asked to talk about the achievements of Turning Point Charitable Trust, he first calls out to Mani who was in the nearby community hall getting ready for a dance rehearsal. "Mani used to be the chairman of the Children's Parliament that we helped set up a year ago. He should be able to tell you about the progress we made last year, as he was the one managing the affairs of the parliament even when the adult monitors were not around" smiles Desai.

Mani rants off one after another in quick succession of the activities of his Children's Parliament. "We conducted a survey in our neighbourhood to identify

non-school going children and found that there were at least a hundred of them in our midst. The Trust is relentlessly lobbying with the nearby schools to admit these children and has been running a tuition centre in the community hall for over a year now," says Mani.

"The children need to be made aware of the progress they had made since the day they started paying slightly more attention to their studies. For that, the Children's Parliament decided to reward the efforts put in by deserving students. We have instituted an award for every child who has progressed from a lower rank to the higher rank. A child who probably had failed earlier, but now managed to pass all his/her papers would also get an award, as opposed to a relatively better ranking student who either maintained or fell short of his/her rank," adds Mani. This idea was thought of solely by the children and it is evident that Desai is a proud man thinking about the extent of insight these children have shown.

Mani runs off shortly after to join his friends who were rehearsing for a dance performance to be held in a few days' time. The collective energy of the children is infectious and we take a quick peek into the dancing crowd, only to find our own feet tapping to the rhythm involuntarily. With just an hour of practice, the young ones twirl and twist with great elegance and style.

Desai has chosen to take his calling in this field unflinchingly, even though he may have initially faced some resistance from his family. However, today he has struck a balance between his twin passions—home and work—by dividing time proportionally and dedicating himself on both fronts. "Wherever I may be, Sundays are strictly for my family. I do not take up any work asides of what my family demands of me on that day," says Desai.

About the plans for Turning Point Charitable Trust in the near future, Morarji Desai would like to expand the geographical horizon of the Trust's outreach from its existing boundaries in T.Nagar, Rotary nagar, Ayodhikkuppam, and Parry's, to Kannagi Nagar. The trust has been working hand-in-hand with a few other NGOs in Ayodhikkuppam as well.

Though there is a lot of internal conflict among organizations with similar interests, Morarji Desai believes that the more of them get together to work, the better it will be for the society. We wish him all the best in his painstaking journey toward crafting a bright childhood for children, which is the most difficult task to do.

—Archanaa R.

## UNSUNG BEACONS

*Stories of people for  
whom humanity matters*

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

# Unsung Beacons

*The collection of stories in Unsung Beacons is unique, as it throws light on the lesser known social servants of Tamil Nadu who are not in the limelight*

**U**nsung Beacons is a compilation of inspiring stories featured in Conversations from January – December 2010. Published by CSIM, this book kindles compassion and empathy in the soul of the reader.

Stories of people from humble backgrounds living for a 'cause' and motivated to make the world a much more beautiful place in their own way has been captured in this book. The collection covers a cross section of issues ranging from ecology to economy and is 'must read' for all – students, teachers, executives, administrators, philanthropists, and altruists.

"The collection of stories in Unsung Beacons is unique, as it throws light on the lesser known

social servants of Tamil Nadu who are not in the limelight. Service is to be done with compassion and bliss.

Dr. Irai Anbu, IAS who penned the foreword for this publication says, "A documentation of this sort will be a great revelation for many of us and will create ripples in our subconscious minds silently. A great effort to be admired, acknowledged, and applauded. The collection is to be read over a period of time without being rushed through. One should meditate on every article to make the contents percolate into the inner fathoms of one's heart. We have to make a sincere inquiry into our existence and purpose on this earth. Every article has a painful history and subsequent success

spun in simple words. Truth is always simple sans decorations."

"The Unsung Beacons is indeed a treatise on people and their deeds, flowering out of their belief in service, and their unlimited and unconditional love to fellow beings. Truly, they are ever evolving social entrepreneurs and leaders in their chosen path and passion. Each story helps us in reinstating our faith amongst humanity. In all, this book is an inspirational reading for everyone. I recommend it as a Healthy soup for the Heart," says Mr P. N. Devarajan, Founder, CSIM.

*This publication is priced at  
Rs. 100. If you wish to buy a  
copy, write to [cmdc@csim.in](mailto:cmdc@csim.in) or  
call +919884700029.*

## CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY & RESPONSIBILITY



### Two-Day Management Development Programme

**28th & 29th June 2011**

*Jointly organised by*

Centre for Social Initiative and Management  
&  
Business & Community Foundation



**Venue: YWCA International Guest House, Poonamalee High Road, Chennai**

**Registration Fee: Rs 15,000/- per participant.**

*For more than 2 participants from the same company, a 10% discount will be given.*

**Last date for registration: 20th June 2011**

*The course is designed for CEOs, senior & middle level managers, others who manage Corporate responsibility related dimensions as part of their core operations; senior executives from Non profit organizations, International organizations, government, academic institutions who are involved in corporate partnerships, etc.*

**For registration, please contact: Marie Banu, Centre for Social Initiative and Management,  
391/1, Venkatachalapathi Nagar, Alapakkam, Chennai - 600 116.  
Phone: 91 44 24867565, 42805365, 9884700029. Email: [chennai@csim.in](mailto:chennai@csim.in)**



## An inspiring conversation with entrepreneur turned philanthropist Mr. R. P. Krishnamachari on his journey in philanthropy

**K**rishnamachari, Managing Director and CEO is the founder of Tex Biosciences. A Chemical Engineer by qualification, Mr. Krishnamachari holds 35 years of operational and managerial experience in the Bio-tech industry. As a philanthropist, he has been an inspiration for many.

*In an exclusive interview with Marie Banu, he speaks about his experience being a first generation entrepreneur, and his philanthropy.*

### Being a first generation entrepreneur, what has been your experience?

I am a graduate in chemical engineering. My father was a professor in Kumbakonam Government College. After working for three years in a private company, where I worked under Mr. P.N. Devarajan, I started my own business. In 1976, I started this biotech company. This was the first biotech company in the SME sector. Now, bio-tech is a high tech area, and we are making various products in the area of pharmaceuticals, poultry, etc.

My mother had faith in me and gave me Rs. 5,000 towards my first investment. My father did not accept me to leave a secure job. I belonged to a Brahmin family, who was very conservative in opinion, and they did not want me to risk my career. From 1976 to 1982, I faced a lot of struggle. There was no guidance available in the field of bio-technology nor was there foreign collaboration. Today, Tex biosciences is one of the leading companies in India. We export our products to over 25 countries all over the world, and we have around 200 staff working with us. I have completed about 35 years in this sector, and my company has one of the most modern facilities available.

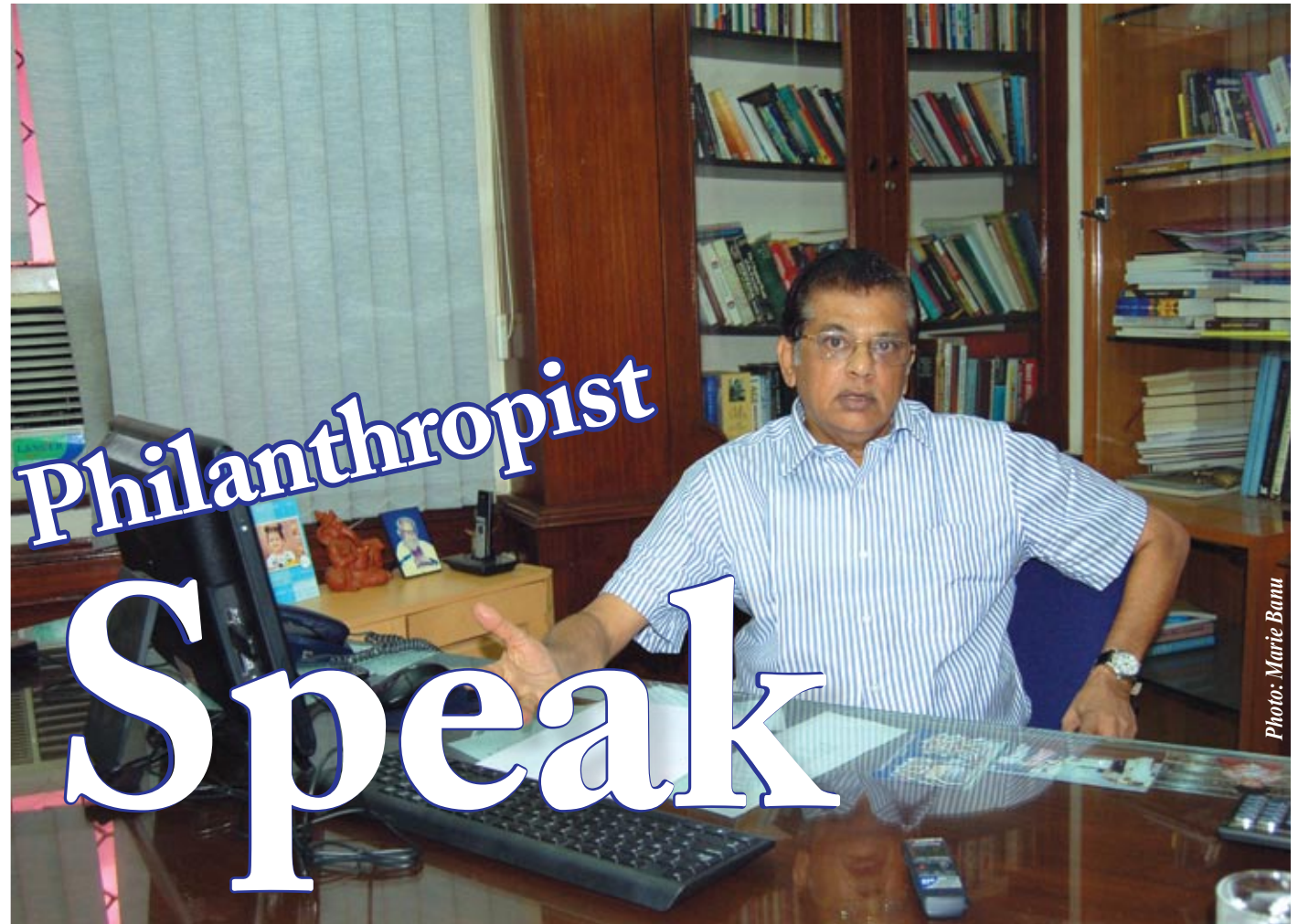
### Why and when did you start being a philanthropist?

During college, I belonged to the communist party and was later associated with the trade union. I had a strong feeling to repay my debt to the society that has given me such a good life. Once my company started making profit, we made it a policy to contribute 30 to 40 percent of our earnings towards charity. Luckily, my son and daughter have accepted my decision.

### What are the social causes that you support?

We have selected a few projects and we have been supporting them continuously. For instance, for CSIM, we have contributed nearly 40 to 50 lakhs so far. We also sponsor 5 to 6 candidates to undergo their PGDSIM course here. Besides, we extend support to Madras Medical Mission's National Heart Foundation through which more patients are able to benefit from this programme.

We also run three schools at Kanyakumari district—Thakkalai, Karungal, and Radhakrishnapuram. These



schools that are already functional are being provided with infrastructure facilities to the tune of Rs. 1.5 crore. About 3,000 children belonging to the fishermen community benefit from this programme. Supporting the cause of education is my first and top priority; next is health. We also run 280 single teacher schools in remote villages across India. In the north this is called 'Ekal Vidyalaya'.

### Can you tell us more about the single teacher schools?

We offer Rs. 50,000 to each of the single teacher schools every year, and engage a local person who has completed graduation as the teacher. Community space is used for teaching, and we provide the children with reading material. The syllabus adopted in these schools is approved by the Government of India, and donations towards this programme are 100 percent tax exempt. This effort has created a tremendous change at the village level. Children studying in government schools are not taught about culture and heritage, whereas in 'Ekal Vidyalaya' this is done.

Classes are scheduled from 6 P.M. to 8 P.M. Besides good education, children are also taught moral values. Around 4,000 students are reached through this programme. We identify the area, meet the Panchayat leader, recruit the local teacher, and provide them training for 15 days. We have a full fledged staff employed under Vivekananda Rural Development Society

to manage this programme which is operational for the past 10 years. We contribute around Rs. 10 to 12 lakhs every year, and also collect donations from our friends. This is our major project!

The single teacher concept is a huge success. In Thiruvallur district alone, we run 40 schools. The enthusiasm you see in the children is remarkable. This programme has made a total change in the lives of these children. They are the future and we have to mould them.

### Has the social service activities made a change in the working culture of your organisation?

Our staff relate to each other as family. Whatever good we do, it percolates down. We at Tex-Bio do not share a boss-employee relationship, nor do we compel our staff to participate in the social work activities. Recently, I was told that my staff has contributed Rs. 25,000 for a charity and collected Rs. 4 lakh in 10 days time for the DOS programme. The DOS programme, as you know, is managed by Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani and encourages donors to contribute Dal, Oil, and Sugar, which is distributed to charities in and around the city.

### What are the pre-requisites for a charity to seek your support? Your advice for CSR programmes?

I don't think that we have a pre-requisite to contribute for a specific cause. I don't

think that I have done something great, and I should be patted. Sharing and caring should be in one's culture. I am not competent enough to give guidance on how a CSR programme should be done.

### About your association with the Lions Club?

I am one of the trustees of Lion's blood bank. We were the first to organize a camp with Padmashri Kamal Haasan. Today, we are one of the leading blood banks and once in three months our employees donate 30 to 40 bottles of blood. Recently, We donated an ambulance to a hospital at Cherakulam near Thirunelveli district.

### Most of the young corporate employees today do not have exposure to the ground realities in our society? Your advice for them?

They should visit villages. Today, whatever you may speak about GDP, it is about the upper strata of the society which is hardly two percent. One would realize what real poverty is and the problems they face only when you visit villages. Only then, you will know the other side of India, which is very important. Every day is a struggle for them.

I tell my corporate staff that by making a donation after reading an appeal does not suffice!





Photos: Marie Banu

# The culture of FARMING

**“Agriculture is a culture in itself, which should be respected by each individual involved in farming.” —Nammalwar**

Nammalvar, a pioneer who re-introduced the concept of organic farming in Tamil Nadu was born in a farmer's family at Elangadu near Thanjavur. He pursued his graduation in Agriculture, and as an Agricultural Scientist was involved in numerous experiments regarding seeds, soil, and farming techniques. He was bestowed with an honorary doctorate in 2007 by the Gandhigram Rural University for his expertise in the field of natural and organic farming.

Recently, he conducted a three-day training Programme on organic farming in which CSIM students participated. A visit to his farm at Vanagam, in Karur district, revealed the reason why he is a role model for thousands of farmers today.

Nammalvar was cycling his way back to his cottage transporting a bag full of coir compost. The heat did not seem to deter him from his work. He greeted us with his warm smile and led us to his farm. “This coir is used as mulch for the plants. Let's keep talking as we get ourselves trained,” he quips.

The trainees and I followed him diligently. He gave some stem cuttings and told us to plant them in the nursery bags that were kept ready. At first, it seemed to be a simple exercise. But, very soon we realized that farming is not easy as it appears to be.

After planting the stem cuttings and adding mulch to the nursery bags, he took us around his farm which was spread over 55 acres, in which 6 acres was cultivated. “This land was barren and was not cultivated for over twenty years. It is only for the past ten months, I am working on converting this into a model farm,” he proudly says.

It was a pleasant sight to see greenery and mountains surrounding us. Having adopted mixed cropping pattern, a variety of vegetables and trees were planted in the farm. The ladies finger seemed to be larger than usual, and likewise did the tomatoes and gourds. “All these crops are grown the organic way. You will find these vegetables to taste better than the ones you would find in the city,” he adds.

“Why are the neighboring lands not cultivated?” I ask impulsively while looking at the large stretch of waste lands that hit a contrast just besides his farm. “These lands were given by the government to the villagers on a 20 year lease. But, they have not been able to cultivate due to lack of water sources. This is now being used to graze cattle,” he replies.

Nammalvar uses different mulching techniques to retain the

soil moisture and make optimum use of water. He follows a mixed cropping system, which results in daily harvesting, and hence the labourers are engaged on a permanent basis.

Retreating back to his cottage, he continues the dialogue. Sensing my curiosity to know more about his journey in organic farming, he shares tit bits of his youth and the challenges he faced.

“While working in an Oxfam funded project during the 80's, I was inspired by articles written by Paulo Freire on conscientization and extension. Paulo Freire has said: ‘education is a two-way communication process. If you want to do development for the people, you should also participate in the process.’”

Vinoba Bhawe, who also wrote an article in this magazine said: ‘Pure theoretical education is not education at all. This set the beginning for me



to launch the organic farming movement,” says Nammalvar.

Distracted by few trainees who were not attentive, he says brushing his long white furry beard, “I had the opportunity to attend a five-day training programme titled ‘Paulo Freire on communicative behavior’. In this, I realized that I lacked the quality of active listening, an important trait for a learner. In these five days of training, I did not have time to shave my beard. I said to myself, ‘I did not lose any friends, because I did not shave my beard. So why do it anymore?’”

He continued saying, “While developing my farm at Pudukottai, my father had given me three acres of land. At that point of time, my father-in-law was about to sell his land due to non-repayment of debts. I sold my land, relieved his debts, and transferred his land in the name of my wife, so that she could be independent. She still cultivates this land, but does not follow organic farming methods. When I asked her to give me a

portion of it to prove that organic farming is more productive, she refused. What more do you need to learn? It is a challenge to convince farmers to change their farming practices.”

“People need to see in order to believe. It does not suffice for them to hear alone. Hence, I formed a trust along with few of my friends called ‘Nammalvar Ecological Foundation for Farm Research and Global Food Security Trust’, and started creating model farms. Agriculture is location specific. Crops and farming methods should be changed based on the availability of natural resources.”

“The model farm launched in 1990 at Keeranur in Pudukottai is now a training centre. We implemented organic farming practices using locally available materials. Our intention was to increase the knowledge amongst the farmers and encourage them



***If you want to do development for the people, you should also participate in the process*** ”

to make optimum use of locally available materials. This concept was well received by the farmers, and we now have more than 75 model farms spread all over Tamil Nadu,” he says enthusiastically.

Nammalvar explained how nature provided Nitrogen (N), Phosphorus (P) and Potassium (K) to the plants which were the three main ingredients in Chemical fertilizers. He showed samples of nodules in leguminous plants and explained how a groundnut sapling could fix nitrogen in the soil, which is more effective than the chemical fertilizers. This was the basis of Permaculture—a sustainable

farming practice which enhance the soil fertility and provides all the nutrients necessary for the growth of plants. This is the method of farming that he prescribes!

Questioning the trainees, on the reason why a farmer should engage in agriculture, and not convinced with any of their responses, he says, “I believe that the objective of farming should be happiness. Agriculture is a culture in itself, which should be respected by each individual involved in farming. It should not be viewed as a commercial or business activity. That's why we call it ‘Agriculture’. Just like other cultural forms, a person involved in agriculture should be creative and in tune with nature.”

Taking a break from the dialogue, we were all served lunch. The sambhar tasted extraordinary and so was the broad beans curry. “These are all made from vegetables grown in our farm,” he says tasting the drumstick.

While speaking about his childhood, he nostalgically says, “When I was ten years old, my mother died after a prolonged illness. My father too died when I was young. My elder sister was very influential. She used to tell me not to believe in everything what others say. My brothers wanted me to study science. I wanted to be helpful to the farming community, and so I pursued my graduation in Agricultural Science at Annamalai University.”

Nammalvar's family lives at Thanjavur. Both his granddaughters are computer engineers, one of them recently married. “My life revolves around this farm. We have another farm which is spread over 10 acres nearby. My daughter, sisters and brothers are proud of my achievement in organic farming. But, my wife is still not convinced about my approach. I did not let this bother me, and I started working with people who believed in sustainable agriculture. To learn to live a life without grief is happiness. This is the life I am leading,” concludes Nammalvar.

Nammalvar plans to organize short-term courses on organic farming. He wants to create model farms along the outskirts of Chennai that would produce organic vegetables. Through his organization, he is willing to offer technical support in managing the farm and also market the produce in Chennai.

***Individuals who own an acre of land and are interested in this sustainable movement can contact Nammalvar by sadhguru@gmail.com or call +91-94425-31699.***

—Marie Banu



# Studying Among Friends



In the year 1825, 'Friends Service Sponsor' was established in Sohagpur, Hoshangabad district, as an orphanage by a London society. It was home to a number of orphan girls who earned their living by making dolls. It is believed that the orphanage was a result of persistent efforts by the then Begum of Bhopal, Qudsia Begum, who wished to do something for the girls.

In 1855, the orphanage was converted into a primary school, and in 1909, it was upgraded to a middle school incorporating English as a vernacular language. Later, it was upgraded to include grade 9. The first batch saw just nine girls in the 9th grade, who were called the 'Nine Gems'. Education was provided to all students free of cost.

Today, the school, aided by the government, offers 10+2 education with no tuition fees. A nominal amount prescribed by the government is charged towards examinations, sports, scout/girls guide, Red Cross, and sundry expenses. The school is also funded by the Friends School Governing Board which runs another school in Itarsi town, Hoshangabad district.

Scholarships is offered to few students as 'kanya protsahan' (girl child encouragement). Also, the school also offers grants to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students, who are paid Rs. 500, Rs. 1,000 and Rs. 2,000 respectively after they succeed in their 7th, 8th and 11th grade examinations. The government's efforts to encourage

girl children education include granting a bicycle to every girl child who enrolls in the school.

The school is equipped with appropriate infrastructure, and offers Science, Maths, Commerce, Arts, and Home Science for the higher secondary students. It also offers hostel facilities for girl children, and houses up to 60 girls.

The current batch of 'Friends School' comprises of 100 students in the primary section, and 370 students in the secondary and higher secondary section. The

employees who are receiving the same salary since 2000.

This leads to the management unable to hire new employees to replace those who have retired. As a result, the existing teachers fill this gap. Mr. G.R. Mandoi, one of the oldest employees of the school, who had worked as an accountant, now works as a clerk on the request of the Board. "We cannot hire any new people and so the board requested me to stay so that I can help the staff," quips Mandoi.

***We cannot hire any new people and so the board requested me to stay so that I can help the staff***

”

school's alumni boast of some MLAs, doctors, and engineers. It also holds a distinction of obtaining 96-97% success in the higher secondary examination.

Even though 'Friends School' is the oldest school in the entire district, and stands firm with support from a known and established entity, it faces a number of avoidable and unavoidable issues. In 2000, the government decided to stop providing aid to the school, but due to an ongoing court case, the school now receives only 50% of its grant. This hampers the career growth of the

Since English is 'believed' to be necessary for any endeavour in today's society, Hindi and other regional language schools are constantly undermined by both parents as well as children. This can be seen in the numbers who reside here. There are now 50 girls as compared to the 250 girls who resided in the hostel until three years ago. The reducing numbers have forced the primary school to operate as a co-education school, and there are 15 boys who study in the current batch.

Apart from the limitations, the faculty

manages to retain a name in academic as well as co-curricular activities. The girls participate in district level sports, head for camps each year, and learn dance and classical music.

The most intriguing quality of the school is its apt use of land owned by the school authorities. It contributes a lot more than its academic role by utilizing the land to grow wheat and other pulses, which is provided as food to the hostel students.

The girls love being a part of the school. "Our teachers are quite lenient and they love each one of us. We are taught by the same teachers across the classes, and so they happen to know all our weaknesses quite well," says Khyati, a 11th standard commerce student.

Also studying along with these girls, are four married girls who attend the school regularly and manage to maintain their grades well.

While the existence of Hindi medium schools is on a steep decline in the urban areas, repercussions are felt in the small towns as well. Like every other school, 'Friends Higher Secondary School' of Sohagpur is seeing a downfall in its enrolment each year. At this point of time, the government needs to back such schools in facilitation of quality education.

— Kanika Sikka  
Asian College of Journalism



**“The Gujarat riots left a deep angst in me. I constantly questioned myself, ‘Why do people behave the way they do?’ The next question was, ‘What can I do about it?’**

# From Angst To Arts

**E**ngaging in any form of art is a process, a journey of self-discovery. “Art is the only way to run away without leaving home,” said the celebrated dancer-choreographer Twyla Tharp. In the eyes of Sriram Ayer whose world was a victim of systematic destruction, art seemed the surest antidote.

On a December day in 2003, Ayer quit his high flying corporate job in a multinational company to start Nalandaway Foundation, an organization that reaches out to children from troubled backgrounds through the channel of art. Starting with six mentors and six children, the foundation today caters to children from Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, and Kashmir. Theatre, music, dance, and painting—Nalandaway incorporates it all in a uniquely designed curriculum for these children. The curriculum is so structured as to impart holistic training not only in the routine subjects and art forms, but also in life-skills to help children cope with everyday anxieties and emerge as winners.

It was the infamous 2002 Gujarat riots that propelled this corporate man to shift focus to the society around him. “The Gujarat riots left a deep angst in me. I constantly questioned myself, ‘Why do people behave the way they do?’ The next question was, ‘What can I do about it?’ This mooted a spiritual quest in me. Finding the answer to the inane question through reading, interacting and understanding more about violence led me to conclude that all people by nature are bad. They act to be good. They need policing,” says Sriram Ayer.

Of the victims, he presumably found that the most affected were women and children. “If only one could find mentors to guide and assist children while growing up, and if they were given that emotional anchoring, we would have considerably less violence in this world” he muses.

With 17 full-time staff and a strong base of 600-700 volunteers, Nalandaway Foundation’s work can be broadly divided into Projects, Resource Mobilization, and Support Services. Continuous research, curriculum development, training of mentors, and keen monitoring are the chief elements of this organization. “We have established partnerships with the 21 homes of Tamil Nadu government, ranging from remand homes to orphanages. Our objective is to expose the children to the world of art and enable them to be constructively occupied. Art should help them see the larger canvas of things” he says.

But, this form of intervention throws up unexpected challenges, like the one Nalandaway faced in Ongole, Andhra Pradesh. “We were working with children of sex workers, teaching them percussion instruments and theatre. The

mothers’ vehemently opposed the move saying that anything remotely connected with putting up a performance in front of a crowd would pull their children forcibly into the flesh trade—the very fate that they wanted their children to escape from,” he reminisces.

The annual event for art appreciation named ‘Art, Arattai, Aarpaattam’ is organized in over 2,000 locations in Tamil Nadu. It seems to have gained instant popularity. In Chennai alone, the participation last year was close to 200,000 children from varied societal backgrounds. This year the 15-day event will be flagged-off on 17th July 2011.

Talking of planning and implementing the ideas, a bedeviled Sriram laughs, “Conducting this one mega event is a nightmare in itself!” However, the next instant he passionately says, “It simply wakes us up to the reality that there is still much to be done. We believe that there is no point in scaling up or expanding our activities just for the sake of it. Instead, we try and delve into the greater depths of the present conditions that we are working on and find newer solutions.”

Mere passion cannot sustain an event of



this scale that requires organizing thousands of children from some of the most remote pockets of our country to participate in artistic activities. The event also demands a high financial back up. 70 per cent of Nalandaway’s funds flow in from different foundations. Individual donations and proceeds from the sale of home productions (films/documentaries) make up for the rest of their needs. “We are looking at a possibility when our children take to art as more than a mere therapy. We recently identified about 50 of our most talented children in the age-group of 15-18 years to be professionally

trained in different art forms. We hope that a few of them make a career out of their art,” he quips.

For someone who was raised in a musically-inclined family and with a keen interest in design, Sriram is excited at the prospects of enabling a whole generation to look to the arts with more sincerity and importance than it is presently accorded. Of course, there are challenges every step of the way. Sriram feels that while the organization strives to hold its reins within controllable limits, it sometimes has to trade-off certain interesting opportunities, consciously. Partnerships with different organizations are difficult to make, and even more so to maintain. On the personal front too, there are a few recurring challenges. The fortitude of the sailor is determined not in the smooth seas, but when the ebbs and flows are violent. We wish this sailor a long journey in his chosen path!

—Archanaa R.

**For more information about Nalandaway, contact Sriram Ayer at 9884499196 or visit [nalandaway.org](http://nalandaway.org)**



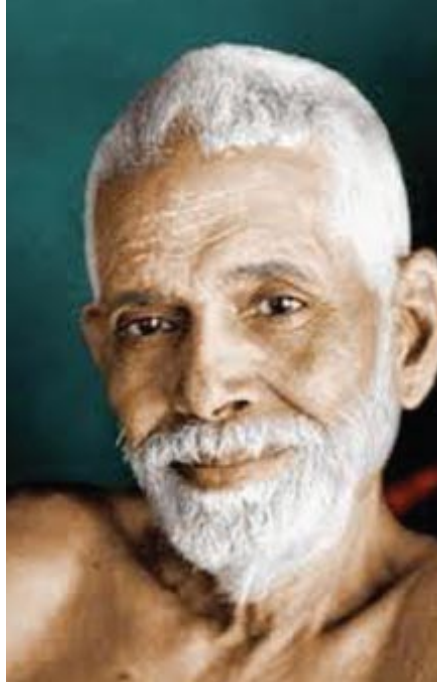
## How to Control the Mind and our Distractions

An inspiring conversation with Ramana Maharishi and his disciple on Consciousness and how to control the mind and our distractions.

**Mr. Duncan Greenlees, Madanapalli, asked:** One has at times had vivid flashes of a consciousness whose centre is outside the normal self and which seems to be inclusive. Without concerning the mind with philosophical concepts, how would Bhagavan advise us to work towards getting, retaining and extending those flashes?

Does *abhyasa* in such experiences involve retirement?

**Sri Bhagavan replied:** 'Outside' - For whom is inside or outside? They can be only so long as there are the subject and object. For whom are these two again? They both will resolve into the subject only. See who is in the subject. The investigation leads you to pure consciousness beyond the subject.



Normal self is the mind. This mind is with limitations. But pure consciousness is beyond limitations and reached by investigation as above outlined.

Getting - Self is always there. One seeks to destroy the obstacles to the revelation of the Self.

Retaining - Having once gained the Self it will be understood to be Here and Now. It is never lost.

Extending - There is no extending the Self, for it is always without contraction or expansion.

Retirement - Abiding in the Self is solitude. Because there is nothing alien to the Self. Retirement must be from some one place to another. There is neither the one nor the other apart from the Self. All being the Self, retirement is impossible and inconsistent.

Abhyasa is investigation into the Self.

**D.:** How long can the mind stay or be kept in the Heart?

**M.:** The period extends by practice.

**D.:** What happens at the end of the period?

**M.:** The mind returns to the present normal state. Unity in the Heart is replaced by variety of phenomena perceived. This is called the outgoing mind. The heart-going mind is called the resting mind.

**D.:** Is all this process merely intellectual or does it exhibit feeling predominantly?

**M.:** The latter.

**D.:** How do all thoughts cease when the mind is in the Heart?

**M.:** By force of will, with strong faith in the truth of the Master's teaching to that effect.

**D.:** What is the good of this process?

**M.:** (a) Conquest of the will - development of concentration

—Excerpted from Sri Ramana Maharshi teachings

## Mindful Social Entrepreneurship

The other day I met someone who said, "I am planning to quit my job and do something else more cool." "Cool? Like what?" I asked. She replied, "Oh, like starting an NGO. You know, both me and my husband were talking it's become very boring and mechanical doing this office job, day after day and it is very hectic. Working with the society will give us time to enjoy life, be with our kids, wake up late, and still use our time and energy for society besides earning a good name. You know, that's what everyone today is doing when they turn 40. Someone told me there are courses too that we can take and start work from home. Once funds are given we can take a good office and work from there." I was just listening not knowing how to respond. Is social entrepreneurship a 'cool' job? A career option? A deeper level of existence? A way of life? An irrevocable responsibility of each of us towards universe? What should I present to this person? I pondered.

How many things in life do we approach mindlessly without a deeper articulation and perception of what it actually is? We seek solutions to our problems too in a similar mindless fashion expecting one to replace the other like we have learnt to replace everything in life now —from gadgets, relationships, jobs, organs, to humans. What would a mindful existence really mean and where does mindful social entrepreneurship stand in all this? From the years of working with people and analysing human behaviour we have come out with 14 distinctions of mindfulness and mindlessness. A few critical ones here perhaps would tickle the brains to think deeper.

Mindfulness would mean going for generative solutions than prescriptive solutions—No two problems that comes in life is the same. They may seem similar, but at least in the dimension of time they are not the same. Life is not about what everyone does; but it is about what needs to be done in each context. Every problem can be seen from several



perspectives and the solutions have n+1 option. N is the number of options already tried and +1 is the one that is yet to be tried.

When mindful we look at being principle focused than rule focused. When an issue crops up, the principles that govern the solution needs focus. Many a times, caught in rules we forget the context. What is required sometimes is out of the box solutions.

A large truck was moving through a railway underpass when it got wedged between the road and the girders overhead. All the efforts of the experts to extricate it proved useless and the traffic

## A Series on Growing -Reflections for Deep Change

was stalled for miles on both sides of the underpass.

A little boy was trying to get the attention of the foreman, but was always being pushed away. Finally, in sheer exasperation, the foreman said, "I suppose you have come to tell us how to do this job?"

"Yes", said the kid. "I suggest you let

entrepreneur may think as an issue may not be so for the person or community. It is not about adding solutions to problems or adding problems to already existing solutions? There is a fine balance in many things in life. That balance has to be understood.

When it is a mindful decision, the social entrepreneur is intrinsically motivated. It is an option which is inside out. When it is the popular option which is born out of outside in, social entrepreneurship becomes a mindless activity. The need to reach out and make a difference needs to come from within as the very purpose for one's existence and not as choice-less popular option. It demands a fine balance of both head and heart. It needs an ability to manage dynamic way of living and not a static set of options easily available.

Social entrepreneurship is one of the most challenging, demanding, intrinsically satisfying way of life that requires the highest level of mindfulness.

### Points for Reflection:

- Is my being a social entrepreneur a mindful choice?
- In a day how many of my actions are essence focused, principle centered?
- Do I look for ready made solutions in life or do I take all elements of the context into account and generate solutions?
- How many of my options are drawn after examining multiple perspectives?
- What do I do to keep my mindfulness alive?

— J.M.Sampath & Kalpana Sampath



# 'Play...Study... Play'



All the children in the street keep playing all day, listening to the petty quarrels in the neighborhood, and watching the drunk fathers and uncles trying to find their way back to their respective homes. This is a typical scene from Varadharajanpettai, Ariyalur District, Tamil Nadu. "They go to school, everyday. But, when they are back home, this is the atmosphere in which they are nurtured. Schooling did not seem to make a difference in their outlook or attitude," says Jayaseela Baskal Rajan, an employee of Cognizant since 2006 and the founding member of Dear India, a grass root rural initiative started by him in 2007.

Knowing that the children must not be affected by all of this, one would have expected the observer to counsel the kids to do their homework and prepare for their classes. But, for Rajan and his team, it was different. Their intention, firstly, was to provide the children with a conducive atmosphere to play, away from the boisterous crowd. Thus, the play centre was born. Kids came here to play chess, carom, and football adhering to one condition—no one would resort to abusive language or derogatory remarks against each other.

"It worked. Eventually, the kids themselves came up and asked if they could use this place for study as well. They made it a point to come here every day, play for an hour and then sit for study. Every evening, they spend two hours between 6 P.M. to 8 P.M. at Dear India Play cum Study Centre. There are no limits to the number of children that could come here," says Rajan.

As the need arose, local college students were appointed as teachers to assist the children in their studies. Dear India (Developing and Empowering All in Rural India) Trust now runs 18 study centres in 12 villages, in the districts of Ariyalur, Pudukottai, and Cuddalore. Having registered formally in December 2009, the thrust areas of the Trust include education, health and hygiene, and helping the aged and differently abled. Education remains the top most priority for the Trust as they believe that it is

during the years of schooling that attitudes are created, enhancing the development of one's personality.

Funds have not been an obstacle at any stage as all these centres are run within the government school campus. When asked about the response of the school management while establishing these centres Rajan says, "In many cases we were invited to start a centre in their school. The reach of our activities has had a positive feedback".

"I have improved from 15th rank to 10th rank after joining the centre. Extra curricular activities like music, dance, and painting are also encouraged," says Arokya Dayalan.

Holidays are more fun here with camps for about ten days, with different themes for each day—Music, dance, cooking, painting, and visit to places like planetarium, airport, and libraries. Every child had some take-away from the camp

for sure. Interestingly, summer camps for 2011 were organized completely by the teachers in these centres.

Besides education, Dear India team has been handling issues pertaining to health and hygiene, helping the aged and differently abled on a case to case basis. Recently, they enabled the villagers complete the construction of required number of classrooms in a Government High school by advocating with the concerned government authorities. The request from the community members themselves symbolizes the change in the attitude of the rural parents who ensure that their children are adequately equipped to study. But, for Rajan, infrastructure is secondary. "It is the attitude of the parents that is very crucial in educating the children in rural areas," he says.

A couple of years down the lane, the Head Masters of the schools call it a 'tremendous change'. Intrigued about the impact the

activities have created, I asked him to enumerate. "Most apparent is the change in personal behavior", explains Rajan who adds, 'children bathe regularly, cut their nails and dress up neatly; earlier we had to wash the hall after the kids left!' With more than 40 children from different classes studying in a centre, handling complaints of lost stationeries was a tedious task. The attitude to steal has now been replaced by a sense of common property that has been inculcated in the children during the classes. Though it may seem simple, he opined that the aforesaid changes cannot be brought about by schools or by the parents alone.

It is in this context that he briefs us about the relevance of Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives. "Such projects help in adapting activities in the local context, thus enabling 'inclusive' education. To be precise, 'change in attitudes of these children will reflect in the sectors they get into. Therefore, education must be prioritized and supported by proper structures to bring about a change in our society'.

Having set the target of higher secondary education for all by 2015 in these districts, tracking the progress of every child in these centres became essential.

"After coming to the centre, I finish my homework and study in the evening. This has become a habit for me, which I was unable to do earlier, due to electrical problems at home," says Anbarasan.

The progress report also records comments from the teacher. The parents' sign a consent stating that in case of non-adherence to rules or if found disturbing other children, their child would be removed from the study centre.

This sense of responsibility from the rural parents is a mile stone for the Dear India team. They have finally been able to convey that 'education is something more than writing one's name'.

—Shanmuga Priya R



Dear India is supported by Cognizant Outreach, the CSR arm of Cognizant. For more details contact Rajan @ 9962580044



# Classic Nightingale

**B**ombay Jayashri is an Indian Carnatic music vocalist. She has also recorded songs as a playback singer in South Indian films. Jayashri began her concert career in 1982. She has a vast performing experience presenting concerts all over India and in over twenty different countries around the world. She has the rare privilege of being the first Carnatic vocal performer in the Royal Opera House, Durban and the Russian Opera House at Helsinki, Finland. She was also the sole representative of the Carnatic Music tradition at Lausanne, Switzerland; Porto, Portugal and Santiago, Spain, and is the only artiste who has been featured twice at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London.

Jayashri has been the recipient of several awards and accolades from many prestigious institutions, including the Kalaimamani award from the Government of Tamil Nadu and she has been conferred a Doctorate by the Mother Theresa Women's University. She has also co-authored a book 'Voices Within' which describes the work and life of seven eminent musicians.

*In an exclusive chat, Bombay Jayashri Ramnath shares with Marie Banu how music can unite people.*

**You have been performing for charity concerts since 2001, not for one but for several issues. Which of the social issues are you passionate about?**

I don't know if I can particularly say that something is closer, or something is not as good. I like to reach out in a way that musicians can do, even if it is like a drop in the ocean and if it could make a change in their lives. I go once in a way to sing at the Ramana Kendra blind school. I don't know if they are happy or not, but at the end of the day I feel that I have done my little bit—thus going beyond just my areas of performing is special to me. Visually impaired children are extra intuitive towards sound, and sometimes they sing with me, which is nice. If we can help them by raising funds through an event, it is

special. Any cause that is worthy is special and I cannot point out and say that it could be only for the autistic children or for the visually impaired that I have sung for.

**Music has a wonderful therapeutic effect and hence used as a tool for treating the mentally challenged. Can you share your experience while performing for this audience?**

The very first time I sang for them was when I was at school. I studied in a convent, and we had a subject that we could choose—Guides or Social Service. To be a Guide one required a lot of funds from time to time and I came from a family that could not allow this. Only seven of us in my class took up Social Service. As months rolled by, I realized what an advantage it was.

We would go twice or thrice a month to institutions, or spend two or three days in a hospital. I remember Sr. Marie Theresa who

was particularly interested in music. She was fond of me because I could sing. She once said, 'Let's change the kind of Social Service we are doing, and go to orphanages and sing.' I was studying in seventh standard then and still remember those experiences that touched a deep chord within me. The experience when I sang for such children and the love that I got made me feel important. It was a pure unaffected, which I never got while singing for a school competition or singing for an audience. I must thank my teacher for this. Time and again when I got a chance in life, I relive those experiences in a more meaningful way, as God has kept me in a better position.

**What according to you are the essential qualities for an artist to be a success?**

First of all, you should be blessed to grow up in a musical atmosphere. Today, the stress is on education and academics. Both my parents were music teachers. I woke up at 4 A.M. for my father's practice, and when I returned from school my mother would be teaching. Many a times, I remember going to sleep when my father was teaching.

These are my early lessons in life.

You need parents who believe that their child should come up in music, offer them training, and make them practice. You require regular consistent practice for three to four hours everyday.

I was fortunate to have very great teachers. I moved to Chennai only to learn music, and not because I wanted a career. I had one of the greatest masters like Sri. Lalgudi Jayaraman, who consented to take me as his student. One does not need anything more in life, but be blessed with the right teacher.

When you are a singer or dancer, you must have the art of performing which you have to hone over the years. For this, you

need a nice guide who will instill the confidence and give you the knowledge. After that, I feel that the most important aspect is appreciation—to get more audiences who love your music and love you for whatever you are. I am really fortunate and believe that God has created me for this purpose.

**Do you think music should be shifted from being an extra-curricular activity into being part of the school curriculum?**

Yes, it should. We have been complaining about this issue in public forums and wherever in private that it should be heard. I grew up in a convent we had piano classes on every Wednesday, and during weekends had the option to go to the church and sing along with the choir. Singing in school creates a deep impact on you. You have access to music which a child is denied today. This is very unfortunate!

It is not that we need every child to become a musician, but instead we need to create that interest. The whole world is looking at India with awe and wonder at its rich culture, but here we do not bother to encourage it. In Europe, every school has arts and music as compulsory subjects until the eighth standard after which it is optional. I think we are all to be blamed for not striving hard enough to see that children of today have arts as part of their curriculum.

**Would you advocate for this along with your fellow musicians?**

I would. But, we always wait for someone to take the lead, for which we are to be blamed for again. If one takes the lead, I am ready to follow.

**As a winner in all music competitions during your school and college days, what is your advice for aspiring musicians?**

Media as it is today is a full time occupation. It is a full time commercial business in itself. There is always talent in every field—science, arts, music, or sports. But today, even in your own house, you would have a television camera before you, and the press writing about you.

This is the order of the day. One has to be very careful not to get bogged down by this before you start singing or become a musician. Because, before you achieve much, the world would know you, and that would make you complacent.

There is nothing like knowledge. My teacher is 81 years old. Even today, he calls himself a student and lives the life of a student. He still reads about music and composes. He says: 'Every day I learn a new note and compose a new note within the range.' The student in him is more alive than himself. So we have to take a leaf from the lives of such great people.

I always tell youngsters not to be happy just because they have a small write up somewhere, or have their face appear on television. It is just an exposure for something which is hardly started. So don't stop learning or practicing. We are here only to learn the art and gain knowledge.

**How can music be used as a tool to unite people irrespective of their caste, religion, or culture?**

I was part of a production called MTV Coke Studio—an internet brand of music that is also to be aired on television. Different genres from different parts of India, singing different languages, in praise of different religions were all under one roof. We had Leslie Lewis, a Christian composer; Rashid Khan, a Muslim; Assamese folk singer, and Sufi singers besides me. We were actually eating from each other's plates and at the end of the shoot we did not want to go back to our homes. I realized how music can actually bring people together. They are actually singing one religion—which is music!

I think we can take a leaf out of this experience. I believe that music is a powerful tool that is filled with love and compassion and unifies people.

## Editorial

**Latha Suresh  
Marie Banu**



Photo: nologo