

## Contents

### Editor's Note

#### Greetings!

A fellow Rotarian, on reading the last issue, commented, "Interesting conversations leads to good ideas and thought processes. Your tabloid Conversations seems to generate the same. The stories featured have inspired me and my family."

Good, the more communicated, more abundant grows. Keep sharing your copy of Conversations and help in spreading goodness.

Napolean said, "A leader is a dealer in hope." And it is so true of all the social leaders who have been featured in this edition of Conversations.

The cover story features our forthcoming celebrations. March is a season of spring, colour and merriment. We extend this spirit by celebrating social work. The Sadguru Gnanananda Awards is a platform to showcase the significant work done by a few social entrepreneurs across India. Read about them and do join us in our celebrations and cheer the great work done by our awardees.

P. N. Devarajan

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#### Events

##### Page 2

#### Nurture Nature



CSIM's Seminar on Environmental Concerns  
26th February 2010

#### AlumniTalk

##### The Organic Way

##### Page 3

The story of Egamparam - the organic farmer



#### The Lives of Others

##### One in a Million

##### Page 4 & 5

CHHASE's efforts in improving the quality and lifestyle of the Irula community



#### Profile

##### Celebrating Social Work

##### Page 6 & 7

About the Eleventh Sadguru Gnanananda Awardees

#### View Point

##### Reaching out the CTS way

##### Page 8

An interview with Archana, Outreach Program Manager, Cognizant



#### Profile

##### Cultural Custodians

##### Page 9

Restoring heritage monuments



#### Expressions

##### Page 11

On Social Entrepreneurship Reflections for Deep Change

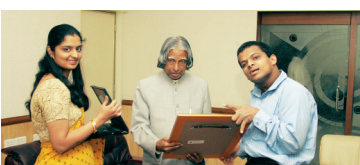


#### Inspirations

##### Lets Learn from Siddharth

##### Page 10

Siddharth impresses Abdul Kalam with his special abilities



#### Chit Chat

##### Page 12

Suhasini shares her views on the social sector



## Centre for Media and Development Communication

a unit of Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM)

is organising a two-day workshop for development workers and students  
on Radio Interviews/Television Interviews/Short film making and Video editing

Venue: Textan House, No. 47, 4th Avenue,  
Ashok Nagar, Chennai - 600 083  
Date: 20 - 21 March 2010.  
Time: 10 a.m to 3 p.m.

Registration fee  
Rs. 1,000/-

To register  
contact CSIM at 2486 7565 / 66  
or write to cmdc.csim@gmail.com



## Nurture Nature - A Seminar on Environmental Concerns

R Christudas Gandhi



Centre for Social Initiative and Management and Need Trust jointly organized a one-day seminar titled Nurture Nature on the 26th of February at German Hall, T Nagar, Chennai.

The objective of the seminar was to address the most serious challenge the world faces today: the intensifying conflict between the indispensable goals of environmental protection and economic development. Around 400 college students and 250 NGO personnel participated in this interactive seminar.

Mr. J.S. Shekar, Trustee, Need Trust, in his welcome address requested the participants to realize the need to protect the environment and maintain a balance in using degradable and non degradable products.

The Chief Guest Thiru R Christudas Gandhi, IAS, Chairman and Managing Director, Tamil Nadu Energy Development Agency spoke about the role of alternate sources of energy for sustainable development. Talking of renewable sources of energy like solar power, wind power, bio-gas from human waste, he said, "We need to consider waste as wealth. With just 2.5 kgs of waste we can produce our own bio fuel sufficient for a family of four".

Eminent environmentalist and organic scientist, Dr G. Nammalwar gave excellent tips on how we can promote local economy by growing organic vegetables in our gardens. He requested the students and women present in the gathering to form a network and campaign for sustainable environmental practices.

Prof. Mohammed Ismail in his inspiring speech on bio diversity emphasized the responsibility of each student in developing an environmental friendly attitude. He further urged them to understand environmental realities and protest against the various anti-environmental developments and campaigns being promoted.

Mr Rajasekar spoke about Solid Waste Management and Ms. Anne Josephine spoke on Methods to Control Pollution. Mr Dhanasekar, Councillor gave away certificates to the participants and delivered the Valedictory speech.

The seminar served as a platform to voice environmental concerns, understand and resolve environmental issues both at an individual and a collective level.

J S Shekar



G. Nammalwar

Mohammed Ismail



Anne Josephine



Dhanasekar



Rajasekar



ADD SPARKLE TO THE SEASON WITH A  
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A MESMERISING SENSE OF NORTH INDIA  
AT **COPPER CHIMNEY** A SPLASH OF COASTAL FRESHNESS  
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# The Organic Way



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

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

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

"I realized that farmer suicides were rampant because most of the farmers harvested only one crop. Often, this one crop failed to yield enough to keep the farmer financially afloat. In addition, constant use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides made fertile lands barren. And reclaiming these lands to increase fertility was too long a process," observes Egamparam.

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

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

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

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

was tremendous resistance to farming. But with practices like rainwater harvesting, these farmlands soon became fertile.

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

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

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

By setting up kitchen and terrace gardens, Egamparam has now taken the concept of

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

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

"A certain rule says that in the committee that prepares schemes for the agriculture industry, 10% of the participation should be from farmers. Sadly, this rule is not being implemented. In the long run, I want farmers to involve themselves from the planning stage itself. This seems difficult, but it is achievable."

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

**Interested in knowing more? Call Egamparam @ 99429 27765**

- Yogini



# One in a Million



*Irulas are a tribal community in the Thiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu. Their population in this region is estimated to be at least 25,000. They are traditional snake and rat catchers, but some are engaged in fishing. Some of them also collect firewood from the forest to sell. They do not have a fixed livelihood. They lack basic amenities like electricity and roads in their villages.*

Vincent Paul grew up in Pannur District of Thiruvallur. As the land lord's son, he would sometimes notice how other children his age never went to school and ploughed his fields.

He began to grow very sensitive to the small mud huts that lined his street sparing his lone bungalow.

Vincent grew up to be a Sergeant in the Indian Airforce and served in the military for 15 years. After retirement he returned to his hometown to find that the situation hadn't changed much.

In 2001, he decided to do something about the lives of the tribal community there and started CHHASE - Community Health, Housing and Social Education.

Its main aim is to spread awareness of AIDS and to improve the quality and lifestyle of the Irula

community. According to Vincent, there are about 14 people infected with AIDS but they remain unknown due to fear of isolation.

CHHASE also has a school in the ST colony outside Perambakkam where it teaches 40 students from classes 1 to 8 in the Activity Based Learning method.

Among the forty odd Irula families that inhabit the 'ST colony' outside Perambakkam, only one boy studies at the local government school which is a thirty minute walk away. The rest are taught in a small open space in the village itself.

The Irulas, whose occupation was, until recently, snake catching have now changed with the times and taken to wood cutting, getting offended at the mere mention of their past. Since most of the population are seasonal migrants, they place their children's education in constant jeopardy.







Vincent Paul

"At no point of time are all the forty families here. And so the school here has never had full attendance," laughs Vincent Paul, Director of CHHASE and headmaster of the only school in the village.

The school is a small shady space made of four long poles with a rubber-sheeted roof and

worn out floor mats. It currently teaches 40 children from class one upto eight. Vincent Paul sometimes encourages a few bright students among them to continue their education at the government school.

"The kids here are very intelligent. It is because their parents keep migrating that there is no saying when they will stop coming to school. And so we are not able to have a proper school here. The attendance is anywhere from ten to sixty children and getting them to come is another challenge that we face every day," he explains.

Absurdly, though the children seem to enjoy their school, they shake their heads profusely when asked if they would like to continue at Perambakkam's government school. Their parents explain why.

"We sent our children to the school but they came back saying they are being beaten by the teachers and others. The teachers also make them sit separately, don't let them have food with the rest of the children and generally discriminate against them. So they refuse to go to school. The school that Mr. Vincent has

started is good – and the children go willingly," says Nachiappa.

Dinesh, who had shown interest in studying further, was the only one sent to the government school with special recommendation by Vincent. "He seems happy there. I make sure he is treated properly and visit the principal often to check if everything is ok," Vincent asserts.

CHHASE's school teaches based on the ABL (Activity Based Learning) method but the staff are not trained sufficiently to teach anything but the basics. S. Anitha, who teaches there, explains why the school is still preferred, in spite of its shortcomings.

These children aren't serious about studying. It takes an hour for us to assemble them everyday. And over here, the parents are happy to watch them study. The abuse they face in normal schools worry them and so they decide not to send them there at the cost of their education. We can only teach them the basics and most of them stop at this. Very few show the interest to study further."

These villagers, who barely earn Rs. 30 a day by cutting wood, seem to unanimously feel that education will solve their problems and give their children a better future. On the other hand, they don't seem to harbour big dreams; and as one man put it, they are happy "if they get some job and earn more money than us". But their looming caste status has made them accept what is given and not dream of anything more.

Vincent Paul hopes that, through his efforts, the future generation of Irulas have a better standing in society and no more have to live in colonies.

- Anusha Parthasarathy  
Asian College of Journalism

For further details about CHHASE contact: Dr. B Vincent Paul, Pannur Village and Post, S.V Chatram (Via) Thiruvallur – 602 108.  
Phone: 094439 91504.  
Email: chhasein@yahoo.co.in





# Celebrating Social Work

The Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani (MSDS) is a public charitable trust founded by philanthropist Mr P N Devarajan in 1999. MSDS celebrates social work by giving awards to social workers. MSDS brings in professionalism in the social sector through customized courses in social work management

Sadguru Gnanananda, a spiritual teacher from Tapovanam, Tamilnadu, believed that when social work is done with joy and compassion, the signature of God is seen in such work. Hence, MSDS has instituted the awards in his name for social change agents who bring hope and courage to people in despair.

The different categories of awards are:

1. Women social change agents
2. Family in social work (husband and wife team)
3. Socially responsible corporate



Till date, 90 women, 7 families and 2 corporate heads have been the recipients. The award comprises Rs 75,000 in cash, a citation and a silver plaque.

The Sadguru Gnananada Fellowship has been introduced this year for budding social entrepreneurs, who will receive Rs 10,000 per month for one year.

The awards celebrations have been held in Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Mumbai and these functions have inspired many to live a life of giving, sharing and caring.

The eleventh Sadguru Gnanananda national awards function will be held on 13th March at Narada Gana Sabha, Chennai.

The awardees being honored this year are:

## WOMEN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS



**Awardee:**  
Sister Lalitha

**Organisation:**  
JEEVODAYA HOSPICE FOR  
CANCER PATIENTS  
1/272, Kamaraj Road, Mathur  
Manali PO, Chennai -600 068  
Phone: 044-2555 5565

A retired professor of zoology, Sister Lalitha founded Jeevodaya, the first hospice for cancer patients in South India, in 1990. They provide palliative care to terminally ill cancer patients who cannot afford the cost of treatment. This 50-bed hospice has catered to over 4,300 patients and has ensured them a less painful, dignified demise. They also offer counselling services to the family members. The love and dedication shown by the caretakers at Jeevodaya are highly appreciated by the patients and their families.

The community clinic at Jeevodaya provides free medical service to the public and undertakes cancer awareness and cancer prevention programs. Jeevodaya launched a pain and palliative care outpatient clinic and home-based care for the terminally ill patients and offers training to doctors and nurses.

### Activities at Jeevodaya



**Awardee:**  
Mrs Phoolbasan Bai Yadav

**Organisation:**  
Maa Bamleshwari Jan Hitkari Samiti  
Sukul Daihan village,  
Rajnandgaon district, Chhattisgarh.  
Phone: 093295 08811



Having experienced poverty, deprivation and discrimination, Smt. Phoolbasan Yadav, realized that women were instrumental in changing the plight of poverty and in bringing about social awakening and development

Guided by her inner self, she was the first woman to organise a Women Self Help Group in her village in 2001. The women were motivated to save Rs. 20 every month and involve in the development of their village. The women started doing unconventional tasks like brick and roof tiles construction, bazaar contracts, running fair price shops, fish markets. In 2001, she won a cycle race organised in her village which inspired over 4,000 women in the district to learn cycling.

At present 12,000 women groups and 2,00,000 women are members in her NGO, Maa Bamleshwari Jan Hitkari Samiti She has launched various other movements like adult education, women education, girl child education, movement against child marriage, and village cleanliness campaigns. A role model to her community, she has transformed the status of women in Rajnandangaon district of Chattisgarh.

### Mrs Phoolbasan in action





## FAMILY IN SOCIAL WORK



### Awardees:

Mr K Pandia Rajan and Mrs Latha Rajan

### Organisation:

Mafoi Foundation & Sornammal Education Trust  
49, Cathedral road  
Chennai – 600 086  
Phone: 044-6622 8200

The Rajans' firm belief that Education is the best gift for empowering underprivileged children, led them to start Sornammal Education Trust (SET) 15 years ago. The children in Sivakasi region, whom they supported financially, were motivated to continue their education and not work in the match industry. Understanding the need for education among the underprivileged children across the state, they launched the Mafoi Foundation and have the support of the entire staff of Mafoi Management Consultants Ltd. for the cause of education.

The Mafoi foundation supports over 4,000 school children in Tamil Nadu through the Disha scholarships, skill building

### Young scholars



programmes and career guidance workshops. They have launched Disha sports academy to provide training in niche sports for poor children.

In an effort to build a just and sustainable society, MaFoi Foundation works towards empowerment of over 40,000 women through Self Help Groups and launching micro enterprises for them. Ekam, an innovative health initiative of the foundation, was launched with an objective that "not a single underprivileged child should die for want of medical care in Chennai".

"Our society is our responsibility" is now the guiding mantra to everybody associated with the Mafoi group.

## SADGURU GNANANANDA FELLOWS



### Fellow:

Rubina Mazhar

### Organisation:

Safa Society  
103, Millennium Centre  
Raj Bhavan Road, Somajiguda  
Hyderabad – 500 082  
Phone – 040- 6453 3964

"Educate a girl, empower a family" is the slogan Rubina used while launching the Safa Society in 2006 in Hyderabad. As girls and women of the Muslim community were denied access to education and employment, she started Safa to empower them. Her projects, Magic carpet and Market Oriented Value Enhancement (MOVE) are economic and entrepreneurial initiatives for the Muslim women. Rubina ensures that her interventions do not disturb the ethos/spiritual fibre of the community.

Rubina has also designed an education plan for the girl child, which ensures the child's continuity in school. Various awareness programmes on health, hygiene, secularism and intergenerational relationships have changed the attitude of children and women in the shantytowns of Hyderabad.

### Rubina and her group



### Fellow:

S Saravanan

### Organisation:

WakeUpIndia.net  
Value Education Gurukulam project  
Jawadhu Hills, Vellore  
Phone: 94445 29017

A deep desire to work with the underprivileged children in the tribal regions of Yelagiri Hills made Saravanan quit his lucrative software job in USA and settle with the tribal folks in 2006. He joined the Society for the Development of Economically Weaker Section (SODEWS), Yelagiri Hills, and started working for the welfare of the tribal children and women. The passion to write motivated him to launch an e-magazine, WakeUpIndia.net, in March 2007. He documents all his activities and seeks support from his friends abroad.

Saravanan manages over 10 computer centers, 12 Government-run libraries and 2 residential camps in the Yelagiri Hills. He has organised over 25 dental camps in various schools, and conducts spoken English classes for Government teachers in the Yelagiri region. He has recently launched the Value Education Gurukulam project in Jawadhu Hills. This programme benefits over 200 children who learn moral values through stories, meditation, songs, educational games, self-hygiene and discipline.

### Saravanan with parents & children



# Reaching out the CTS way

***“Working for the Outreach at Cognizant has changed my outlook about my career and life,” says Archana, the Senior Program Manager of Outreach, the social wing of CTS.***

When Cognizant Technology Solutions (CTS), a major software company in India, hit the 2- billion-dollar revenue mark in November 2007, they launched Outreach, their social responsibility arm, with six full-time staff and around 100 volunteers. Mr. Shankar Srinivasan, Senior Vice President, Cognizant appointed Archana to head this wing as she was an active blogger and well networked within the organization.

***In a meeting with Marie Banu, Archana reminisces about her journey in Cognizant from being a Project Manager to an Outreach Program Manager.***

***How did your experience working as a Program Manager help you in your new role?***

It has been an amazing learning experience for me.

While I was involved in project delivery, we had to envision the future of the accounts, plan and arrive at strategies for maximizing productivity. These skills and techniques that I learnt were very helpful in my new role although it is a different orbit altogether.

From identifying the vision, mission, objectives to ensuring that everyone was involved was a creative process.

***Was it easy to recruit volunteers for Outreach?***

One of the things that I learnt when I started the program was that there were many employees who were interested in community service but did not have the right platform. They had to do it after office hours and to find the right initiative to support needed much more effort.

Now that Outreach has provided them with the platform, a lot of our employees are enrolling as volunteers.

***Which was your first project in Chennai?***

In 2008, Outreach setup a computer lab at the Government Higher Secondary School, Thorapakkam, Chennai and the volunteers have been taking weekly classes in English and computer science for the students of class XII.

In the Tamil Nadu class XII State Board examination held in 2009, the pass rate in Computer Science and English was an amazing 100%, while the overall pass rate in the school was only 61%. This is truly remarkable for the school's very first batch of class XII students. All of them also secured full marks in their Computer Science practical examination.

This is the kind of results we can produce when we combine volunteerism with donation. It is said that the whole is better than sum of its parts. It is not merely money that brings about change, it is the synergetic relationship by people volunteering that we get much more than the actual money itself.

## ***Outreach Activities:***

- Enhance the quality of education
- Provide infrastructure
- Conduct coaching classes
- Organize value adding initiatives

***What are the present programs and how are they coordinated by Outreach?***

At our offices and across key client locations globally, Cognizant employees are organized as Outreach Councils. These councils work towards extending the skill and capability of the employees by enabling volunteer efforts, supporting quality education and providing access to learning. Currently there are over 30 Outreach Councils operating globally.

A council comprises of a leader who is the head of the Business Unit/location that the council embodies and is supported by a core committee of seven members. This group consists of employees hailing from different projects but share a common passion to work for the community around them. The ownership for the Outreach projects in their location/business unit lie



with them. They decide on the causes to support and mobilize volunteers in implementing their projects.

***How do you recruit volunteers and how do you motivate them to sustain their interest?***

We have a broad guideline that at least 10% of employees participate in Outreach initiatives. Having said that, we have however not mandated participation from anyone. In retrospect this worked well for the program because only people who are really passionate about community service participate in Outreach. Cognizant employees register to be a volunteer through our online portal and we also have an event specific registration in the Outreach calendar.

Championship trophies are awarded to be best performing council once in year. This has a positive influence on our employee motivation. Also volunteers who pool in a considerable amount of time and efforts are recognized by their project team and peers. They also act as an inspiration for other employees to join the Corporate Social Responsibility movement.

*More than 5,000 employees of Cognizant who work as Software Engineers, Vice-presidents and CXOs, actively volunteer for Outreach initiatives.*

*Several hundreds of community service initiatives have been organized through which more than 1,00,000 students have benefitted.*

***What are the other activities of Outreach?***

We organize campaigns from the central program management office. During the beginning of the year we have a notebook collection drive and donate it to all the schools that are supported by the councils. For example, February is the 'Science Awareness Month', every council conducts programs related to science awareness to forward the cause of science education and offers prizes to the top three winners. During the month of April we organize summer camps for school children.

Our signature initiative is 'TalHunt' an annual inter-school competition amongst all the schools that we partner with. We conduct preliminaries and in this we cover 100% of the students. The winners of the preliminaries contest for the final. Volunteers train the students on various activities like oratory, singing and dancing and a championship trophy is awarded for the best performing school. Every council tries its best to make sure that their school wins the trophy.

***How are the funds for the Outreach programs sourced?***

We have a yearly budget which is allocated to Outreach and based on the projects that the council executes they make a request. As a policy we do not collect money from the staff. However, certain councils within their own community collect funds because many feel that this is one of the ways they can contribute.

For instance, the notebooks were fully funded by the employees last year, but now we have decided to look at long term support like sponsor a child for a year, provide food packets for children and coordinate mentoring programs. This provides the volunteer an opportunity to donate money and also interact with the child.

***All the bigger companies have their own Trust and foundations as part of their fulfillment towards Corporate Social Responsibility. How do you feel that the Cognizant approach is different amongst others?***

Cognizant also has a foundation that was established in 2005 doing similar work like other IT foundations. They primarily donate and fund projects pertaining to healthcare and education. Some of the projects funded by Cognizant Foundation are referred by the Cognizant employees. That is the extent of employee participation in the Foundation.

Cognizant's Outreach program is a complete employee-driven initiative, where the volunteers are the real leaders and act as a veritable lifeline for the Corporate Social Responsibility initiative. This modus operandi is unique to Cognizant.

## ***Program Highlights***

*A group in Coimbatore visits the juvenile home every day and provides vocational training.*

*Volunteers work with the underprivileged children who live in a residential vocational training centre in Calcutta. They have trained children in organic farming and also set up an organic farm to make their operations self sustaining.*

***Do you feel that a corporate employee can also be a social entrepreneur?***

Absolutely! When I started Outreach, I thought employees who are running tight project delivery schedules might not be able to contribute to Outreach. But what I found was that the first 100 volunteers were all busy people. They had their own programs to run and had a lot of work to do. But they had real passion and so took time off to engage in community work. People who achieve are those who are basically productive and have the enthusiasm. Lack of time definitely is not an excuse for those who have the commitment to do community service.

***If you want to know more about the Outreach program email archana.raghuram@cognizant.com***



Outreach is currently working with 90 Schools, 20 orphanages and 1 juvenile home in 6 states in India and has established a presence in China, UK, USA and Argentina.



# Cultural Custodians

## *Villages are our most precious heritage*

**W**e are proud of our rich cultural heritage, but are we good at preserving it? Industrialisation and urbanisation has led Indians to focus more on modern infrastructure and forget many old structures and monuments. We believe that the Government or Archaeology department should conserve and preserve monuments. Here is an interesting story, which tells us that we have a role to play.

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

The foundation works to preserve and conserve structural heritage. They identify 'Heritage Wardens' and train them on various strategies to restore heritage sites and temples and also on the dos and don'ts of preservation of monuments. The heritage wardens are also taught to read the inscriptions which narrates the story of the monument.

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



Photo Credit: Vijay

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

"We never came near the temple until last year, as there were a lot of snakes and shrubs inside the temple and around it. It is quite surprising to know that such a beautiful temple was built in our village a thousand years ago. We will now ensure that the temple will retain its original glory," says 18-year-old Solaimalai, a resident of Uthiramerur.

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

"If the restoration work for a monument requires a lot of technological intervention, we work in collaboration with the ASI or IIT" says Chandra, an active member of REACH.

- Latha Suresh

### Dr T Satyamurthy's Achievements

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

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

To know more about the work done by REACH Foundation visit [www.conserveheritage.org](http://www.conserveheritage.org)





# Lets learn from Siddharth

*Siddharth Jayakumar impresses Abdul Kalam with his special abilities*

December 2 has been a special day for a special child, twice over. G J Siddharth received the prestigious National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) Helen Keller award from Union Human Resources Development Minister Kapil Sibal on December 2, 2009. The award was in recognition of his exemplary work in helping disabled people find positions of equality and dignity in the workplace. Siddharth is the only person from south India to have received the award last year.



*Siddharth receiving the Helen Keller award 2009 from union human resources development minister Kapil Sibal.*



*Siddharth and his sister with former President APJ Abdul Kalam*

On the same day in 2005, Siddharth was picked up from his home in Nandanam and driven to the airport to meet India's First Citizen, the then President of India, APJ Abdul Kalam. The President had earlier responded to Siddharth's email, saying, "You are indeed a great role model to the able-bodied as well as special children. When I visit Chennai, I will be happy to meet you." When Siddharth, stunned at receiving the mail, volunteered to go to New Delhi to meet him, the President told Siddharth that he, the President himself, would meet him in Chennai.

Siddharth's is a story of courage and determination. Immediately after birth, he was infected with jaundice. However, doctors failed to recognise the illness. After five

months, when parents Jayakumar and Komala sought specialist help, their son's problem was diagnosed as 'mental disability'. It was only four years later, after detailed examination, that Siddharth was diagnosed as suffering from cerebral palsy.

Following a year at the Spastics Society of India, Bangalore, Siddharth was admitted to the Spastics Society of India, Madras (now Vidya Sagar). He proved to be an excellent student and in 1995 moved to a normal school, Boston Matriculation HS School, Nandanam. In Class 10, Siddharth scored 80%; he could

not draw diagrams and was not allowed to do the practical examination. In Class 12, he cleared the Board examination scoring 90% overall. After completing BCom from Vivekananda College in 2002, he went on to complete his MA Economics from Loyola College in 2004; he aggregated 74% in four semesters.

At a job fair organised by Ability Foundation, Royal Bank of Scotland, RBS Group, impressed by Siddharth's academic record, selected him as trainee officer in 2005. He is now an executive. "It is a very responsible job.

I check export and import documents for mistakes based on international banking standards and practice. I enjoy my work and feel at home. The support from my colleagues is almost unbelievable," explains Siddharth, who is the first Certified Documentary Credit Specialist (CDCS) with cerebral palsy in India. His mission is to carry out social work, particularly for uplifting the lives of people with multiple disabilities.

*Let there be many, many more people like Siddharth.*

- Sashi Nair

*Vidya Sagar has been working for 20 years to assist people with disabilities to overcome negative community attitudes and to develop the skills they need to participate more fully in community life.*

*For more information contact: No.1, Ranjit Road, Kotturpuram, Chennai - 85  
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**GROWING - Reflections for Deep change**

*Mr J M Sampath, & Ms Kalpana Sampath are human resources development professionals setting out to make psychology increasingly a part of the average Indian's skills. They are actively engaged in helping individuals and organizations focus on their vision and clarify their values.*

*This is the first of the series of articles on GROWING.... Reflections for Deep Change. We are planning to make the process of reflection ongoing.*

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

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

Learning requires effort and it is a very personal journey. But many of us feel we have 'learnt' something when we have actually only stored information about it. But isn't it true we need to see the world from our own point of view and we cannot see it through other's eyes? Why do we want someone to think for us? Don't we all like it to enjoy eating the fruit ourselves?

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

Nasruddin used to visit a saint everyday to seek knowledge, though the saint was silent and did not speak anything. One day Nasruddin asked him, "I have been coming to you again and again, expecting that you

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

Every experience shared by someone is only knowledge until we don't put in the efforts to understand the same. Every person aspiring to be a social entrepreneur wants to 'help'. But how much does one understand what 'help' is? Understanding happens when we follow an enquiry process - The 5W 1H.

1. What does help mean? - an answer to this will give the meaning of help, and what kind of help has to be given
2. Where should I help? - will give the exact location where help should be given
3. When should the help be provided? - will give the timing when help has to be given
4. Why should the help be provided? - will give clarity on the cause that propels the need to help
5. Who should provide help? - will give clear accountability as well as define the target group
6. How should help be provided? - will map the process steps of providing 'help'

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

**Pointers for Reflection:**

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

- Kalpana & Sampath

**On Social Entrepreneurship**

Though the concept of social entrepreneurship is gaining popularity, it means different things to different people. This can be confusing. Many associate social entrepreneurship exclusively with not-for-profit organizations starting for-profit or earned-income ventures. Others use it to describe anyone who starts a not-for-profit organization. Still others use it to refer to business owners who integrate social responsibility into their operations. What does social entrepreneurship really mean? What does it take to be a social entrepreneur?

This new column aims to clarify the concept of social entrepreneurship by featuring different perspectives on this subject. Mr P N Devarajan, Founder of CSIM, shares his views in this issue.



Social entrepreneurs are change agents in the society. I believe that the basic tenet of social entrepreneurship is "when you give away, it enriches lives of two, yours, and that of the person who receives it." And 'giving' is of your time, talent, treasure and touch, the 4 Ts. There are other influencing factors that determine the success of a social entrepreneur and they are -

**Change**

Social work organization should be comfortable with 'change' and relish it; see 'change' as an opportunity and not as a threat and therefore have a distinctive advantage in a world where the pace of change is always exhilarating and exciting.

**People**

Real value of organizations are its people. We have to focus on developing and harnessing best practices, active learning and processes.. When dealing with people, one should have empathy rather than sympathy, which is about pity- It is a balance between "the head" and "the heart" issue.

**Passion**

The driver for human emotion is passion; You can buy talent but not passion. A social entrepreneur is driven by 'passion'. Passion fuels the talent's engine. The passion actually transcends all behavioural aspect of people; one can see it, smell it and feel it. This has an enormous impact on environment. The real bench mark of being best in class is about pure passion.

**Leadership**

Leadership is the key to successful social entrepreneurship. Leadership style which bring in servant leadership, creates future leaders. There is value in being a great leader. There is also value in being a great follower. - One who forgets the past (except learnings), effectively manage the present and create the future. Leadership accepts responsibility, which is accountability. Leadership encourages loyalty and team work to create the pattern of excellence and contentment.

Great leaders have an excellent vision and also the ability to take it to the level of execution of this vision. People produce unprecedented result with inspired leadership.

**Communication**

Communication is the vehicle in unleashing the power of people. Words are potent and has impact - The best example is "Quit India" by Mahatma Gandhi. Your communication should be such that people are inspired and they go into action and understand what is important. Some people recreate your message for others. Good communication fixes the problem. One should not create embarrassment, shame and regret by thoughtless communication.

**Goals**

The power of goals is most important and 'goals' matter a lot. The 'goals' set should be motivating than discouraging. Repetitive communication of goals and goal setting is a must.

When selecting priorities for achieving goals, one should set about to find out what is important, what is urgent, what is long term vs. short term and what is realistic vs. visionary. By setting right priorities enormous energy is generated inside the organization and among all stake holders. Conversely, by wrong priorities enormous tolls are taken. A high priority is to develop a strong pipeline of growth.

**To know more on Social Entrepreneurship contact CSIM @ 2486 7565/ 66**

- P.N. Devarajan

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# Star Social Worker

*Suhasini shares with Marie Banu her views on the social sector*

Suhasini has been part of the film industry for 25 years as actor, director, dialogue-writer and producer. She won the coveted National Film Award for Best Actress in 1986 for her role in the Tamil film Sindhu Bhairavi.

In 1996, Suhasini stepped into direction, helming her first film Indira. She also wrote the screenplay for the film. The project was produced by G.V. films. She and husband Mani Ratnam, are both involved in the running of their production company Madras Talkies.

This award-winning actor has been actively supporting many charities and has a passion towards working for the cause of women and children. She chooses roles that portray an empowered woman and has inspired many women through her characterisations.

She shares with *Conversations* her views on the social sector.

**What motivates you to engage in social work?**

I get motivated when I see other people who are passionate and single-minded about the work they do as a duty to fellow humans, and not out of pity or guilt.

**Which of the social issues are you most passionate about?**

Issues concerning women and children are what I am passionate about.



**What according to you is the role of a celebrity for an NGO?**

A celebrity should know when to be a volunteer and when to be a beggar and when to be a celebrity to the advantage of the cause that he or she is working for.

**Who is your role model in social work?**

Mr. M. B. Nirmal of Exnora International and Ms. Jayashri Ravindran of Ability Foundation have been a major inspiration for me to get involved in social work.

**How do you think the media can be used as a tool to bring about change?**

Media is the voice. There is no war or peace without voice, word and language. Media creates all these three. Hence media is a powerful tool to bring about social change.

**How can we bridge the rural-urban divide?**

It has already been achieved in many villages. My village is unrecognizable and so is my school. Children have become smart in my native town Paramakudi. But I feel that the urban monopoly would go away if the voices of the rural folk are heard more than that of the urban.

## Support Corner



### Sponsorship Support

Hi, I am Kalaivani, Founder of "Nightingale Social Trust (NEST)". Currently NEST is functioning at 3 different centers situated near Thirumullaivoyal benefiting 125 students from low-income communities. Can you sponsor one of the following at our 3 Tuition centres?

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Please get in touch with me at No.5, Pillayar Koil Street, Thirumullaivoyal, Phone: 9962993947, 9345811260

### Tree Planting

I am Manimaran and I have planted over 12,000 trees in and around Chennai and am maintaining each one of them.

Are you interested in a tree planting campaign? I can supply any number of tree saplings and also maintain them on your behalf. Contact me at 9940726790

### Need a Place.

My sister and I, Rukmini & Kalyani, are visually challenged. We have started Jeeva Vriksham Trust, and are planning to launch a monthly Braille magazine shortly. Unfortunately, we are being denied an office space. Can you spare 200 sq. feet for our project? Contact us at 9444208961 / 9444208963

### Computers Required

Readers, if you know someone who can spare a few computers, why don't you help these NGOs who are in dire need of computers? Their contact details are -

Tamilnadu Handicapped Federation Charitable Trust, No:21 AA, Lake View Road, Kottur, Chennai-85. Ph:32927664. Mob: 9444115936

Yoga Amirtham Charitable Trust Koodakovil, Thirumangalm taluk, Kalikudi block Madurai District. Ph: 9344118708

M. Krishna Rao National Association for the Blind, TN State Branch, Plot no. 12, Association road, I lane, Madhavaram, Chennai - 600060.



Conversations shares the lives and opinions of social change agents and path-breakers who have touched many lives.

This tabloid aims to strike a resonant chord with its readers and presently has a readership of around 20,000.

This monthly tabloid is circulated free of cost to leading corporate houses across India.

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