

Conversations

A Chronicle of Social Currents

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The Two Sides of Learning
Children and education

Photo Credit: nologo

From the Editor

Dear friends,

You have freedom; you have choices in life; therefore the 'freedom of choice' is yours. There are two questions you will have to ask yourself before you exercise your choice: whether the choice comes from *Priyam*, or *Hitham*.

Priyam is full of likes and dislikes, self centered and purely materialistic and it keeps changing. *Hitham* is based on consideration of—'is it good to me and all?'

Pursuit of *Priyam* will be endless and does not provide peace and happiness.

Since 'peace' and 'happiness' is our goal

we should think and act on the *Hitham* as basic pursuits. If you practice this all along in your life you will experience 'bliss'. The stories in this edition feature people following this trait.

Happy reading!

—P. N. Devarajan

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The Power To Overpower: An unarmed self defence workshop for women



Practical training session at the workshop

What would you give to have the ultimate self-defense weapon you can always rely upon? What would it be worth to have a self-defense weapon that will disable or annihilate your attacker immediately? What would you do to own a self-defense weapon that required no registration, no carrying permits, and no luggage space? It is your weapons that you have like hands, elbows, etc which will help escape an unwanted or threatening situation. CSIM is partnering with Paradigm Shift to offer the Power to Overpower program to women across all cross sections of society. The students of CSIM have undergone the training and have acquired this new skill of self-defense to boost their self-confidence.

"When a man misbehaved in the bus, I applied the technique taught to us. I have not seen him since that day," says, Elizabeth, a CSIM student.

The Power to Over Power program by Paradigm Shift, a Chennai-based Learning & Development company, is just not any self defense program, but it helps develop holistic skills that can be used by any woman for her defense. "We teach techniques for conditioning the mind to help you identify and recognize early warning signals. For the body, we teach you hands-on effective, easy to learn techniques that maximize damage while not relying on strength, and by empowering and strengthening the spirit and mind we build survival instincts to ensure your own personal safety. It will

also help you recognize and respond effectively to potentially dangerous situations, in a confident way and hence you are less likely to become a target of crime," says Usha Venkataramani, Director.

"The skilled, competent self-defense trainers like Shihan Babu and Shihan Ravi, martial arts experts who have their own training centres, understand the challenges that women face, and what they will, and won't do in defense. And most importantly, they can make the participants laugh and relax while still tackling a serious subject," adds Usha.

Take control of your own personal protection by honing the ultimate self-defense weapon - your mind.

Some key aspects that the training session imparts would be becoming more aware of your surroundings, managing fear and performing effectively under pressure, preventing any vulnerable situations, becoming less vulnerable by minimizing your victim potential and taking control over your emotional well-being.

Most people believe that it takes years to learn effective women's self-defense. Well, it doesn't. Power to overpower program equips a person with skills and confidence one need to identify, avoid and survive crime by preparing

the individual both mentally and physically to overcome violence.

Anyone who has a need and desire to ensure her own personal safety can be part of this programme. The next workshop is scheduled on 27th November 2010 in Chennai.

If you would like to enroll, please contact Usha Venkataramani at 98409 11155, or email uvr@paradigm-shift.in

"We teach techniques for conditioning the mind to help you identify and recognize early warning signals"

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**


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Every Child Matters

Archanaa recounts her exhilarating meeting at Child, an NGO working with children



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

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

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

Senthil started the children's home in 2005, while working for CPACS (at KMC), for a salary of Rs 6,500. "There is hardly any organization that is willing to pay development professionals at par with other professionals", rues Senthil. Working in an Electrical Company and earning a modest income, he continues to juggle the demands of running the home, maintaining a family and is constantly on the look out to upgrade facilities for the children.

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

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

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

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

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

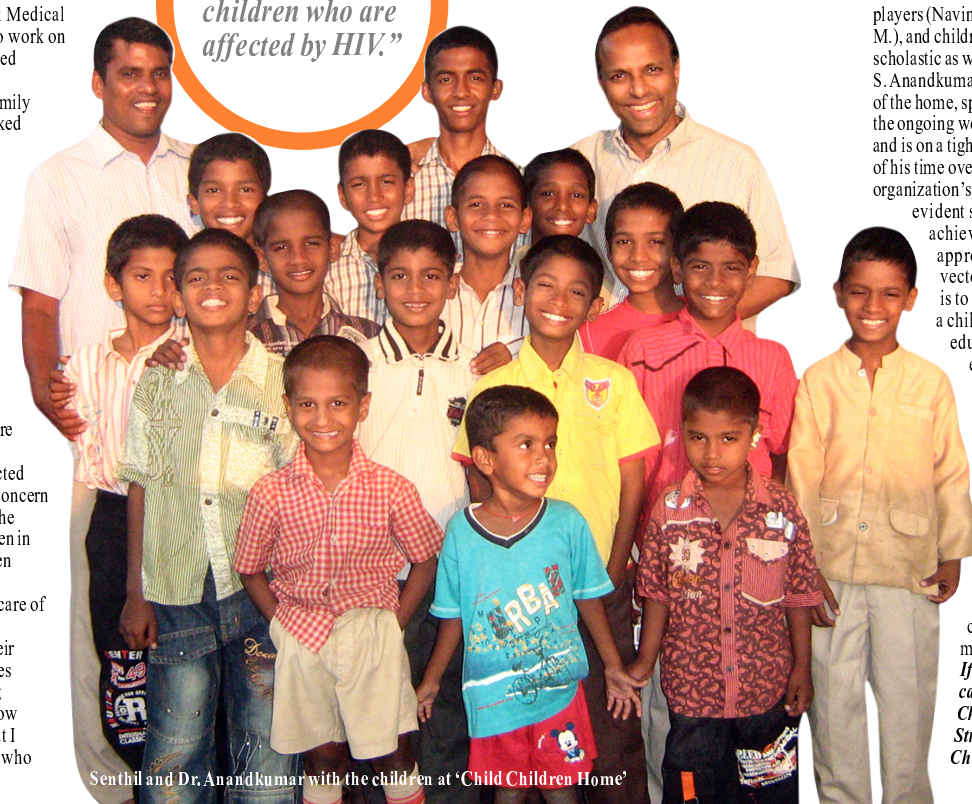
The children's home has nurtured some of the country's best talent, including: Navin, a national under-16 archery player, three state level hockey players (Navin, Manikandan K. and Manikandan M.), and children who actively engage in scholastic as well as extracurricular activities. Dr. S. Anandkumar (of Lifeline Hospitals), a Trustee of the home, speaks with great enthusiasm about the ongoing work at Child. Though he is travelling and is on a tight schedule, he offered to share some of his time over the telephone, to explain the organization's activities in detail. There is an evident sense of pride when he recounts the achievements of the children. 'Child' approaches its core issue as a multi-vectoral problem and our endeavour is to cover the following crucial areas of a child's overall development: top class education, a conducive family environment, nutrition, and medical counseling."

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

If you wish to contact Senthil, please call 9841656103 or visit Child-Children's Home at #1, Chellappa Street, Annai Nagar, Korattur, Chennai-600076.

—Archanaa R.

"I decided to start a shelter for children who are affected by HIV."



Senthil and Dr. Anandkumar with the children at 'Child Children Home'

Documenting WOMEN'S Glory

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



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

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

Established in 2006, Prajnya trust is a

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

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

Dr. Swarna Rajagopalan, Managing Trustee of Prajnya Trust says, "Although South Asian women have been active in politics and social movements for a long time, it was only after 1975 that this issue began to be studied seriously. In the Indian scenario, even after more than 60 years of independence, we have incomplete records

of women's participation, beyond electoral politics, in formal and informal decision-making processes. The database seeks to fill the gap created by scattered and unsystematically compiled information in this field."

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

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

Prajnya also undertakes research and advocacy towards eliminating gender violence. In 2008, Prajnya organized its first 16-day campaign

against gender violence, to raise awareness on the different forms and manifestations of violence against women. Held every year between November 25 and December 10, the campaign draws the attention of policy makers, governments and civil society towards gender violence and advocates for its elimination.

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

In 2009 the trust released a Gender Violence Report detailing the state of gender violence in the country. The Education and Peace Initiative (EPI) is yet another important pillar of Prajnya. "EPI focuses on preserving and nurturing the innate peace related values in children through systematic engagement with students, teachers and school administrators," says Priyadarshini Rajagopalan, Director of this initiative. A pre-launch research grant from the Sir Ratan Tata Trust enabled Prajnya to undertake research studies that mapped educational administration in Tamil Nadu. It surveyed civil society peace education efforts in South Asia and interpreted the NCERT peace education guidelines to create a framework for EPI. The initiative will work towards including peace education in the curriculum through seminars, communication workshops, talks, volunteer opportunities and community events. Another unique facet is the use of Peace Tales; retelling fables, folk tales, and mythology, to engage children and adults towards building peace skills.

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

To know more about Prajnya please log on to www.prajnya.in.

—Nandhini Shanmugham



Quiz competition organised for college students

“Although South Asian women have been active in politics and social movements for a long time, it was only after 1975 that this issue began to be studied seriously”



Workshop on domestic violence

An Editor Turned Communitarian



Vincent D'Souza

“

I wanted to publish and remain in journalism. I saw a niche in community media since the dailies I read closely almost gave up covering local people, places and issues in the 1980s and 90s.

”



D'Souza's passion for community events led him to start the Mylapore Festival around the Kapaleeswarar Koil about ten years ago, with a kolam contest

Mangalore-born Vincent D'Souza edits and manages three neighbourhood newspapers—*Mylapore Times*, *Adyar Times* and *Arcot Road Times*. He also runs *KutcheriBuzz.com*, a website devoted to South Indian classical dance and music. More than anything, D'Souza is deeply associated with community affairs. The income generated by his newspapers and the website goes to a trust to support local projects, especially children's education. The *Mylapore Festival* and *Madras Day* celebrations owe their beginnings to him.

Soon after undergrad studies in Physics at Loyola College, Madras, Vincent D'Souza freelanced for about five years for about a dozen publications across the country. He also worked for “a few local rags”. The experience stood him in good stead. He learnt the ropes quickly and understood how media businesses worked.

Between 1987 and 1992, D'Souza worked for *The Week* magazine and *Malayala Manorama*. He covered “all sorts of issues and news” during the period. So, what drew him towards local news and the community? “I put together annual campus journals in school and was involved in campus sheets. Those must have been triggers. I have also been a keen student of local people, events and issues,” he says.

D'Souza was never keen to work in a big organisation and he did not wish to move out of Madras. He says: “I wanted to publish and remain in journalism. I saw a niche in community media since the dailies I read closely almost gave up covering local people, places and issues in the 1980s and 90s. I read a lot on families or couples who ran small newspapers in US towns—from the books I read at the American Library, Madras. One book did it. It was called ‘*How to Run a Small Newspaper*’, written by a publisher couple. It became my Bible for many months.”

As the idea of launching a newspaper kept floating in his mind, D'Souza heard of a media initiative in the city which funded and supported “such small ideas”. The man behind it too had similar ideas—to publish local. So, S. Ramakrishnan, a retired bureaucrat, joined D'Souza. Ramakrishnan brought in S.P. Ambrose, another retired bureaucrat. Ambrose and D'Souza started a weekly in Adyar (*Adyar Times*), and they helped Ramakrishnan start *Anna Nagar Times* and to sustain it.

Today, D'Souza partners Ambrose's son, Ranjan, at *Adyar Times*, while he runs two weeklies, *Mylapore Times* and *Arcot Road Times*. The newspapers cover on a regular basis people, civic issues, community events, campuses, shopping, lifestyle and sport.

“D'Souza's column”, “*Vincent's Jottings*”, is quite popular. He often uses it as a platform to air views that affect the local community. “Writing is effortless, so the column runs. But I do make sure my focus is on local and city-based issues. It's my way of

helping the local community,” he says.

D'Souza takes special interest in organising journalism training camps for children. “Our office is open to people to discuss and share issues that affect them. We do give them a ear. Once our websites set well, we intend to meet community groups to drive community content,” he says.

At a time when even major newspapers all over the world were facing the heat—from economic slowdown, competition from online and mobile—how difficult is it to keep a free weekly publication going? “We promote different ventures. Local directories is one. We have floated the beta of our websites. These should pull our local clients in via online ads. We intend to have more extension products that add to revenue,” he says adding, “Clients are smart. They recognise the best in value. You've got to be a good paper first and vibe with local clients.”

The local newspaper is delivered to homes, but

sites, enable information to mobiles, etc. We launched a web video channel in Mylapore (www.mylapore.tv). We will also have web radio as well. All are local,” he adds.

D'Souza's passion for community events led him to start the Mylapore Festival around the Kapaleeswarar Koil about ten years ago, with a kolam contest. Gradually, the festival grew around the Mada Streets and in recent years it has become a three-day event, complete with food stalls, sale of knick-knacks, and folk music and dance. The success of the Mylapore Festival led to Madras Day being celebrated in 2004, with a handful of events on August 22. Today, Madras Day has grown to Madras Week and Madras Fortnight, with about 150 events across the city.

The Mylapore Times Charitable Trust funds certain specific projects at a local area middle school. These include training the school band year round, providing breakfast gruel to 100 children



Mylapore Festival

many times not. Sometimes, the newspaper distribution boy simply throws a pile at the entrance to a home or office and cycles away. “It is a challenge, and a worry,” says D'Souza, “We keep working at sorting out such headaches. We also circulate copies at a large number of shops, banks and stores. In Mylapore, we keep papers at about 150 points so people can pick them up. This innovation has worked.”

D'Souza's first online initiative was *KutcheriBuzz.com*, for classical music and dance in South India. “We began this because we found dozens of artists lived in our area and interacted with us. We experiment on it—web casting music/videos of young artists. We hope to do a lot on the three local

three times a week, and supporting a computer skills lab on campus.

The Adyar Times Trust supports small projects at random. The monies of the Trust comprise partly of donations made by the newspaper as well as donations made by Mylapore Times readers.

The income generated from advertisements in the neighbourhood papers are used to fund education for poor children. Proceeds from sale of T-shirts, mugs, etc during events are also used for charity work. Students are encouraged to write for the papers and even trained.

It's quiet work by D'Souza, but he has touched and continues to touch many lives.

—Sashi Nair



There are schools in Chennai where the annual fees are on par with that of a college education. In the same city there are also schools, located deep within the suburbs whose students don't have the opportunity of having a midday meal during their lunch break.

The Two Sides of Learning

There's something magical about the process of learning. Those very first steps into your classroom, the smiling face of your class teacher, and the first few lessons you learn. How ever old one may possibly be there can be no denying the fact that one's first steps into education can never be forgotten. That could probably be the reason why, several adults today can remember their first nursery rhymes and probably why several parents talk to their kids about their lessons in school – be it prose, poetry, mathematics, or science. Perhaps that is why, a very popular group of nursery schools in the city decided to celebrate *Pafiyaravani* in the best way possible, helping toddlers take their baby-steps to education, by adhering to the selectivity of traditional courses of *Pafiyaravani*, thus enabling tiny tots to contemplate the meaning of their journey to education.

Literacy rates in the country stand at an impressive 66% as of date, though this is far below the world literacy rate of 84%. Why does the country find itself in this situation despite making waves of progress since independence when its literacy rates stood at a dismal 12%? The answer may well say is – disparity in education. Consider this: There are schools in Chennai where the annual fees are on par with that of a college education. In the same city there are also schools located deep within the suburbs whose students don't have the opportunity of having a midday meal during their lunch break. This economic disparity can go on to become quite a vicious cycle as the situation may very well repeat itself for generations to come. This also begs the question – why is there such a drastic disparity that continues to exist in society today? Is our nation too capitalist? Is the gap between the rich and the poor too wide to contemplate filling?

“Children who study in our school don't have the

basic necessity of food,” says Malathi Venkatesan, one of the supporters of the Sacred Heart School located 90 kilometers outside Chennai. “The midday meal scheme isn't implemented here as the government claims that the school is not government-recognised.” As surprising as such situations may be, it throws up an even bigger question: Are our bureaucrats and policy makers making the education of children a difficult process on account of a technicality? Education is something that ought to be nurtured and cherished – a value that must be imbibed in every child. However, with the current state of educational disparity, the dream of achieving 100% literacy seems to be a far cry.

“The Right to Education Act (RTE), when implemented may change the scenario,” says a senior teacher from a well-known city-based public school, “It is only when all children are looked at, equally, and all given the same treatment, will this huge divide cease to exist.” However, many feel that though the quality of education may rise when the act is implemented, how well the implementation takes place continues to be a question. Another school of thought is of the opinion that if government bodies cannot take care of education in its present state – at the grass-root levels, dealing with RTE may be even more challenging for the Government.

Many also feel that there is a growing level of ignorance about the needs of the lower strata of society. The Sacred Heart School on East Coast Road stands as a typical example of this situation. The children there, according to Ms. Venkatesan come from fishing hamlets in the sea here. The school in question doesn't have government recognition. However, not surprisingly, as Ms. Venkatesan claims the pass percentage in this school is almost consistently 100,

with all students who study in following a continued interest towards academics. “There are kids in several schools who don't study well enough to be promoted,” says a class teacher in a state board school. “It's strange how the less fortunate children have to be driven to study hard. It would be ideal if those who were blessed with opportunity could also study in the same manner.” In comparison with the number of dropouts and dismal pass percentages in several government-recognised and state board schools, these schools in question who supposedly lack recognition has undoubtedly proved themselves to be worth their weight in gold.

To help break this barrier and dissolve this disparity, there ought to be an answer to the falling levels of concern towards society, as a whole. How this school is any body's guess, but one thing is for certain – education will continue to reel under collective ignorance unless the paper sets the standard of concern. Education, one might say is not restricted to the class since. However, it is only when the so-called “educated” start taking stock of the “non-educational” will the enhancement of the education of children be a process that can take place in the best possible manner. It is a fact that only when society begins to recognize and help those that can't help themselves, will society move forward as a whole unit. After all, education isn't restricted to the classroom and that is something that most of society will come to learn. Al McGuire, one of the legendary basketball players on the NBA circuit once said, “I think everyone should go to college and get a degree and then spend six months as a bartender and six months as a cashier. Then they would really be educated!”

If you wish to extend support to Sacred Heart School, please contact Malathi Venkatesan at 9884030015

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Literacy rates in the country stand at an impressive 66% as of date, though this is far below the world literacy rate of 84%



Gandhian Communists with balanced capitalism

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

—Lakshmi Kumari, Panchayat President



Sarpanch Dayakar Reddy receiving ISO 9000:2000 certificate from District Collector



Main Road of Pragathi Nagar

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

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

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

Community of Kurians (Mr. Kurian of Amul) with a difference

This urban village has cement roads with beautifully laid green platforms, lawns as road dividers, and green trees on either side of the roads.

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

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

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

environment protection.

Specific sites for the construction of Temples, Mosques and Churches have been allocated and the Panchayat ensures security in the village by deploying private security services. They have introduced a penalty system and this has resulted in near 100% collection of house tax and water bills. Affordable Health care and quality

for the welfare of Allwyn employees. On one hand, the supervisory union was fighting with Allwyn Management through the Board for Industrial Financial Reconstruction to take over and run the factory on a cooperative basis, and on the other hand, ‘The Housing Committee’ identified an ideal habitat for its members. Crisis creates opportunities.



Gram Panchayat Office

Medicines are easily accessible and Rain Water Harvesting is made compulsory in every household.

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

Dream come true for the progressive young leaders—some of them affiliated to communist ideology through the ‘Allwyn Employees Housing Committee’ that was founded in 1990

Unity In Diversity

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

The Leader and the championing team behind

It is Dayakar Reddy, who made this unique miracle happen with the support of his team

members—Ch. Sudeer Reddy, R. Sreeramulu, P. Chandra Sekhar Reddy, D.A. Chowdhary, M. Srinivasa Rao, Surya Prakash, M. Krupa Sagar, B. Venkateswara Rao, J.S.S. Varma, and J. Mallikarjun.

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

Enhancing the gulf

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

Value added mantra resulted in procuring timber and teak logs from Bhutan and Nagaland and bulk purchase of cost effective cement from Raasi Cements. In-house brick making and steel fabrication, and the ABC analysis of this supply chain mechanism contributed not only to cost effectiveness, but also sturdy houses.

Roti – Kapada – Makan

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

Fighting the Challenges by evolving new strategies became a cakewalk for these people. When the residents moved into their new houses, having access to basic amenities was a

problem, and their cooperative collaboration resulted in bulk procurement of milk, and vegetables. Access to cost effective health care and drinking water was their next challenge, and a collaboration of the members resulted in them investing 50 lakh rupees to lay pipes.

The Village rivalry and Legal Battles

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

Self Help is the best route to excellence

This was the time when TDP came up with the Novel program - Janma Bhoomi. PNVP took complete advantage of this initiative and constructed cemented internal roads. Greenery in surplus land and real estate appreciation was positively channelled to mobilise funds to build a school.

Sustainable Succession

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

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

Lessons to Learn for better tomorrow

The village development committee considered

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

The Only ISO 9000 Certified Village in India

Pragathi Nagar Panchayat brought in a high quality of life in the village through well-

orchestrated and planned development of infrastructure facilities. Pragathi Nagar has a quality policy, ISO 9000 certification and an elected Panchayat, but the unity among them is amazing. Caste, religion, gender, or age has articulated differences for excellence and not divisiveness.

Lakshmi Kumari, the first women Panchayat President says, "service excellence is

my first priority and future generation's safety and ecological security is the decision criteria. Some children have now settled in western countries, but Pragathi's ethos is getting seeded wherever they go."

Prosperity in Poverty

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

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

The Invisible Guru

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

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

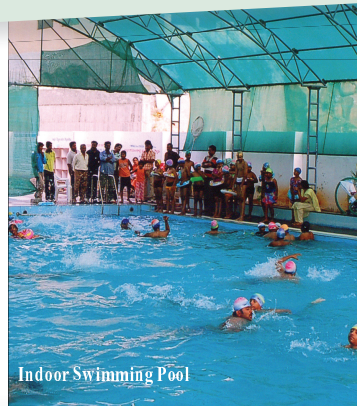
Creditably Credible

To the question: 'Can this Model be replicated?', the answer was 'NO' from Dayakar Reddy. He reasoned saying: "We can do, only when we are transparent, sincere, trusting people, and above all have confidence in team work. We are not corrupt, but I cannot guarantee that we have achieved this without greasing hands here or there, but the saving grace is its minimalism".

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

If you wish to know more about Pragathi Nagar visit www.pragathinagar.com, or write to dayakar.pragathi@gmail.com.

—S.Deenadayalan and P.Srilatha



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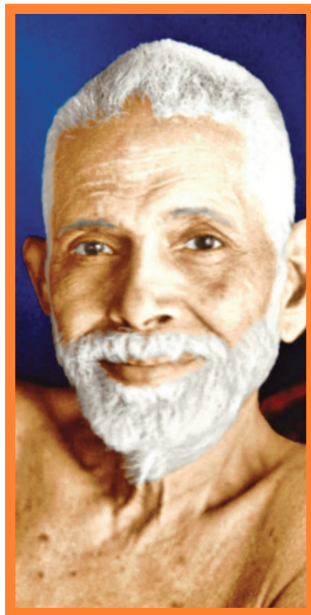
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Inspirations

Interesting conversations serve as road signs directing Creative thought. We bring you a few conversations that we feel are inspiring and thought provoking. Here is an interesting conversation between Ramana Maharishi and his disciples.



D: What is the best way to work for world peace?
M.: What is world? What is peace, and who is the worker? The world is not in your sleep and forms a projection of your mind in your *jagrat*. It is therefore an idea and nothing else. Peace is absence of disturbance. The disturbance is due to the arising of thoughts in the individual, who is only the ego rising up from Pure Consciousness. To bring about peace means to be free from thoughts and to abide as Pure Consciousness. If one remains at peace oneself, there is only peace all about.

D: If it is a question of doing something one considers wrong, and hereby saving someone else from a great wrong, should one do it or refrain?
M.: What is right and wrong? There is no standard by which to judge something to be right and another to be wrong. Opinions differ according to the nature of the individual and according to the surroundings. They are again ideas and nothing more. Do not worry about them. But get rid of thoughts. If you always remain in the right, then right will prevail in the world.

D: If one is to withdraw oneself, why is there the world?

M.: Where is the world and where does one go withdrawing oneself? Does one fly in an airplane beyond space? Is it withdrawal? The fact is this: the world is only an idea. What do you say: Are you within the world or is the world within you?

D: I am in the world. I am part of it.

M.: That is the mistake. If the world were to exist apart from you, does it come and tell you that it exists? No, you see it exists. You see it when you are awake and not when asleep. If it exists apart from you, it must tell you so and you must be aware of it even in your sleep.

D: I became aware of it in my *jagrat*.

M.: Do you become aware of yourself and then of the world? Or do you become aware of the world and then of yourself? Or do you become aware of both simultaneously?

D: I must say simultaneously.

M.: Were you or were you not, before becoming aware of yourself? Do you admit your continued existence before and when you become aware of the world?

D: Yes.

M.: If always existing yourself, why are you not aware of the world in sleep if it exists apart from the Self?

D: I become aware of myself and of the world also.

M.: So you become aware of yourself. Who becomes aware of whom? Are there two selves?

D: No.

M.: So you see that it is wrong to suppose that awareness has passing phases. The Self is always

aware. When the Self identifies itself as the seer it sees objects. The creation of the subject and the object is the creation of the world. Subjects and objects are creations in Pure Consciousness. You see pictures moving on the screen in a cinema show. When you are intent on the pictures you are not aware of the screen. But the pictures cannot be seen without the screen behind. The world stands for the pictures and Consciousness stands for the screen. The Consciousness is pure. It is the same as the Self which is eternal and unchanging. Get rid of the subject and object and Pure Consciousness will alone remain.

D: But why did Pure Brahman become *Isvara* and manifest the universe if He did not mean it?

M.: Did Brahman or *Isvara* tell you so? You say that Brahman became *Isvara*, and so on. This too you did not say in your sleep. Only in your *jagrat* state you speak of Brahman, *Isvara* and universe. The *jagrat* state is a duality of subject and object - owing to the rise of thoughts. So they are your thought creations.

D: But the world exists in my sleep even though I am not aware.

M.: What is the proof of its existence?

D: Others are aware of it.

M.: Do they say so to you when you are in sleep or do you become aware of others who see the world in your sleep?

D: No, but God is always aware.

M.: Leave God alone. Speak for yourself. You do not know God. He is only what you think of Him. Is he apart from you? He is that Pure Consciousness in which all ideas are formed. You are that Consciousness.

—Excerpted from 'Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi'



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Time – the elusive but decided

A Series on Growing-Reflections for Deep Change

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

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

One woman in the crowd whispered to

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

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



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

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

In today's world context what matters is the speed of response and that cannot be achieved without being in the present moment. Learning to be in the present moment requires a disciplined life of reflection, meditation, openness to life, awareness to prejudices and bias and a willingness to flow while having clarity on the inner structure based on principles. While moving into being a social

entrepreneur may seem a huge decision, when we spend time in the present giving the best that we can give, the journey becomes a satisfying one. Responding at the appropriate time becomes the key to making it satisfying as well as successful.

Points for Reflection:

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

—J.M.Sampath & Kalpana Sampath

Review Process – Course Correction Through Feedback

Review processes should permit 'out of the box' thinking, solutions and responses to obtain 'more' for less.

A Social Enterprise has to have a built in system for review of processes, goals and impact periodically, at least quarterly and cumulatively, at the quarter ending. Review of documentation processes, strategies and attainment of desirable goals and purpose are necessary, to arrive at causes of shortfalls in quantitative and quality measurements. Review will help to arrive at smart solutions to close the gap with effectiveness and least resource expenses.

Review of processes must have objectivity, consensus, simplicity and openness so as to have total involvement of stakeholders with the correction process.

Review process will also consider the aspect of change in context that occurs at all times. Review will consider unseen and unconsidered risk definition, and mitigation issues.

Review processes should permit 'out of the box' thinking, solutions and responses to obtain 'more' for less.

Course corrections are done as a result of

review process. Corrections are done in order to improve continuously due to feedback. These steps must be well recorded so as to capture cause-effect relationships.

Course correction is a great mine of knowledge and social capital for the Social Enterprise sector.

'Feedback' is an action to close the loop in order to examine what could have gone wrong or amiss or did not occur as predicted and why. What needs to be reset or re-calibrated in order that the cycle of events occur as predicted to obtain best results.

The 'Feedback' can also help generating options of different ways of doing things (innovations) in order to get desired deliverables smoothly with least cost and resources (inputs).

The 'Feedback' exercise also enlivens the thinking and creativity of people concerned in order to obtain simple and smart answers.

The 'Feedback' helps in fine tuning and sharpening the tools of analysis. The 'Feedback' is a last opportunity ground for optimization of

use of resources and creates intellectual capital out of the social context and capital for an inspiring march forward in sustainable practices.

For 'Feedback' being powerful and purposeful, it is important to have true recordings of past practices by true documentation. The efficacy of 'feedback' is entirely dependent on good documentation. This takes it back to how well the documentation is done and the predefined format in particular, which articulates the need for observing and recording events and contents in a sequential and/or concurrent manner.

Of course there will be several cycles of 'feedback, course correction of strategy, review and feedback' in order to arrive at a most reliable process and time line to repeatedly get ever improving impact.

This whole exercise has to be internalized in the process of implementation so as to have reliable performance of reaching goals and purpose of the social enterprise.

—PNDevarajan



Bold and Beautiful

Kushboo Sundar is an Indian actor who has acted in over 100 movies, starring opposite to leading actors. Besides, she is also a television hostess and a producer. She is known for her outspoken nature, and has been an inspiration for many social activists. Recently, the Supreme Court had dismissed all the cases that were registered against her in 2005, for her alleged remarks about pre-marital sex and AIDS. In an exclusive interview with Marie Banu, she shares her views on social issues that require attention.

You have been extending support to many children pursue their education. While most of the celebrities would want to publicise their social work activities, what makes you different?

When you say that this is what I am doing for a good cause, then it becomes a cheap publicity. My mother has said to me: 'let not your right hand know, what your left hand does'. This is the value I follow. I enjoy the social work I do and I treat it as a private affair. Whatever I do, I feel that it should be known only to me and to the person who has received the support. I am happy with what I am doing and I don't want the world to know what help I am extending to others.

What according to you is the major social issue in Tamil Nadu that require attention?

Definitely, it is education. We need to come up to a stage where we could say that Tamil Nadu has got at least 99% literacy rate. Unfortunately, we still live in a society which has too many superstitious tags attached to it. Today science is advanced to the extent that we are finding another planet to move and start living there. But, there are still people who consider it to be inauspicious when a black cat crosses the road, or when you sneeze. Faith and religion is different and I feel that we should not bring that to the streets.

Education is very important, especially educating a girl child. There are cases where girls are not allowed to study beyond fourth or fifth standard, as their parents feel that they will have to remain in the kitchen to take care of their family and so they need not have to study. People should realize that it is very important for a girl child to study as education will help her to excel in life.

The second serious issue is sexual abuse of young children which is on the rise. This issue has to be seriously deal with. We need to make the laws very stringent. Unfortunately, when you look at it, most of the children who have been through this kind of abuse are because of their own family members or from a person whom they had known. Parents should tell a child the difference between a good touch and a bad touch.

I very strongly feel that when a child is studying in the sixth standard we should introduce sex education. By this time, the girl is mature. If you don't teach them, then they are in the computer 24x7. Rather than them finding it out the wrong way, it is better that we teach them the right way.

Kushboo Sundar shares with Marie Banu her views on social issues that require attention

Despite urbanization, a large section of our society are conservative and do not wish to speak about HIV/Aids. This stigma largely affects those people living with HIV/Aids. How do you think one can bring about attitudinal changes in our society?

We have to educate people that one does not contract HIV/Aids by sitting together, eating from the same plate, using the same towel, or by shaking hands with a HIV infected person. You have to bring about awareness on what HIV is.

A HIV affected person needs very strong moral support from his family. Again, it is the woman who is stigmatised here. You will never find a man who will own up and say that he is the reason for his wife to get HIV/AIDS. While he happily sits at home being taken care by the family, his wife is victimised, blamed of loose morals, and thrown out of her home. We need to educate the men and tell them to own up for their mistake.

You have the ability to strive for women's empowerment. Given the challenges you have faced in the recent past, are you still determined to work towards empowering women?

Absolutely! If out of around 7 crore people in Tamil Nadu, 2,000 of them think that I am wrong, they are absolutely free to voice their opinions. There is nothing wrong in that. Nothing will deter me from working towards what I have been working at. There is awareness and there has been a notification that has come in.

Who is your role model in social work?

Absolutely no one! I have never grown up looking at someone saying that 'this is what I want to be'. I am not going to say that 'I want to be like Mother Teresa. She inspires me'. There can be only one Mother Teresa. I want to be what I am, and I want to believe in what I say. I want to follow my heart, of course after applying my mind to it. I want someone to turn around towards me and say 'she is my role model', rather than me saying this to someone else.

If at all there was anyone whom I had idolized right from childhood, then it happens to be Ravi Sastri. He definitely cannot be my role model, because I would have become a cricketer.

In what ways does your family support you in your social work?

I would not have evolved so much as a person, or would not have been so confident in these five years of my battle if not for the support of my family and friends. When I say support of my family and friends, it is not necessary that they will have to believe in what I say, or what I believe in. What is important is to let me be me.

I have a huge support from my husband. He is an introvert person, while I am an extrovert. We are like chalk and cheese. The support I have from him is



tremendous. When I won the case, I was holidaying with my children in London. The first thing I did when I received the message from my lawyer was to call my husband who was shooting then. When I said that all the cases have been quashed, I heard him scream over the phone with joy, which he never does. When I returned, he received me at the airport and said 'You have made it. I knew that you have been a strong person.'

What inspired you to choose the role of Maniammai in 'Periyar' and what were the challenges that you faced?

I did not choose. I was fortunate that my director chose me to do that role. In fact, few of my good friends went against me protesting that I should not enact this role. An issue was also raised in the assembly that I should not act in this movie. But, my director was very clear that he wanted me to do that project and so, I was in the film.

It was a different experience as it was for the first time I was depicting the role of a real life character. It was tough for me as I did not have any video footage of Maniammai. I just had pictures and so I really didn't know how she spoke, how she walked, or how she would sit. Also I had to put on a little weight for that movie which was a challenge.

You are known to be a wonderful mother; are

actor; and a social activist. Which of these roles, do you like most and why?

Obviously, I like the role of a mother. Mother is a 24x7 job where one can never reach a stagnation point. In a career you keep looking at what's next. As an actor, you want to better yourself. But, being a mother it is like you grow up with your children, you become a kid when they are young, and you start re-living your life along with them.

It is a task every day to install good values in your children, and telling them what is right and what is wrong. At every stage, especially with girls, you will have to be a strict mother, but also be a close friend with them so that they are free to discuss things with you. Being a mother is the toughest job, but I think that it is the most lovable one.

Editorial

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu

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