

Conversations

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A look into the Joy of Giving Week

Photo Credit: Rajendra Shaw

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From the Editor

Dear friends,

As we look at yesteryears, we would remember few people who have touched our lives by their act of kindness. Now, it is our turn to share this gesture with others.

Giving does not mean only money. Even by sharing a smile, you can make a difference. Hope this publication inspires you to involve in the 'Joy of Giving Week' that is organized across the country from 26th September to 2nd October, 2010.

Let's begin the season of Joy of Giving by contributing and inspiring people to give for a cause. Hoping to see you in the Seva Mela.

Happy Giving!

—P. N. Devarajan

Madras Week was celebrated in a fascinating manner all over the city from 15th to 22nd August this year. Every city has the right to celebrate its birthday and a city like Chennai sure deserves to do so. Madras, now Chennai was founded on 22 August, 1639. In 2004, a small group of people who loved their city started the Madras week celebration. It was launched by a group of three people—the city’s famed historian S. Muthiah, journalist Sashi Nair, and publisher Vincent D’Souza.

Although August 22nd is officially considered to be ‘Madras Day’, the celebration of this day has been extended to a week’s time celebration. S. Muthiah quoted in his article: “The way in which the Madras week celebrations are growing in the city, in a few years it seems like August itself will be celebrated as the Madras month!”

Celebrating ‘Madras Week’ is an attempt to create a sense of people’s pride for their city. ‘Madras Day’ focuses on the city, its history, its past, and its present. The core team motivates communities, groups, companies, and campuses in the city by hosting events that celebrate the city. Rotary Club organized a large number of programmes such as quizzes, talks, treasure hunts, and many more events in some of the major cities. Media too took

Madrasapattinam



Young girls displaying traditional flower arrangement

interest to cover the celebrations. Almost all the major newspapers conducted contests asking readers to write about their pride towards the city. Television media included news clips every day featuring the city’s heritage. A visit to the Asan Memorial School

auditorium will make one feel as if you have taken a trip around the entire Madras City. The lively school campus wore a festive look during the entire month and hosted the Madras Week Celebrations. Students from all classes participated and created models of

ancient buildings in Chennai, showcasing the city’s tradition. Abdul Raheem of IX standard said: “I feel so proud to be a part of these celebrations. I have learnt a lot more about Madras after seeing other exhibits and models done by my fellow mates. I sometimes

feel that I should have lived in ancient Madras to have known more about this wonderful city.”

The University of Madras, Chennai Museum, Anna University, and the Archaeological Survey of India were some of the institutions that came forward to participate this year.

Lectures, heritage walks, exhibitions, traditional games, talks on wildlife, display of ancient paintings, art exhibition, photography exhibition were among some of events that were organized. Besides, traditional food contest was held at various parts of the city and participants were allowed to cook anything that is related to traditional Madras or south Indian food.

Yet, there is much more that people of Chennai need to know about ‘Madras’. The information is so vast that it will surely take decades to exhaust all facts of this city. Madras is indeed inexhaustible!

—Faitha Khaja Mohaideen

ADD SPARKLE TO THE SEASON WITH A TOUCH OF THE ORIENT AT **China Town**

A SIP OF SCINTILLATING SPAIN AT **Zara**
The Tapas Bar & Restaurant

A TINGE OF EXOTIC THAILAND AT **Benjarong**
The Inspiring Taste of Thailand

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A SPLASH OF COASTAL FRESHNESS AT **Kokum**
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fingerprints



H. Narayanan with Chezhiyan

Only five to six per cent of the population is physically challenged. If three per cent of them get jobs, they could survive and live with dignity



Tailoring unit for women

Righteous Visionary

“When I was in 12th standard, I lost my eyesight due to glaucoma,” said Chezhiyan. Despite treatment at reputed eye hospitals in Tamil Nadu, Chezhiyan could not regain his eyesight. But this did not affect his studies. He got an M.Phil degree in History. “I never found it difficult. The notes were all recorded in a cassette and given to me. During examinations, the question paper would be read out loud, and I was able to write all the exams with the help of a scribe,” said Chezhiyan.

When he tried to find a job, he found all doors closed. He realized that society was not ready to accept his skills and expertise, and realized that the differently-abled were a handicapped lot. This motivated him to take up their cause and he set up Mercy Social Trust in 2005 at Kadaladi, a village in Tiruvanna malai district, Tamil Nadu. He focused on education for the socially and economically backward children, vocational training, and support to the disabled and rural women through empowerment programs. Though I set up the Trust and began to work, I was not sure about the direction to take and the modalities to adopt. It was at this time I heard about CSIM’s programmes through H. Narayanan, the chairperson of CSIM’s academic council, and its support to NGOs, CBOs, and other social change agents. I enrolled for the PGDSIM course at CSIM in 2006 and ever since, Mercy Trust has moved on a fast track. The lectures, seminars, workshops, field work, interaction with various people in the social sector, and the internship programme have helped me to take my organization in the right direction,” said Chezhiyan.

“I have networked with many organizations like Rotary club, Lions Club, Udhavum Ullangal, and other local organizations. This enabled me to serve the people, especially women, in my home town, Kadaladi, a remote village. Till date, 200 women have completed their tailoring course and



Chezhiyan with trainees

“*My focus is not only for the rights of the disabled, but also of the underprivileged*”

20 women are being trained now. They can earn and work as trainers too. Besides training, women are also offered counseling. Career guidance has been given to over 1,500 people so far. We are now planning to start a computer training centre and are looking for sponsors to provide computers, and teachers to train the rural and physically challenged women,” added Chezhiyan.

Although qualified, Chezhiyan could not get a job in a bank or in the government. He decided to fight for the rights of the disabled and began working on advocacy initiatives while studying at CSIM. He realized that though the Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission had a three per cent reservation for the disabled, it was not implemented. He filed a lawsuit against the government and won. Following the court order,

the Government offered jobs to 600 physically challenged people.

“Only five to six per cent of the population is physically challenged. If three per cent of them get jobs, they could survive and live with dignity. Not all disabled people are aware of their rights. We need to engage the media to empower them and sensitize them about their rights,” asserted Chezhiyan.

He said, “My focus is not only for the rights of the disabled, but also of the underprivileged. I have conducted awareness programs on National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in the neighboring villages. This helped many families enrol in the NREGA scheme and seek work for 100 days.”

Chezhiyan comes from a family of weavers. He aspires to work for the weaver community’s welfare in and around his home town. His dream is to set up a power loom near Kadaladi and employ his villagers. “I have submitted proposals to a few organizations. Some of them have rejected my proposal as they were not confident of my capabilities. But I will prove them wrong by starting my own power loom. I am sure they will come forward one day to support my dream. The power loom would be a social enterprise and I will employ the disabled, women and needy weavers in Tiruvanna malai district,” concluded Chezhiyan.

Having overcome several hurdles, and having succeeded in many ventures, Chezhiyan’s dreams are surely not going to end soon. He will not stop until he achieves his vision of improving the living standard in and around his home town.

—LS & FM

Sponsors and donations for Mercy Social Trust are welcome. If you wish to help, contact Chezhiyan at +91 9943163345.



Civic Gandhi

DR. M.B Nirmal,
Founder, ExNoRa
movement

Leading film actor Kamalhasan once said, everyone has Gandhi in us, while it doesn't surface in action in most of us, in some, it does. This is true of our hero of the month, DR. M.B Nirmal, founder of the ExNoRa movement.

M.B. Nirmal began his career as a dispatch clerk in a Nationalized Bank during the early 70's, and has completed Bachelor's Degree in Law. Today, he is the founder of 29 organizations—all dedicated towards social change. Nirmal is the founder of ExNoRa, a non-governmental organization which aims at creating a cleaner, greener, and environmentally friendly world.

Born in a family with rich ancestral property in Chennai, he faced difficult times when his family lost all their assets. The financial crisis burdened him with a debt of 15 lakh rupees and he found himself in a slum in 'Giriappa Road' at T Nagar, Chennai.

"Be the Change"

Nirmal believed in making declarations. One such was: "You must make an affirmative statement to yourself on any mission that is important in your life." One day his aunt asked him, "Can't you go to a better place?" He replied, "I can't go to a better place, but I can change the place where I live now". This sowed the seed for his revolutionary idea and made ExNoRa to what it is today.

Nirmal worked with the people in his neighborhood to keep the environment clean. He realized that it wasn't important to know about environmental management but instead know how to involve people in the cause. Gradually he expanded this movement beyond Giriappa Road.

An Honour Student

Although Nirmal was an average student, his alma mater, Pachaiyappa's College published his name amongst a list of 150 outstanding Students of the College. The list also included two former Chief Ministers C.N. Annadorai (Tamil Nadu) and Brahmananada Reddy (Andhra Pradesh).

Leveraging the Sixth Sense

During the early days of his career in the bank, he often helped officers who had difficulty in tallying the books of accounts. To everyone's surprise, he would reconcile the accounts within three minutes. He believed that everyone has a powerful sixth-sense, and with keen observation anyone can perform with higher efficiency.

Nirmal realized that he often de-motivated himself with what he called 'the fragility developed due to peer comparison in the community.' Fortunately this positive declaration helped him and he progressed to the position of an officer, and later as Manager at Indian Overseas Bank.

Training Trials

When Nirmal was the manager, his direct superior recommended him to a high level training program at 'National Institute of Bank

Management' (NIBM), but his application was rejected. It was then, Nirmal made another declaration—he aimed to make it into NIBM at the earliest.

He succeeded in his declaration and within 6 months went to NIBM, not as a trainee but as a Trainer. Training is yet another portfolio that he handled during his career. He trained people on what he believed, and he became a great motivational trainer.

You Have 48 Hours a Day

Over the years, he has developed modules to address specific needs. To name a few: 'Spot Spark', 'Spot Success', 'Fashion your Passion', 'Motive Action', 'Study Smarter and Not Harder', '48 Hour Day'. He conducted a wide range of programs for corporate and general public as well.

Two Decades of ExNoRa

Many years after the informal movement at Giriappa Road, Nirmal founded ExNoRa in 1989. He had a clear vision: 'to mobilize and empower communities to participate in preserving nature and preventing environmental degradation, and to improve the quality of life of common man.' ExNoRa's fundamental philosophy states 'environmental protection or

management is meaningless unless it is a conscious choice of all, or a substantial portion of people.

The mismanagement of waste is the most important cause of environmental degradation, and affects poor people, the most. The inability of the local bodies to manage the waste is due to the sheer volume that is generated and due to the lack of resources. This problem needed a solution that involved the people's participation.

The success of Exnora is in its ability to motivate people and involve them in sanitation activities. People were brought together through neighborhood communities called 'Civic ExNoRa'. Over the past 15 years, ExNoRa has motivated and formed thousands of Civic ExNoRas across India, who are involved in maintaining their surroundings clean.

ExNoRa firmly believes that it is possible to develop different kinds of replicable models to suit different places and situations. The various prototypes developed by ExNoRa are indeed replicated everywhere today. ExNoRa's vision is to promote sustainable human settlements, through the promotion of waste management as an income generating opportunity. Practices today by Civic ExNoRa include Solid Waste Management, Liquid Waste Management, Rain Water Harvesting, and Recycling, amongst others.

The Innovator

Nirmal promoted new ideas like the ExNoRa Innovators Club, Civic ExNoRa, and Home ExNoRa, to ensure that the concept reached everyone. He believed that social transformation is possible only when like-minded and socially conscious people came together. This led to the

“One day his aunt asked him, “Can't you go to a better place?” He replied, “I can't go to a better place, but I can change the place where I live now””

formation of management committees and operational teams who performed, while he remained as a mentor.

Nirmal is an atheist (if that's how one who believes 'divinity is within you' is to be called) who says prayer is more powerful than the god. He attributes his success to three women in his life: his mother, wife, and daughter.

Star Fish Can Regenerate

It is a difficult task to write about such a person in one article. Just like a star fish can grow into another star fish, if a part of its body is cut, every social transformation thought of Nirmal gives birth to an organization, a model, or a team. His greatest strength is the 'emptiness' that bubbles with ideas often. He conceives the idea, operationalizes it, hands it over to the beneficiaries, and moves on to with his next mission.

Relevance of contextuality over the purpose of continuity

Nirmal believes in addressing issues and not creating organizations. Organizations are the medium to address the cause. He also believes that social organizations must address contemporary issues, whatever might be the purpose of its birth.

Apart from his path breaking work in environmental protection and cleanliness, he is also working on various missions against



M B Nirmal with Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu

corruption, alcoholism, and women empowerment. Realizing the need for synergy among the social activist organizations, he has developed a networking model and is in the process of operationalizing it. The focus points of his networking model are Employment, Education, Environment, Entertainment, Energy and Ethics.

What is Voluntary Sacrifice?

Environmental Catastrophes have become the order of the day. One of the most serious problems is Global Warming. There is a very urgent need to cut down on carbon emissions all over the world but no one wants to do so. Nations prefer to increase industrial activity in

order to overcome economic problems. Governments promise to take care of their citizen's welfare, but focus on politics instead. In such a 'never before seen situation', issues related to the environment takes a back seat.

There are 6 'P's that parents give children from day one:

1. Power / Strength
2. Prayer - fear in God
3. Personality (Individual Development)
4. Pupilage (Education)
5. Possessions (Wealth)
6. Position (Post)

Nirmal reminds people that parents forget the 7th 'P' which is

7. Planet. (Saving the planet & protecting the environment)

The 7th 'P' is a collective responsibility for all to work on. Every parent and citizen should take the following pledge, 'All Good Things Begin with Me', and act so. Saving the Planet is one's collective responsibility and we should all work together.

Nirmal says: "Joy is in giving and not holding to oneself". As a true Gandhian, Nirmal plans to handover all his responsibilities to his team by next year and settle down in a village.

—S. Deenadayalan and S.Rajalakshmi

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Joy That Knows No Bounds

“True joy comes from giving someone something that they need knowing that what you are giving will bring joy to that person’s life.”

—Sachin Tendulkar

“The best portion of a good man’s life (are) his little nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love,” said William Wordsworth in Tintern Abbey. It can be said without a shadow of a doubt that there exists no better joy than that which comes out of giving wholeheartedly. That is the joy of Giving Week (JGW) 2010, a movement which gained tremendous popularity in the year 2009 when it was first started, is all set to begin its second inning in this year to turn the focus, yet again, on deriving joy out of this simplest of giving. This idea was initiated by GiveIndia, an NGO that raises funds for other NGOs. Organized by a group of NGOs and bringing together the activities of students, corporate agencies, youth, and celebrities, the Joy of Giving Week aims to bring these people together to celebrate what it calls “a festival of giving.”

“The main focus of the Joy of Giving Week is to encourage people to celebrate a festival of giving, much like they celebrate other festivals such as Holi and Holi. JGW also a campaign aimed at establishing this celebration of giving deep into India’s culture, and is conducted in such a manner that people will look forward to this festival every year,” says Anil Madhusudan, volunteer, JGW 2010.

With the organizers gearing up for preparations enthusiastically, JGW 2010 is all set to overtake its first innings in 2009 by a huge margin. “This year promises to be bigger and better,” affirms Anil, as he expresses hope that the joy of giving will turn out to be everybody’s festival by way of its larger bandwidth this year.

Scheduled to be held from 26th September to 2nd October, 2010, JGW 2010 promises to bring together acts of kindness and generosity from the general public in Chennai and several parts of the country—all in a week’s time for the sake of more enjoyment in the experience of giving. However what has touched the hearts of the organizers among many others is the public support that they envisage as a manager of the game in the run-up to the same. “The key to making the JGW a big success was the fact that the act of giving was the purpose of the Week and not an incidental benefit,” explains N Venkat Krishnan, a volunteer of the Joy of Giving Week 2010, “Support from the media, government, the public, and celebrities from poems, movies and business has been immense,” he added.

The Joy of Giving Week 2010 which has already promised a bigger show in the current year is also expected to throw up a host of new and innovative activities, most of which are those activities in 2009 which make a comeback, but on a larger scale. The School Design for Change (SDC) which in 2009 targeted 8 to 13-year-old children, has now gone global to 24 countries. The Toofles Foundation “Smiles for Smiles” show made a return this year but in a bigger and better avatar, introducing a series called “Speak for Smiles” playing host to eminent business leaders who will come forward to share their ideas on giving.

The Joy of Giving 2009 was also special for several children in the suburbs of Mumbai as half a million, Sachin Tendulkar graced the occasion with his presence and philanthropy. Recalling the many times when he was pleasantly surprised by gifts from his very own teammates, Tendulkar emphasized the need to give in order to stay happy. Among these ever philanthropic acts

of the master blazer at JGW 2009, was a one-day cricket coaching camp he conducted for lesser-fortunate children in Mumbai. In the cricket champion’s very own words, “True joy comes from giving someone something that they need knowing that what you are giving will bring joy to that person’s life.” Interestingly, the whole concept of Joy of Giving is “truly about monetary contributions alone—an impression that most of the public is under in the words of Anil, “It is only about giving a part of you and experiencing joy in the same.”

Workshops and awareness programmes are scheduled for women on domestic violence and training programmes in Chennai conducted by the SDAT (Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu) to train children for district-level sports meet are a few of the programmes conducted as part of the Joy of Giving Week.

For its part, Chennai plays host to a number of events planned by its citizens on the occasion of the Joy of Giving. Seva MeLa, a fair for the welfare, is being organized by CIOSA, an NGO network, on 26th and 27th September at Valluvar Kottam. “It is an opportunity for public on devising the work of NGOs through games and entertainment,” says Pn Aruna of CIOSA. Battle of the Buffet on September 30, and a programme for special children at Nehru Stadium on September 26 are a few more events that have been meticulously planned to make the Joy of Giving Week a memorable occasion in Chennai. This year, a major attraction is the role played by 20 child parliamentarians from Annavasal village in spreading the concept of Children’s parliament in over 10 villages.

One of the most astounding aspects of the Joy of Giving Week is the fact that even the lesser-fortunate care all too ready to give generously, thus living up to the concept of the joy of giving—case in point being 6,000 Women Self-Help Group members in Chennai who are involved in collecting Dal, Oil, and Sugar (DOS) for distribution to charitable organizations. This DOS movement is being coordinated by Iva Rowlin, Coordinator, CSIM. She says: “I was always fascinated by the DOS initiative of CSIM. When I first shared the idea among the SHG women, they were touched by the simplicity of the concept and expressed their willingness to participate in this movement. They also volunteered to collect old clothes, utensils, and books along with DOS. Over 50 NGOs in Chennai will receive our collection during the Seva MeLa.”

“If the concept of the whole idea of Joy of Giving is like this, 50,000 people running together on their own makes no news, but 50,000 people running together creates a marathon. Similarly, one cannot blame giving together will create an outburst of energy that will pay attention and make citizens feel hopeful that together change can be achieved,” says Hema Lamba, a volunteer with JGW. On whether India is slowly becoming a poverty-free nation in the future, members of the Joy of Giving Week reply in the affirmative. “If we can eradicate poverty in the lives of the have-tos, we can easily eradicate poverty in the lives of the have-nots,” says a volunteer of JGW. Perhaps the participation in this week that aims to bring about a sense of joy in the mere act of giving will make people realize and live out the very purpose of their lives—that is characterized by, as Wordsworth puts it, “little nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love.”

—Jude Samith S.



Battle of the Buffet 2009



Seva MeLa



Goonj - Old Clothes Collection Campaign



Sale of NGO Products

The Army Village

That is how the village of Kamawanpettai in Nemili Block, Vellore district in Tamil Nadu is known to most of its neighboring villages and beyond. Not surprising, given that 1,100 of its 1,200 households have at least one member serving in the Army, according to its Panchayat President K.E Sivaji.

Sivaji himself is one of the very few men of the village who has not gone into the army, though both his father and grandfather did.

“My father, despite being the only son of a family with seven daughters, still joined the army,” he says. “But even though we were four boys, he said it was enough that his two elder sons had enlisted, the younger two needed to stay behind to look after the family’s agricultural lands.”

So Sivaji, the youngest, and another brother had to stay away from the army. His brother is now the Village Administrative Officer while Sivaji has been serving as the Panchayat President for the last 10 years.

Nevertheless, such is the tradition of the village that has had a history of sending recruits to the army from colonial times—four freedom fighters fought in Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose’s Indian National Army—that parents apparently give their daughters as brides only to army recruits.

“Even if the prospective groom works at the collector’s office, that’s still not good enough for most parents,” smiles Sivaji.

About 30 to 50 youths join the army from the village every year, with the numbers varying according to the recruitment policies of the army each year. Though not officially acknowledged by either the state or central governments for its contribution to the army, the village is nevertheless well known.

“Actor Vijay came to spend one day with us and interact with our youth because of our reputation of sending so many youths into the army,” says Sivaji.

‘Jaya TV carried a 30-minute program on us on



K.E Sivaji

Independence Day last year. Actor Ajith is scheduled to come down soon. He wants to shoot a film called ‘*Ranuvam*’ (meaning army) based on our village.”

Sivaji himself has only one son along with two daughters. The son is also destined to join the army.

“To educate them to be doctors or engineers is beyond us. They do very well in the army economically,” he says.

Though most youths join the army with the minimum educational criteria of higher secondary education and be recruited as jawans, they are able to send Rs.5,000 to their home on an average. The children are educated in the English medium these days.

Most families own land; therefore, farming income is also available. Rice, banana, maize, turmeric and sugarcane are cultivated. Though there is enough land, there is not enough water resource for all the men to pursue agriculture. Being a hilly region with no factories/industries in the vicinity providing employment opportunities, this is what led most men to choose to join the army. Now it has become the mainstay of their economy.

“We have a Tamil proverb saying: An elephant whether alive or dead is worth a 1,000 sovereigns of gold,” says Sivaji. “The same applies to the army. We have had our share of tragedies too. Men have lost their lives in the army. But, the widow’s pension is sufficient to look after her needs.”

Though generally inclined to talk favorably of the army and the employment opportunities it affords the men of his village, Sivaji did have one grievance to relate. The army provides canteen facilities to the families of its members where various essential goods from groceries to toiletries and furniture can be procured at a highly subsidized rate. However, despite having more than 1,000 families with members in the Army, the village does not boast of a canteen of its own. The nearest canteen as well as the Army hospital is in Katpadi block, which is 45 km away from the village. “It’s a long and tiring journey to get there, and many of our older people suffer on that account. Despite several requests, the State Government has not opened a canteen in our village. Right now, the villagers have to commute by changing three buses to reach the canteen. We have requested for at least a direct bus—given our numbers which isn’t unreasonable—but it has been denied,” relates Sivaji.

The village also has its share of social problems as a consequence of having so many men in the army. The women are overly burdened with household work, besides looking after their family. Second, many among the men learn to drink in the army. According to Sivaji, 90 percent of the men retired from the army consume alcohol regularly, with 40 percent being alcoholics.

Also, once in the army, the men learn to lead a highly regimented way of life which makes it hard for them to ease back into civilian lifestyles, post retirement.

“They get very irritated and impatient with the easy ways of us civilians,” laughs Sivaji. “They are especially hard on their own sons, trying to get them to lead a regimented life as well, but over time they learn to ease up. They have no choice; we won’t change to suit their convenience so they will just have to adjust themselves,” adds Sivaji.

—Thulasi Muttulingam
Asian College of Journalism

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Starting Things Anew



Training sessions at ANEW



When Dr. Anu Chandran began a small institute in a garage with ten folding chairs and offered employable skills to women, not many could have foreseen that the humble beginning would blossom one day into an organization that would occupy a special place for women today.

Thirteen years since the Association for Non-Traditional Employment for Women (ANEW) was set up in Anna Nagar in 1997, it is recognized as one of the prime institutes for its role in uplifting women and giving them employable skills to get a well-deserved decent life. ANEW provides skill-based training to over 600 young women every year in nursing, driving, and computers, coupled with soft skills and other skill-based courses such as infant care and spoken English.

ANEW has created a niche for itself in the social service spectrum in Chennai. With over 2,000 of its trainees currently employed, running families, and even educating their children, ANEW has done what few social service institutions have been able to achieve: create a place in society not only for the women of today, but also for generations to come.

“Circumstances have led these less fortunate and downtrodden women to reach out to social service organizations for help. Most of us don’t realize that if only these women were trained in areas that would get them jobs, they would all lead better lives,” said Dr. Anu Chandran.

What germinated as a thought when Dr. Anu Chandran discussed it with M.K. Kumar led to setting up ANEW that promised to impart nursing

skills to lesser fortunate women so that they could get jobs somewhere.

“The first group of women who completed their nursing course at ANEW are still working and managing their families,” said an elated Dr. Anu Chandran. She recalled how a nurse-trainer used to take classes at the institute, and how a tie-up

“*The first group of women who completed their nursing course at ANEW are still working and managing their families*”

with Sundaram Medical Foundation (SMF) at Anna Nagar helped trainees get hands on experience. As the course progressed, infant care was introduced with the aid of adoption centers. In addition, the nursing course was also certified by SMF.

With the skill-based courses at ANEW gaining ground, and more trainees joining every day, ANEW decided to branch out. A course in computers was started in 2000. “We realized that

the girls joining our institute were from diverse backgrounds—some had even completed their graduation,” recollected Dr. Anu Chandran. “We thought we could equip them with a better programme and thus introduced computer training to our courses,” she added.

With 20 girls joining the first batch, and courses such as DCA, DTP and Tally included in the computer courses, it remains a hit at ANEW as more students join this programme. The certification by Sathyam Computers added value to the course. Recent records show that the number of students who have enrolled in the computer programmes at ANEW is the highest amongst the programmes that they offer.

ANEW didn’t stop there. What followed was a course in driving, and trainees were trained in car and auto-rickshaw driving, which continues till date. “The driving programme was coordinated by the Institute of Road Transport. This programme, the most rewarding from the trainees’ point of view, is the most challenging for us. Owing to the demand for women drivers, our girls were employed quickly on completion of the driving course and obtained their licenses. But, they found it hard to cope with the cars they were expected to drive since the cars in which they were trained were different,” said Dr. Anu Chandran.

“The course was quite challenging from a financial perspective as well. While it took just Rs. 3,000 to train a nurse, we incurred about Rs. 10,000 to train a single driver, and only 37 out of our 97 trainees actually benefited from the training. However, the driving programme has

indeed showed several encouraging signs, such as one trainee, Kayalvizhi who is an ambulance driver, and remains so till date—the only woman ambulance driver in a government-run hospital,” added Dr. Anu Chandran.

With ANEW having plans to begin a full-time optometry course, certified by the Sight Care Foundation, the importance attached by the organization to the employability of women remains unquestioned. With a host of training programmes and more to come, ANEW continues to pave the way today for women’s rehabilitation and employability. Dr. Anu Chandran said: “We train around 600 young women every year on a charitable basis. We plan to raise this number to 1,000 by the end of this year. In the light of this, donations from people are welcome.”

Spoken English classes, soft skills training and extensive counseling sessions conducted at ANEW have led to holistic skill-based training of women. “Attitudes are changing these days. Equal opportunity ought to be given to young girls, and people will eventually begin to understand that,” concluded Dr. Chandran.

For 13 years, ANEW has strived to lift the status of women and has succeeded. The efforts of ANEW will certainly ensure that women in society start anew—for a better life of peace, harmony and self-sufficiency.

—Jude Sannith S.

If you wish know more about ANEW contact Dr. Anu Chandran at 044-2620 0697 or visit www.anewindia.org

Inspiring Conversations

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 about "Self Enquiry" between Ramana Maharishi and his disciples.

QUESTION 1

D: Master! What is the means to gain the state of eternal bliss, ever devoid of misery?

M: Apart from the statement in the Veda that wherever there is body there is misery, this is also the direct experience of all people; therefore, one should enquire into one's true nature which is ever bodiless, and one should remain as such. This is the means to gaining that state.

QUESTION 2

D: What is meant by saying that one should enquire into one's true nature and understand it?

M: Experiences such as "I went; I came;

I was; I did" come naturally to everyone. From these experiences, does it not appear that the consciousness "I" is the subject of those various acts? Enquiry into the true nature of that consciousness, and remaining as oneself is the way to understand, through enquiry, one's true nature.

QUESTION 3

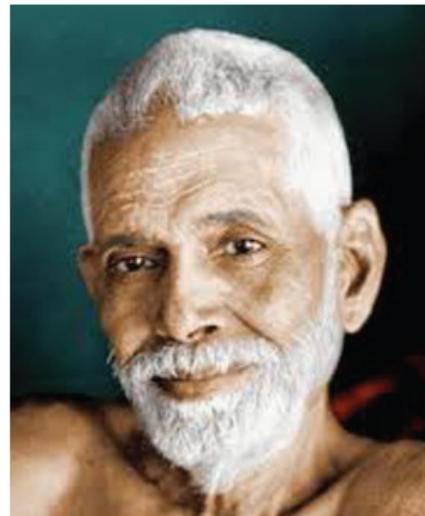
D: How is one to enquire: "Who am I?"

M: Actions such as 'going' and 'coming' belong only to the body. And so, when one says "I went, I came", it amounts to saying that the body is "I". But, can the body be said to be the consciousness "I," since the body was not before it was born, is made up of the five elements, is non-existent in the state of deep sleep, and becomes a corpse when dead? Can this body which is inert like a log of wood be said to shine as "I" "I"?

Therefore, the "I" consciousness which at first arises in respect of the body is referred to variously as self-conceit (tarbodham), egoity (ahankara),

nescience (avidya), maya, impurity (mala), and individual soul (jiva). Can we remain without enquiring into this? Is it not for our redemption through enquiry that all the scriptures declare that the destruction of "self-conceit" is release (mukti)? Therefore, making the corpse-body remain as a corpse, and not even uttering the word "I," one should enquire keenly thus: "Now, what is it that rises as 'I'?" Then, there would shine in the Heart a kind of wordless illumination of the form 'I' 'I'. That is, there would shine of its own accord the pure consciousness which is unlimited and one, the limited and the many thoughts having disappeared. If one remains quiescent without abandoning that (experience), the egoity, the individual sense, of the form 'I am the body' will be totally destroyed, and at the end the final thought, viz. the 'I'-form, also will be quenched like the fire that burns camphor. The great sages and scriptures declare that this alone is release.

Excerpted from 'Self-Enquiry' By Ramana Maharshi









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OBSESSION – the bane of passion

A Series on *Growing-Reflections for Deep Change*



Being passionate is one of the essentials not only for every social entrepreneur but every human being. In the last growing series we had spoken about aspiration and passion as an essential outcome of the depth of aspiration; but there is a danger to passion and that is obsession. When passion blinds the person to the context, that person begins to work towards shaping the context to their requirement, akin to the boy in this story.

A little boy was heartbroken to find his pet turtle lying on its back, lifeless and still, beside the pond. His father did his best to console him: “Don’t cry, son. We’ll arrange a lovely funeral for Mr. Turtle. We’ll make him a little coffin all lined in silk, and get the undertaker to make a headstone for his grave with Mr. Turtle’s name carved on it. Then we’ll have fresh flowers placed on the grave each day and make a little picket fence to go all around it.”

The little boy dried his eyes and became enthusiastic about the project. When all was ready, a cortege was formed—father, mother, maid, and child as chief mourner—and they began to move solemnly towards the pond to bring in the body. But, the body had vanished! Suddenly they spied Mr. Turtle emerging from the depths of the pond merrily. The little boy stared at his friend in bitter disappointment and cried out: “Let’s kill him!” (*Sampath. J.M. story 25 Discovery – 3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998*)

Initially the turtle was a loving pet. But the minute the excitement of the funeral function occupied the boy’s mind, the love for the pet was forgotten. Many a time when the social entrepreneur begins, there is a real need to reach out to the identified group. In the initial days, the person begins by responding to the context and formulating ways to reach the needy. Over a period of time, to find the viability and sustainability of the idea, it is encased into an

organizational set up. But as the organizational issues grow and popularity begins to emerge, instead of sustaining the original intention of the idea, the person becomes larger than the purpose. Then the person instead of responding to the context begins to work towards taking from the context. At this point of time, the obsession takes over, sadly, many a time killing the very purpose of the original idea.

How do we identify if obsession is taking over?

The nature of obsession is:

- To blind the person to understand the context. The person begins to interpret the context in relation to his/her ideas.
- Obsession makes the person feel insecure. This insecurity limits the person in resource utilization.
- Obsession makes the person risk averse. There begins a trend to repeat the success stories.
- The need to maintain the image of self and organization overtakes the need to reach out to the needy.
- Only those serving the obsession are allowed to become part of the group and feedback is not welcome.
- Obsession itself becomes the stimulant of the downfall of self and organization thereby killing the purpose and intention in due course.

Points for Reflection:

- How do I constantly become aware when my passion starts becoming an obsession?
- Why do I get obsessed?
- How do I deal with my obsession?
- What are the actions I can take on a regular basis to ensure I serve the purpose and not the purpose serving me?

—J.M.Sampath & Kalpana Sampath

VENTURE PHILANTHROPY

Venture Philanthropy is almost same as Venture Capital in business.

Venture Capital is equity for investment in a potentially important prospective idea, which will succeed after nurturing it, developing it, and scaling up into an extremely profitable, economically viable and sustainable venture. The waiting can be long, but it is worth waiting and exciting at an appropriate time, thereafter, with multiples on the equity invested.

The entrepreneur needs to be left undisturbed to grow, expand and establish a long-term sustainable achievement of goals. This success story may be one in ten of such Venture Capital forays. When it fails venture capital is written off, but the one in ten which succeeds takes all the hit and survives with a rich harvest. In this case, the

Venture Capitalist feels happy for having accomplished and goes on looking for the next potential idea.

Runs parallel is the concept of Venture Philanthropy except with one notable deviation. A Venture Philanthropist invests his resources in a potentially fruitful social enterprise idea promised by a social entrepreneur. He waits patiently providing timely committed succor and finances until success/goals/ impacts are sustainably achieved. Thereafter, the Venture Philanthropist quits with zero multiples, but with an accomplishment that a good quality, replicable, scalable, and sustainable Social Enterprise model has been created. That is his success and goes on to support the next potential idea of social change.

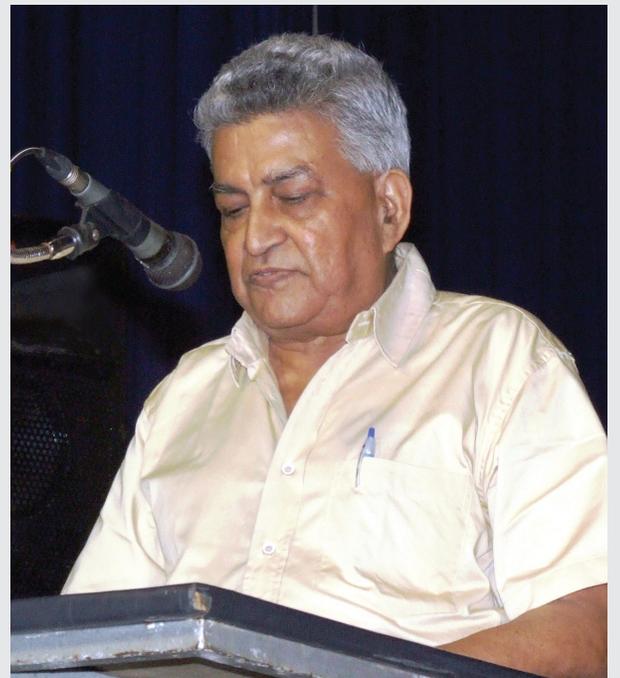
Corporate Philanthropy is also Venture Philanthropy like Venture Equity Capital (without making

multiples on exit). Corporate Philanthropist partner with Social Entrepreneurs, who works towards improving life, respect, and economies of disadvantaged people.

You may not have the financial wherewithal of a larger corporation, but you can engage the hearts and the minds of your employees in Corporate Philanthropy by these actions.

Large corporations generally have well-defined Corporate Philanthropy programs that may include foundations, major event sponsorship, and corporation-wide employee involvement in volunteerism, and organized giving, often to a well-organized charity such as United Way. But, Corporate Philanthropy presents an astonishing opportunity for small to mid-sized companies and organizations.

—P. N. Devarajan



Mover and Shaker

Gautham Menon tells **Marie Banu** how media could be used to bring about social change

Gautham Vasudev Menon, an award winning film director and producer has been in the film industry over ten years. A trendsetter in Indian cinema, Gautham has been an inspiration to many. He has recently won the National Film Award for Best Feature Film in Tamil, and has also been nominated for a Filmfare Award for Best Director.

In an exclusive interview with Marie Banu, Gautham Vasudev Menon tells how media could be used to highlight social issues.

You had recently directed the anthem song for Tamil Semmozhi Maanadu. Can you share your experience working in this project?

In movies, I put together a concept and the songs are woven into a screen play. I don't have to think too much about the visuals for the song as they form part of the script. Working for the Tamil Semmozhi Maanadu anthem song was a new experience, because the song was already composed and recorded. I was asked by A.R. Rahman to make a video out of this, and being a government project I wondered if it would have a political edge. A.R. Rahman convinced me that the project was about Tamil, the language, and Tamilians, and asked me to script out a concept.

I suggested shooting the video with all the singers, similar to 'we are the world' song. MP Kanimozhi was very supportive and was like a producer of the film as the funds came through her from the government. Both A.R. Rahman and I did not charge for this project but spent on making the song.

I decided to include all singers who contributed to the project. It was nice to see T.M. Soundarajan and Shruti Hassan share the same platform. We brought in concepts like having Tamil alphabet shaped *murukus*, showing Google in Tamil, and making the Chief Minister enact some scenes. It was fun and a tremendous experience for me.

Two of your movies were based on the life of a police officer and both were super hits. What was your motivation to work on this topic?

It's not just the police, I admire men in uniform. I wanted to join the army but



Photo credit: no logo

my mother wasn't too happy about it. I did take the NDA examination, but pursued engineering. Film making was my passion and so I weaned away. If I did not pursue this career, I might have probably joined the army.

I respect that profession, and am looking at making more movies about the police and the army. I want to show the dreams of one who wants to become a police officer, and how it gets shattered because he has to work within a structure that has been a ready set up.

I think about men in uniform to be the basic instinct for any action film as they are the only people associated with action in real life. It is easier to write a story for a thriller film with a police officer as a protagonist.

Your films have been milestones in Tamil cinema. Which of them did you most enjoy making?

It is difficult to pick. I enjoy the process of film making. I write what I want to write and make what I want to make. I don't think about what people would think and I don't get bogged down while making the film. It is only when I finish the film do I get into a nervous state as it involves a lot of money.

The most emotional film for me was 'Vaaranam Aiyiram'. I made that after my father passed away. The story was about him and his moments with me. Suriya, a good friend of mine decided to play both the characters as father and son. He asked my assistants to go to my house and pick up photographs of my father, and insisted to appear like him in the movie. I felt that I was just five films old, and I didn't want people to say that I spent someone else's money to make a personal film. I was wary, but Suriya insisted.

He said that he knew that the story was about my father and so wanted to look like him in the film. Whenever Suriya would come to the set, I would get emotional. Most of the scenes were shot at home and this made me happy. When the shoot was over I felt that the movie would come out well. It turned out to be a hit and I even received an award for that film.

If you were asked to direct a movie on a social topic, which issue would you choose?

Of late, I have been thinking of doing a film on a person who is able to handle life despite being disabled. I do not

conform to that school of thought where you show lives of people who are suffering in order to make one contribute. This is happening anyway. For instance, issues like a ramp not being provided in a theatre to help disabled persons commute easily are some issues that I would like to talk about when I do a film.

I am becoming socially conscious of late. I always feel that the lesser we talk about it, the better. I somehow conform to that kind of an idea and people who know me will understand. I have contributed to charities and I will. But I would never want to talk about it as my intention is only to make a contribution.

How do you think media could be used to bring about social change?

Even the smallest of scandals are blown out of proportion in the media. When you skip channels and watch news, a scandal is the one you want to watch. That attitude should change. There should be some system like a censor board governing the television channels. We have started a production house and are going to produce television shows and show good content on television similar to American television. There is

no mainstream director who would like to direct a television programme for the fear of being termed as a television director. I am confident that I can balance both. I am getting into prime time television and looking at doing good content. Hopefully we will try and cover social issues as well.

How did you convince your parents about your decision to enter the film industry?

My parents would never disagree to what I wanted to do. My father did not watch many films, but my mother was a film buff. The films that I watched while I grew up were those that my mother recommended to me.

When I finished my engineering, my parents wanted me to go abroad or seek employment here, but I expressed to them that I wanted to become a movie maker. They were initially worried as it involved a lot of hard work, but I convinced them. Their consent was my motivation.

Whenever I attend a show or a movie, I take my mother along. Recently during the music release function at London, I made A.R. Rahman hand over the first music cd of my film 'Vinnaihaandi Varuwaaya' to my mother.

Will you encourage your children to enter the film industry?

I don't have any issues, but will not force them to enter the film industry. My children are very young: Arya (8) Dhruva (4) and Adhya (2) are all boys. We decided to make them what they want to be. But, they all must attend college. Arya likes cars and wants to be a car racer. He has just started watching films, mostly animation films.

I insist on college education even for those who come to work with me. Education streamlines a person, and I believe that a lot of taste depends on what you study. The friends you choose and the life you go through during the college days sets you up for the rest of your life.

Editorial

**Latha Suresh
Marie Banu
Radha Jagan**