

Conversations

A Chronicle of Social Currents

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Savithri Vaithi
80 glorious years in serving humanity

From the Editor

Dear friends,

Come October, India celebrates the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, a servant leader and a legend whose teachings I admire and try to emulate. 1st October, World Elderly Day, is also the birthday of a living legend in social

work—Ms Savithri Vaithi, founder of Vishranthi old age home, whose yeoman service to the senior citizens of Chennai is an unique model which needs to be replicated throughout India.

This issue of Conversations features these two legends along with G.R. Shanmugappa,

Shabeena Francis, and C.Sylendra Babu, who are icons in their own way.

I am sure all the stories in this issue will inspire one and all, and serve as a symbol of hope to the future generations.

Happy reading!

—P. N. Devarajan

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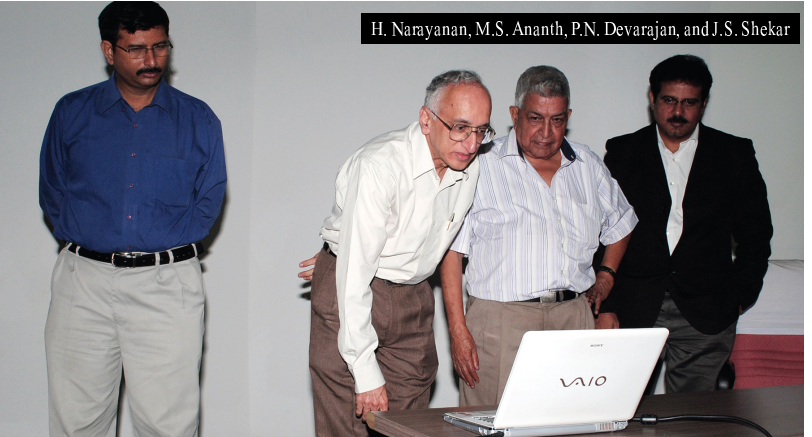


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Prof. M.S. Ananth



H. Narayanan, M.S. Ananth, P.N. Devarajan, and J.S. Shekar

Learning Social Entrepreneurship the E-way!

E-learning and entrepreneurship are undoubtedly the two E's whose baby-steps might just result in one giant leap for mankind. As familiar as one may be with these concepts, there's no denying the fact that these principles have started becoming the driving force for almost any basic form of growth, be it knowledge, wealth, or all-round development. Given the huge potential that these concepts hold within themselves, one can only imagine how viable and noteworthy a combination of these two principles may be. A realization of that dream is exactly what was to be at the launch of CSIM's

online course in social entrepreneurship.

A revolutionary course by nature, and inventive and path-breaking by virtue of its content, the online course in social entrepreneurship offered by the Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) got off to a grand start on 7th September, 2010 as the course itself was launched at the IIT, Madras campus by Prof. M.S. Ananth, Director, IIT Madras. Designed and developed in collaboration with Cognizant Technology Solutions, the online course in social entrepreneurship offered by CSIM involves the intricacies of entrepreneurship which has been

tempered with a social angle.

The online course consists of modules dealing with legal aspects, fund development, social marketing, management tools, project management, finance management, and human resource management (several aspects of social entrepreneurship). Besides, short films and documentaries on successful social entrepreneurs are included as case studies.

Mr. Lakshmi Narayan, Vice-chairman, Cognizant, Mr. P.N. Devarajan, Founder, CSIM, Mr. H. Narayanan, Chairperson, Academic Council, CSIM and Mr. J. S. Shekar, Executive

Director, Sinar Jernih India Pvt. Ltd. participated in the event.

In attendance at the launch of the course were several students, teachers, academicians, and corporate representatives. What provides an impetus to the program is the association of a software giant such as Cognizant with the program thus allowing the inflow of ideas and syllabus design to take place in a more efficient manner, in keeping with the demands and challenges thrown up by modern society.

—J.S.S

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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Engendering an Identity

Even though we may call ourselves educated, boast of great levels of exposure towards various socio-cultural-technological advancements; we still have problems contending to patriarchal values. We remain closed to liberally discussing gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation. Shabeena Francis Saveri, an achiever of sorts, is a transgender and founder President of Dai Welfare Society, Mumbai and Founder Trustee of South India Aravanigal Rights and Rehabilitation Centre, Trichy. She is a committed activist who has worked extensively in the field of Human Trafficking, HIV/AIDS prevention, Health and Human Rights, Transgender Rights, and Anti-Tobacco movements. An Indian ambassador at major international forums of discussion on transgender issues, she is also a member of the Advisory Board in Trans-respect versus Trans-phobia (TvT) Project (conducted by transgender Europe). She has been recently invited to be a panel speaker on her research topic 'Transgender (Hijra-Aravanis) Social Movements in Tamil Nadu'.

Having started her career as Assistant to the then Deputy Municipal Commissioner Mr. G. R. Khairnar in Mumbai, where she worked for the rescue and rehabilitation of trafficked women in Mumbai, she has come a long way. It was not until she arrived in Chennai for higher studies in the year 2002, that she found her true career call.

While pursuing M. Phil in Sociology at Annamalai University, she took up the PGDSIM course at CSIM in the year 2004-2005. "Joining CSIM was one of the major turning points in my life. Still studying then, I was in desperate need of a job to support myself. I was given a stipend, and Mrs. Latha Suresh, Director, CSIM, identified my interest in documentation and referred me to a few organizations that needed assistance. At CSIM, the rigorous training and the various topics that were taught changed my attitude, and provided me with a fresh perspective of life. CSIM has been an eye opener for me and it is also my second home," said Shabeena.

Spilling the beans on her childhood dreams, she recalls wistfully, "I wanted to grow up to become a school teacher. Somewhere along the way, between activism and grass-root level work, this dream wore away. When I was doing M.Phil, I decided to pursue my Ph.D, and it is then I confirmed to myself that this is where I want to be." The contentment in her voice is unmistakable. Speaking of her growth as a professional, she reminisces her trip to the United States in 2009 as part of a student exchange programme, visiting the George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Washington University. "Meeting teachers who dealt with topics such as 'Queer Rights', and students who were doing research in the same field, and also a few trans-people, I learnt about the different strategies they adopted to address Human Rights issues in their country."

"The U.S. society is very much gendered," she observes, "You are compulsorily required to conform to being a man or a woman, even if you are a trans-gendered person. Although there are a few welfare policies for the transgender, these policies

are not uniform. At the societal front, there is no concept of a third gender in the United States and in the European countries, whereas, India is one of the very few nations where trans-people have a role in the society. Even though they are still treated like aliens, they are regarded as Demigods and are feared to have blessing and cursing powers."

Just back from the Barcelona International Congress on Gender Identity and Human Rights, she says: "Attending international conferences provides me an exposure to realities of trans-people all over the world. It helps in forming active networks and listening to real life experiences." Narrating her personal experiences of being a trans-woman she says, "I have been on my own since I was seventeen, and I have been supporting myself financially. It has been a long and difficult path, but I've taken everything as a learning experience," quips Shabeena, even as she speaks of her tour de force. About 13 years ago, after completing school, she left her family and charted a path of her own. "Leading a normal life as a trans-person can be quite difficult," she laments. "In states like Tamil Nadu, where the Aravanis tradition symbolizes the lifestyle of trans-people, and where it is common to find them making a living as either beggars, or commercial sex workers, it is a challenge to make people understand that trans-people can be empowered individuals—educated, employed, just like anyone else."

"I like to lead a quiet life. I have always aspired to be an academician, and am pursuing just that. I like to be recognized for my profession and my expertise. If anybody notices me to be a trans-person, I'm okay with it. I certainly do not intend proclaiming my gender-identity to the whole world through mass

media. I have never considered myself as being out of the mainstream; so I do not endorse the politics behind 'mainstreaming the transgender,'" adds Shabeena.

Speaking about the challenges that trans-people face in our society, she points out that there is little research done on transgenders in India. The irrefutable truth is that there is massive discrimination, and it is a double-whammy when it is coupled with a disability. "Finish your education first! Transition can happen at any point in time. With the present lack of substantial policies, and rampant discrimination, it will be better to put off transition until after one has acquired a basic educational qualification," she advises.

Shabeena's research throws light on already existing policies for the transgender in Tamil Nadu, amongst other things. Her intention is to bring out a piece of literature that will help trans-people at the grass-roots. Shabeena's doctoral thesis will come to fruition in about a year. She is looking forward to taking up teaching and further research. Also, she is conceptualizing a unique not-for-profit organization that will deal with education and research. Determination and discipline twinkling in her eyes, she exudes confidence even as she gets going on her very own 'Pursuit of happiness'.

—Archanaa R.



Shabeena Francis Saveri.



Shabeena with participants at Barcelona International Congress

The Magic Of The Mahatma

“May God grant the people of India the right path, the true vision and the ability and the courage to follow this path, difficult and yet easy, of sacrifice”

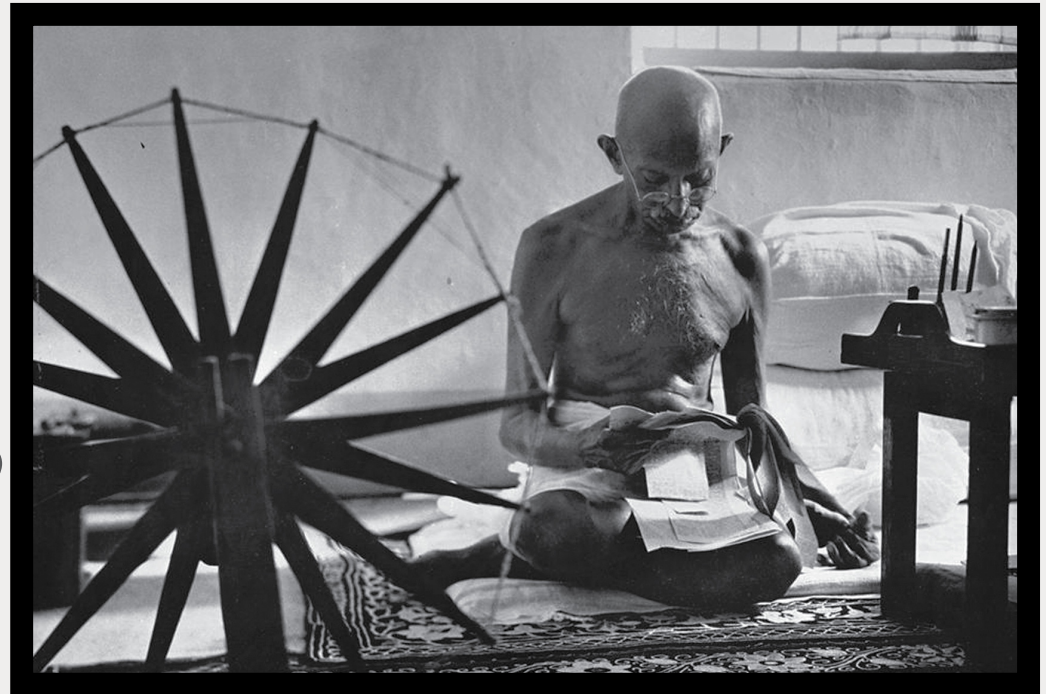
For a bowl of water, give a goodly meal;
For a kindly greeting, bow thou down
with zeal;
For a simple penny, pay thou back with gold;
If thy life be rescued, life do not withhold.
Thus the words and actions of the wise regard;
Every little service tenfold they reward.
But, the truly noble know all men as one,
And return with gladness good for evil done.

By his own admission, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi believed that the aforementioned didactic stanza, originally written in Gujarati was the driving force behind his mission and its precept—returning good for evil became his guiding principle. A figure that has often been associated with the freedom struggle—the man who brought India its long-awaited independence to be fondly called the ‘Father of the Nation’, Gandhi was perhaps the most enigmatic icon of the 20th century. Disciplined, tolerant, persistent, peaceful, and a patriotic are perhaps the most commonly used adjectives while one tries to describe the persona of the Mahatma. However, in the melee of describing India’s most powerful man that ever was and ever will be; many forget the multifaceted qualities of India’s greatest freedom fighter.

Turning the other cheek

“Anger will serve no purpose. We shall have to meet ungodliness by godliness. We shall have to meet their untruth by truth; we shall have to meet their cunning and their craft by openness and simplicity; we shall have to meet their terrorism and frightfulness by bravery.”

These golden words reveal the most significant reason why Mahatma Gandhi is a global icon today. The very fact that his philosophy prescribed good for evil and radiated Christ-like qualities, caught the attention of the world and quite literally shook the minds of the European settlers in India. Quite ironically, the fact that these



philosophies were those of a practicing Hindu directed at a largely Christian population of settlers yet mirroring qualities of a good Christian is perhaps what has amazed the world for several decades now. Gandhi’s resolve to fight evil with good; lies with the truth; and terrorism with bravery has created a niche for himself in the minds and hearts of not only several Indians, but people all over the world. The ideals that the Mahatma radiated, quite unsurprisingly have also been the driving forces behind Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King’s victories in their respective independence struggles. That the philosophies of the Mahatma would result in a world movement is both a matter of pride, and a point to ponder in times where violence continues to dictate the ways of the world.

A man of action

Turning the other cheek could perhaps have provided a wrong notion to people that Gandhi perhaps propagated inaction as one of the basic means of achieving independence. However, on the contrary, Mahatma Gandhi was a man of action—his life in itself is a perfect testimonial to the same. Gandhi never believed that one could sit back, stay non-violent, and get what he wanted. On the other hand, he felt that any desire can be attained only when there exists a resolve, a motive, and most importantly the drive to act upon the same, and win by sacrifice. While making a speech at the erstwhile Madras Beach in 1920, the Mahatma paid tribute to Lokmanya Tilak, his rich accolades enabling the audience to understand the underlying principle of the freedom

struggle of the nation’s forefathers.

“His life, if it teaches us anything whatsoever, teaches one supreme lesson: that if we want to do anything whatsoever for our country we can do so not by speeches, however grand, eloquent, and convincing they may be, but only by sacrifice at the back of every act in our life.”

Through these lines, Gandhi not only underlined the persona of one of India’s greatest freedom fighters, but also emphasized on the need to act upon one’s beliefs. A voracious orator himself, Gandhi seldom believed that oratorical skills would win his war, however “grand, eloquent, and convincing they may be.” Sacrifice, the Mahatma believed would be the sole answer to the nation’s desires.

A call to act

“I urge those who talk or work (against non-cooperation) to descend from their chairs and go down to the people, learn their feelings and write, if they have the heart (against non-cooperation).”

Gandhi was always a man of action. However, what is perhaps the more significant aspect about the father of the nation is also the fact that he was a pioneer of sorts. While leading the non-cooperation movement, Gandhi strongly believed that the only way to sow the seeds of non-cooperation deep into the minds of every Indian would be for every learned citizen to answer the call of the nation. Gandhi believed that one man’s effort alone was enough to change a nation, but the Mahatma also knew that in a nation of millions,

it would take a collective effort to win freedom. This simple principle, if applied, can surprisingly be the answer to every single problem that the country is facing today—poverty, political instability, regional insecurity, sectionalism, separatism, and terrorism. If Gandhi’s principles of action were applied to the ground level, most problems of the nation would cease to exist.

Vision for the nation

Gandhi wanted all Indians to be one—irrespective of cast, creed, colour or religion. He believed that only if harmony prevailed in the nation could the nation be united, in the true sense of the word. He loved India and wished that Indians would live together as one. He also believed that the only way one could achieve the same was by sacrifice, and sacrifice without any exception.

“May God grant the people of India the right path, the true vision and the ability and the courage to follow this path, difficult and yet easy, of sacrifice.”

With these qualities at heart, and a philosopher, visionary, and humanist in mind, body, and soul, it goes without a doubt that the magic of the Mahatma transcends all barriers—national, regional, and even individual. What Gandhi has done in his time, no man can achieve for a lifetime. Gandhi was, is, and always will be the Father of a Nation—a nation that still grapples with the principles of a man so great that his enemies could only stare in wonderment as he lobbied for peace in his quest for freedom.

—JSS



Cultural Programme



General public visiting NGO stalls



Mr. Gnani, and Ms. Ranjani Murugan



Justice Vallinayagam and Actor Vijayakumar



Seva Mela

Seva mela was inaugurated by Padmasree Dr. Bakthavathsalam, of KG hospitals, Mr. Murali, Krishna sweets, and Mr. Gnani writer. This Mela served as a platform to bring together social workers, corporate employees, volunteers, and college students under one roof and encourages giving amongst common people. Giving Corner and food festival was also inaugurated. CIOA Seva Awards were by the guests companies, NGOs and individuals.

Food Festival was organized as part of the event in which Coke, Adyar Bakery, Ginger breads, Duchcess Club set up 20 food stalls and raised money for NGOs.

Over 65 NGOs participated in the exhibition and set up stalls. Visitors played chess with visually impaired, tested their eye sight, played dart, weaved *charka* and participated in various such games.

Children and women from NGOs performed Cultural programmes and entertained the audience. Self-help group members and BIG FM radio listeners donated over one tonne of Dal, Oil, sugar,

rice as well as one truck load of old cloths were collected. The collected items were donated to orphanages in and around Chennai and the old cloths were handed over to GOONJ.

12 colleges participated in the street theater completion, peace painting and debate. 120 students took part in the essay competition that was conducted for school students.

Actor Vijayakumar, Dr. Joe Arun of Loyola Outreach and Justice Vallinayagam gave away the prizes to the winners during the valedictory function.



Mr. Mahadevan and Mrs. Kanimozhi, MP interacting with NGOs



Food from leading hotels being served

Battle of the Bufffet

'Joy of Giving Week' is a special week that was organised from 26 September to 2 October all over India to bring people, from all walks of life, together to get involved with a cause(s) of their choice. It was a concerted effort across companies, celebrities, business heads, NGOs, schools, colleges, and the 'general public, to create a

movement of "giving".

The Battle of Buffet was one of the events that was organised in Chennai on the 30th of September 2010 as part of the 'Joy of Giving Week' celebrations. It was a gala evening of fun, food and entertainment that was sponsored by Oriental Cuisines and Naihaa.

Live concert by playback singer

Srinivas, and traditional folk music by Chennai Sangamam drummers was performed during the event. Leading hotels in Chennai had set up their food stalls. It was mentioned that the funds that were raised from this effort would be donated to charities.

MP Kanimozhi and Actor Suhasini Manirathnam witnessed the event and interacted with the audience.



Singer Srinivas performing at the concert

Savithri Vaithi— 80 glorious years in serving humanity



“There is no higher religion than human service. To work for the common good is the greatest creed.”
—Woodrow T. Wilson

This is a quote that aptly defines the principle beliefs of Smt. Savithri Vaithi—visionary and karta of Vishranthi Charitable Trust in Chennai. Turning 80 this month, she is as committed as ever with her zest for life radiating from her face. Social work has been her only passion in life and her calling to serve mankind came at an early age of sixteen. Her hands full with work, she discusses her life, interests, her deep rooted connection with social service. Having visualised upcoming plans she is running to go, and narrates her vibrant journey with the *Conversations* team.

Eldest of four daughters, she recalls her childhood days being part of a big family. “My grand father was a judge in the High

and social work took a backseat. She felt that she was wasting her talents as she remained idle all day, and so learnt baking and confectionery at the Catering technology institute. Gradually progressing and innovating, she began conducting cooking classes at home for a group of women.

“I taught women various dishes that they had never attempted at cooking. I wanted to take this group forward and so formed a service oriented club that met every Monday and named it Monday Charity Club,” adds Savithri Vaithi. A home leader, she volunteered to head the club that raised funds for the financial assistance of students. The club later started a book bank, and a project called ‘*Chandrika*’ that provides monthly rations to the elderly in slums. All these programs still continue till date. It was in 1978 that she envisioned a home to care for poor elderly women. With the assistance from Help Age India and

Another home funded by Vishranthi Trust is at Irungattankottai, near Sri Perambalur. This is being run for the past ten years and is managed as a co-operative house for and by the elderly men and women.

Other initiatives of the trust include catering for individuals with mental disabilities, and eye cataract services. Both are run with aid from Lions Club and Rajan Eye care Clinic. “Most inmates feel unwanted and do not know the value of donating their eyes after their lifetime and its in them a feeling of being of use to someone after they are gone,” she adds.

Death is something she teaches the inmates to be fearless about. Recalling an incident she says, “When the first death in the home took place we were unaware of how to go about the ceremonies. The *Pitrayan* (undertaker) at the cremation ground was drunk. It was then that I decided to light the funeral pyre, and I have been doing it

Vaithi wishes to spend the last golden years of her life without any difficulties to her close aides. “My life will end here and I wish for it to be peaceful as possible. I do not want to be a burden to others,” she says.

Recipient of various awards including the ‘Real Heroes’ award by the Amhar group and the more latest, The Lions Club Humanitarian Award 2010 by Mohaammed Sahak Abdullah College, Chennai, Savithri Vaithi is as humble as ever. She plans on training middle aged women as caretakers and sending them to homes that require elderly care. Clearly, she has her future plans set and retirement is something she hasn’t considered so far. The thought of turning 80 hasn’t changed her old look or life either.

“I wanted my 80th birthday which falls on 1 October, to be a close affair of my well wishers and inmates, but people insisted it should be celebrated,” she says.

To celebrate the occasion, a felicitation ceremony was held at the A.V.M. Rajawar Kalayana Mandapam on the 28th of September. A Sri Manorama and Actor Sachu, Villupattur folk artist Subbu Arumugam, Srs. S. Sankara Ramani, Hon. Secretary of the Anna Anna Sangam were among other personalities who attended the function. The inmates of Vishranthi were also part of the celebrations. A documentary which had eminent personal lives speak in praise of Savithri Vaithi was screened and the evening drew to a close with a *Naachari* by Sutha Raghunathan.

Recognising a young talent in her field, Savithri Vaithi has dedicated two awards for young achievers in the field of social work. These awards were presented on the occasion of her birthday celebrations. Giving away the awards she says: “People need to be aware of the excellent services done by P. Kalayani who runs an NGO called ‘Neyyam’ in Coimbatore and Lakshmi who heads ‘Ansho Karangan’ in Chennai. Both of them run homes for the elderly and their work has to be recognised. These awards are my personal recognition to their services at the grassroots levels.”

A life dedicated to serving mankind, Savithri Vaithi is an inspiration to each and every person who has the passion to serve. Indeed, here is one person who has walked her talk.

—Vidhi Adithya



Gomathi and Rajalakshmi (an inmate) interacting with Savithri Vaithi

Court, and my father was a leather technologist. When Gandhiji called upon his service, my father resigned from his job and hence I had to start working,” says Savithri Vaithi fondly remembering the pre-independence days and how the labour for service ran in her family.

Her multi-faceted journey began as a welfare worker at the then existing area of Ashok Vihar. “I educated slum dwellers on health and hygiene. My work involved walking for miles or travelling by rams, and I aimed at targeting the grassroots levels in society. I moved on to obtaining a Diploma and working as a medical social worker at the General Hospital,” says Savithri Vaithi.

Like most girls in those times, Savithri Vaithi too could not oppose marriage. She tied the knot with photographer R. Vaithi,

Dr. Natirajan, a geriatricist at the General Hospital, Vishranthi was founded. In the 32 years of its existence, Vishranthi has grown to be more than just a home for the 100 women living there. It is a multi-purpose organisation that serves the needs of many. For instance, the inter-medial nursing home was started to serve the elderly who require post-operative care. Also, under the *Motherly* initiative, orphaned or single parent girls are cared for and provided a commensurate in the same premise. “A lady approached us with her baby as she was abandoned by her husband. She wanted to look after her baby as she had to work and fend for herself. This gave me the idea to create a home for such girl children. The presence of children at Vishranthi is an added joy for the inmates as well,” explains Savithri Vaithi.

for the 300 inmates that have passed away in the home so far. It was shocking at that time for people to see a woman take part in the cremation ceremonies, but I had no option,” she says.

The word ‘personal’ has no meaning in Savithri Vaithi’s life. “I have nothing of my own. I have no family and these inmates are my things. I can’t help to think of anything else but my work as this is my only hobby,” she says with a deep rooted sense of belonging and affection towards Vishranthi.

A lover of books, she has two cupboards stacked with her book collection, but lately has any time to read? She also collects key chains, a hobby that has been kept alive for the past many years and this is the only thing she refers to as her personal belongings.

Living at the Vishranthi premises for the last 15 years, Savithri

Photo credit: pin logo

“I wanted my 80th birthday which falls on 1 October, to be a close affair of my well wishers and inmates, but people insisted that it should be celebrated

From Zero to Hero—A Porter Turned Entrepreneur



Harsh Goenka, Chairman, RPG Group, Ashok K Shah, V-Trans-India-Ltd, Mumbai, and G.R. Shanmugappa

“I was happy and privileged to sit by his side to understand further about his dreams. India needs many leaders like Shanmugappa” – Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

As Management consultant, I take some guest speakers with me to address top management team members including CEO's and to them, somebody who is not from Michigan, or Harvard, or those whose books are not published few million copies—these are not worth even to talk about. I have been of late working with outstanding native intelligent achievers.

Recently, I took a gentleman, who worked as a porter in Bangalore railway station to address the CEO and his Management committee members of a Tata Company. I had requested the CEO to keep the speaker's name confidential. The speaker agreed, but gave me a last minute refusal and I had to therefore cancel the dinner meeting. The speaker said “NO” because he could not speak in English. I persuaded him and in this group, we were discussing the Sand Box theory of C.K. Prahalad's, and working the business targets.

The speaker came and spoke in Hindi, Kannada, and Tamil and kept the 10 senior management committee members spell bound. He also gave them inputs on some major business directions. CEO and the senior executives of this Tata Company were zapped, and what theories, and voluminous pages of book conceptualized, he explained in simple words. He also spoke about how we could fight corruption, take on a government, run businesses, and still remain to be value based—a reality, and a rarity.

The speaker was none other than G.R. Shanmugappa.

G.R. Shanmugappa, failed in 10th standard, from the Pudupet school of Natrampalli Taluk in North Arcot district of Tamil Nadu. For him, that was not the end of the world but the starting point. Armed

with two rupees that his father gave him, he took a lorry to Krishnagiri, and from there walked to Bangalore. Earning to survive was the only dream as he started as a porter at the Bangalore railway station. He hails from a family of five brothers and two sisters, and for his father, who was a small time betel-nut vendor the best that he could offer his son was just two rupees. His mother was a housewife and although living in a poverty stricken condition, taught her son the virtues of dignity of labour. When Shanmugappa moved to the goods shed, loading and unloading became his core competence.

It is interesting to see this native, writing a letter to the son of a boat man, saying that there are several such achievers—who need to be showcased much more than the Bollywood actors. This is the story of one porter getting a call from the son of the boatman, who was then occupying the Rashtropati Bhavan. The person extending the invitation was none other than the former Indian President, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. The invitation from the highest office of the country was however not because of the current status of Shanmugappa as President, Federation of Karnataka State Lorry Owners and Agents Association. Recently, he was been elected as the National President for the All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC), a national body governing the interests of truck operators.

Shanmugappa as an Economist

Shanmugappa's economic theory is astounding. He says that next to agriculture, it is the truckers and their supply chain movement that contribute the most to Indian Economy. An amount of Rs. 1,78,000 crores is the value of money that is

financed by private financiers to buy trucks, while the financial institutions that are run by the government hardly finance one-fourth of this amount. He strongly believes that this unorganized sector of truckers is the real backbone of the economy, and if efficiencies and delivery mechanisms are streamlined, the country can grow to greater heights. Credit worthiness of the truck owners are far better than many of the white-collared senior executives, and that is the pride for him. Also, there are only five government driver training schools all over India, whereas there is a need for at least 500 such training schools to bring in safety awareness, lesser accidents, and for safe driving.

Other concerns that worries him is bribery and diesel theft. If the delivery mechanism is properly managed, the energy savings and funds for country's development will be huge.

The Humane Resources Manager

Shanmugappa's meeting with the President was for a HR cause; and HR professionals would do well to pick a leaf from his native intelligence. Seventy eight truck drivers die of accidents and natural causes everyday and their families are not only on road but majority of the widows take to prostitution. Through the former President he espoused the cause for bringing an insurance scheme for truckers. Truck owners are now paying Rs. 375 premium per annum, and in the event of the death of the driver the family would receive Rs. 1.5 lakhs towards rehabilitation.

Shanmugappa is concerned that a majority of these drivers are affected by HIV/AIDS and that government funding on AIDS control does not reach those who are really affected. This is his next

mission and his third mission is to make the spouses survive and stand on their own feet.

Role Model for Entrepreneurship

Shanmugappa represents the land of equal opportunities that India is in letter and spirit, even as he symbolizes entrepreneurship at its best. The young boy, of course, thought differently and did not mind what he did to get a start in life. His is the story that Dr. Kalam never tires of recounting: “I would like to share how he faced life and has grown to the present position”, he says whenever he has the opportunity to interact with the Indian youth. The first six years of Shanmugappa's life were spent on understanding the transport industry even as he explored the other channels of enterprise that were opened up to him in the course of his work, and that would transform him from being a porter to a professional; and a leader of enterprises. His first trip to Germany, many would have thought, he would have taken time off to see Germany around, but he took time off, to drive trucks for 18 hours to understand the supply chain and truck management.

Transformation: Learning on the Job

His core competency was loading and unloading and hence from being a Porter in the Bangalore railway station in 1971, he became a loader and unloader in 1972 with Sasikala Transport Company. He later took up a job as labourer in Brooke Bond India factory at Whitefield at Bangalore. Between 1975 and 1977, he worked in a transport company called Ramani Rangarao at Vijayawada, where he was loading and moving coffee trucks to different places in the country.

To go by Dr. Kalam's account: “During this

seven year period, with his hard work and devotion he had a savings of Rs. 4,000. With this money he bought an old van in 1978 and started running the van with the help of his brother Sri Basavaraj who was a driver, and he served as a cleaner. With the savings that he generated by running the van, he purchased an old Ashok Leyland truck in 1979. From 1980 to 1986, he kept purchasing one or two trucks each year. During this period, he continued to work in Ramani Rangarao Transport Office. Within a decade and a half of failing in his tenth standard examination, Shanmugappa was ready for the third phase of his career. He was ready with his big investment plans.

Warrior – the doyen of Hindustan Levers (now Hindustan Unilever) gave him a small opportunity to blend tea. Today, he is blending and packing 10 tones of coffee per day by employing around 600 laborers. In 1999, he entered into the premix coffee business and engaged in production of small quantities of 100 to 200 kg per day. Based on that experience, he went into production of 10 tons per day of premix coffee, and 8 tons per day of premix tea by employing more than 700 labourers. Yes, he leveraged his core competency and built around it without going to any management institution. Today, his brother Basavaraj is also an industrialist!

Today Bon Coffee is available even outside India and this is supplied from his factory. Yes, he is the dedicated contract manufacturer for Unilever and has participated in some of their unique product patenting and in building the blending machine indigenously. While competition lured him, he stands by Unilever for they gave him a new lease of

life. In the days of commercial ethics, here is an exceptional human being!

Acquiring Excellence

Given the quality of sophistication in the transport industry, Shanmugappa realized that his operations would have to be raised to international standards, especially if he was to handle milk production and transportation. He was already a big truck fleet owner but it was the quality of transportation that would be of the essence. Dr Kalam says: "In 2003, he bought 100 trucks for hiring to certain mines, coffee transportation, and sub contracting to Larsen & Toubro. Thus, he became a fleet owner. In 2004, he converted the trucks as milk transporters for the milk dairy. In 2005, he visited Australia with his son who is an MBA student for establishing a milk dairy as a joint venture with an Australian firm to handle 9 lakh liters of milk per day".

Through the association, he fought for setting up a good driver training school which has now been established in Delhi. He desires, through telematics, to put a check on diesel and truck theft, prevent accidents by stopping driving between 2 A.M. and 3 A.M. and also desires that vehicle should not move if the driver is alcoholic. He addressed the senior executives of Taccosken to work on this R&D.

Forward Integration

Simultaneously, he has established a factory which produces 100 tones of corrugated boxes per month for packaging premix coffee and premix tea. Today, he is employing around 1,200 persons for running the trucks and also running premix coffee and tea business.



Transformation: Leading Industry

Having satisfied his entrepreneurial spirit, Shanmugappa took on the mantle of industry leadership. Who else could be better positioned to do so than the man who has first hand knowledge of the workings of the transportation industry – from the lowly porter, driver, or cleaner, to a single truck owner to fleet management? Shanmugappa leads from the front now; representing industry; negotiating on its behalf. Dr. Kalam says: "Through this example, we can see how enthusiasm, hard work with devotion and above all the will to succeed made Shanmugappa, a successful

entrepreneur, indeed he is a role model for people in any level of society. On his invitation, I inaugurated the Motor Transportation Congress, of which he had become the Chairman; I am happy and privileged to sit by his side to understand further about his dreams. India needs many Shanmugappa-like leaders".

Cultural Revolution

The contrast between the Bangalore of 1971 and the Bangalore of 2007 pains him as Shanmugappa wants to usher in a cultural revolution by channeling the youth with the help of HRD networks to partner in fighting cultural degeneration. English is his only limitation, but that does not thwart the man who is fluent in Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, and Hindi. Several educational institutions have sought his assistance.

The English-speaking HR fraternity needs to learn HR in its true spirit. Living values, to him comes from life's learning. His going to jail, sleeping on the pavements and the sufferings of the families of many departed lorry drivers, his own wife's death, his son ably supporting him, threats from vested interests have all made him mentally stronger. He is humble and not all his wealth has made him hand up his tools. Even today, Shanmugappa wants to lead the "hard work revolution".

"I was happy and privileged to sit by his side to understand further about his dreams. India needs many leaders like Shanmugappa" – Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam (February 25, 2007; addressing students of the Nathajirao G Haldekar Institute of Dental Sciences, Belgaum, Karnataka)

—S. Deenadayalan

SMITTEN BY THE VENOM OF IGNORANCE

The Jogi-Nath community spread across tiny hamlets, in Rajasthan is among the lowest in the caste order today.

Initially snake charmers, the Jogi-Naths have now taken to begging to earn for a living. In three Jogi-Nath villages—Balewa, Ramsar and Kanata, in Rajasthan's Barmer district, not a single family carries forth its tradition of snake charming. Amid dreadful living conditions and a highly caste divided society, the Jogi's can be located on the outskirts of villages and disconnected from other castes.



Makeshift settlements of the Jogis

Balewa is home to 20 such Jogi-Nath families who beg for a living. "Our forefathers used to be snake charmers, but we have never owned land. The Panchayat keeps promising us land but never keeps its word," says Laxminath, a Jogi.

Frustrated on the mention of the word 'government' he adds, "Our voting card is the only proof of our existence, but it is of no

use. We are treated as outcaste and live outside the villages and are forced to beg. The government does not do anything for our community."

With no permanent settlement these Jogi-Naths shift their location every few months and depend on neighbouring villages for a livelihood.

At Ramsar, while the men are away begging, the women are left to look after the children and the few sheep they own. A child, hardly one-day old, lies on a dirty rag. Hiriben, a local, says, "We have received only Rs. 600 out of the 1,000 that the parents receive on the birth of a child under the Janani Suraksha Yojna. We are charged for the services at anganwadi as well. If we pay at the time of the birth, what will we feed the baby afterwards?" For the Jogis, lack of sanitation and decent living conditions are a distant reality.

Approaching the local clinic at Ramsar, Kamala Singh, who delivered the baby, had a look at the child the next day. "I had sent the child with its cord nursed well and warned them not to untie it. But, they have smeared the baby with turmeric and applied *kajal* on its eyes! They untied the cord and strung it with a lose string around his neck, so every time my child moved it tugged at the cord which is why he bleeding," she says as she cleaned her baby.

"They need to have faith in what we do, and realize that we are here for their benefit" she adds, speaking of the lack of education in the community.

The only complaint the Jogi-Nath's have is the lack of government aid. Many want to discontinue their practice of

begging and work under government schemes, or start farming.

"If the government gives us land we will change our lifestyle. Now, even people in the villages have stopped giving us things, and tell us to work and earn money. Unless we receive help, how can we survive?" says Bhuriben.

The Jogi-Nath community at Kanata village fares better. The Jogis here have progressed beyond begging and built houses under the government outreach program. Hiranath, one such worker says: "We wish to work and few of us have moved away from the age-old practice of begging as nobody gives us anything anymore. We earn about Rs. 3,000 a month, and although we still have issues, are happy with this lifestyle."

A primary school managed by two teachers is present three kilometers away from where they live. "Only ten children in the entire village attend school. It is very cold in the mornings and we have to long way to walk. But I go to school on most of the days," says Somnath, who studies in the fifth standard.

The Government has done little to serve the needs of this community, which has changed their occupation, and also their living patterns over the decades. Many are still unaware of government schemes, and the few schemes that have been recently initiated have reached very few villages such as Kanata. Lack of an identity proof and leading a nomadic lifestyle makes it impossible to get registered for work under the National Rural Employment Generation Act (NREGA).

Mr. Hari Chowdhary Member of Parliament from Barmer, heads the District Vigilance Committee that oversees employment issues. He says: "No one can refuse to offer them work. If they want land, they will get it. We are doing our best to help them." Such promising statements however are misleading, as they make no difference to the reality faced by the Jogi-Nath community.

—Nidhi Adlakha
Asian College of Journalism

Swami Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux OSB), a French Benedictine monk met Sadguru Gnanananda of Tapovanam in December 1955, and later spent a few weeks with him in February and March 1956. He recognised in the sage a true Guru. He recorded his experience of the stay with him in a French book titled "Gnanananda" which was published in 1970. Its English translation titled "Guru and disciple" was published by the Society for Promotion of Christian Knowledge, London in the same year.

The concluding pages of the book contain the conversations of Swami Abhishiktananda with Sadguru Gnanananda. After describing how to stay in the awareness of *atman*, the Guru emphasises the importance of detachment and renunciation

"It is in the *atman* and not in the mind that you should be conscious of everything. In the *atman* we should do our eating, drinking, walking, hearing, reading, and writing; all should be done in the light of the *atman*. In all things the only reality is the *atman*. All that exists derives its reality from the reality of this *atman*. All that is seen is seen in its light. All that is heard is heard in the *pranava*, the OM, which is the name of the *atman*. Not to know the *atman* is the most serious of all illnesses. Ignorance of what is real is a fever that is more dangerous for the spirit than malaria is for the body. But there is a remedy for this fever, one that is within the reach of everyone. It is available for everyone, I mean, *jnana*, true knowledge, the knowledge of the self, the *darshan*, vision, of being. This medicine is provided by *dhyana*, silent contemplation within.

Inspirations



Swami Abhishiktananda then said: "if the cure is so simple, how is it that so few people make use of it?"

"Just see what children do," replied Gnanananda. "When they are ill, their mothers prepare a suitable concoction and give it them to drink. But the children don't like the taste. They wave their arms, kick their legs in the air, turn their face away and refuse to open their mouth. If the mother manages somehow to get the concoction into their mouth, they just spit it all out. It is the same with ignorant people who reject wisdom."

"Wisdom or true knowledge will never find entrance into anyone against his will. You have to want it, and want it with your whole heart."

"Supposing one day you hear that on the other side of the river there is a swami whom everyone praises to the skies. You will want at all cost to have his *darshan*. You set off, but the river is in the way. There is no way to cross it, and swimming is dangerous. Then beside the bank you see a ferry man with his boat. You ask him to take you to the other side. 'Okay', he says. But first, you must drop that bundle. I can

take only men, and not their luggage."

"Oh no, I need my bundle! I can't possibly leave it behind. How could I manage without my things? In it there is my food for the journey, and bedding for the night. I have brought flowers and fruits to offer to the Swami. I have got my holy books which I read every day. After all, my bundle is not so heavy. Look here, ferry man, be reasonable! Take me across just as I am, with what I am carrying. I will pay the full fare."

"Whichever you prefer," replies the ferry man. "The choice is yours. Without your bundle, I take you across the river; else with your bundle you stay here. Which do you want? The *darshan* of the Swami, or your old rubbish?"

"So then, when we have dropped our load, we pass over and have the *darshan* of the *atman*."

"Tell me, who can run with a load on his head? What the guru expects of you is 'yourself', and not what you have bought, as you went through the market.

Naked you were born; only naked can you be reborn in the glory of the atman!

He who loses himself finds himself, he who loses all finds all!

He who saves himself loses all, and himself into the bargain!"

Finally Gnanananda repeated his favourite *sloka*: "Where there is nothing, there indeed is everything! Enter into this secret, and yourself will vanish from your own sight; then only, in truth, YOU ARE!"



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Conditioning-stuck to comfort

A Series on Growing-Reflections for Deep Change

What is that one thing that makes every 'let go' a difficult process after a period of time? Whether it is the boon or bane of human behavior, this is a process that makes people form patterns so easily that it makes doing a few things easy on one hand, but makes 'letting go' difficult on the other hand. This is the process of 'conditioning'. Here is how one can best describe the process of conditioning.

A man once read in an ancient book about a black stone on the shores of the Black Sea, which could on contact, turn any metal into gold. The stone would be warm to touch. So, he went to the Black Sea, and found a heap of black stones. He was convinced that one of these would be the miracle stone.

He picked up a stone, felt it on his cheek, found it cold, and flung it into the sea. The second stone too was cold and followed the first one into the sea. He did this from morning to evening, every day for weeks, months, and then years. Three years had passed. One day, he put a stone to his cheek, threw it into the sea and then realized that it was the very stone he was looking for! (Sampath, J.M. story 61 Discovery – 3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998)

In these three years, the man had got conditioned to the process of searching for the stone. Being aware of conditioning makes growing an effortless process. For a social entrepreneur, moving away from the known to the unknown, there would be several uncertainties which life will present. The conditioning to the known world does not allow the person to easily move and evolve in the unknown. While conditioning process takes time and effort, moving away from the conditioned space also involves time and effort.

From our childhood, there are several



conditioning processes that becomes a part of us, that many times makes living in any other way seems almost next to impossible. The conditioning does not allow us to see the realities in front of us. It makes us formulate truths that are convenient to us, rather than those that question and reflect our shortcomings to us. Conditioning process also makes us justify and find ways of being in the same space. Conditioning creates a pattern and

that pattern becomes our identity. The more one tries to break the identity, more the effort it takes. When it becomes threatening to the identity itself, we tend to mask the realities creating stress and anxiety within.

It is also a peculiarity of human that they can consume anything that the world offers. This has been seen from the urbanization process in the last century. This makes the step towards

social entrepreneurship even more difficult. There is an unsaid conclusion in many minds that if they can reach out to others in the society without having to change, or give up anything that they already have, they will be willing to step into social entrepreneurship. This is not just limited to materialistic possessions, but even to the concepts, perspectives, thoughts, experiences, and philosophy of life. Unless one is willing to shed all that one knows, and moves into the space of the unknown, a real social entrepreneur cannot be born. Growing happens when the society and its existence presents itself within and not outside. This growing cannot happen unless one is willing to get out of all the conditioning one has got into. Growing entails the person to see social entrepreneurship as a process, to deal with all that is presented within self, and not just with the society. Then, there is an evolution that one goes through in this process of living, being aware of the self and also of the society within self.

Points for Reflection:

- What are the comfort zone indicators that I am caught up with in life?
- What are the conditioning processes that I can identify within me that stops me from moving away from the comfort zone?
- What defines me—my possessions or my behaviour?
- What prevents me from seeing each experience in life as an independent one?
- How do I break the patterns I have got into?

—J.M.Sampath & Kalpana Sampath



Vision and Values

For social enterprises and a social entrepreneur, it is important that a plan is made up front which will indicate the purpose and goals in a business like a format.

The most important is formulating a Vision-Value statement.

Vision is indicated in a simple and short statement. The vision is one which has long term validity. Vision statement should be like a *mantra* which everyone in the organization from bottom to top understands, and the stakeholder's vision should be in alignment with the vision of the enterprise. An example of a vision statement of Mahatma Gandhi is "Quit India" during the freedom struggle. How compact, powerful and visionary it is!

The Vision statement is supported by 'Values' the enterprise will adhere to, in the pathway of realization of the vision.

What are values? So to say it will be the DNA of the enterprise. There will be no compromise on the 'Values'. The values need not be a long list of spelled out definition. They can be few and practiced one hundred percent right across the organisation. For citing a few, see below: (Speaking and practicing) truth, (practicing) non-violence, (preserving) self-esteem, (giving) unconditional love and compassion, and (giving) forgiveness.

The second step is in articulating and defining the mission of the social enterprise. The mission statement will

be more descriptive and elaborative to reinforce the vision. It will have time line and geography.

It will be incomplete without the expression of strategies to implement the mission. The strategies are processes and methodologies for implementation steps.

The strategies will also state the methods and process for measuring achievement, impact and goals and where not measurable state expected intangible measures.

—P.N. Devarajan

Dr. C. Sylendra Babu, IPS, Commissioner of Police, Coimbatore, is an inspiration for thousands of youth who aspire to join the civil services today. His zeal in directly engaging in rescue operations at times of need has won him several laurels. He is the recipient of the Chief Minister's Medal for outstanding devotion to duty in 2000, Prime Minister's Medal for saving the lives of 18 bus passengers in 2001, Chief Minister's Police Medal for Gallantry in 2001, and President's Police Medal for Meritorious Service in 2005. In an exclusive interview with Marie Banu, he shares the need for discipline in the society today.

What inspired you to become a police officer?

I had a passion for uniform even during my school days. I was a NCC cadet and later became the NCC Sergeant. Amongst hundred cadets, I was the chief in school. Even in college, I was the Senior Under Officer, a top position. It was since then I had a passion to wear the uniform. I came to know about Indian Police Service through one of my seniors who had passed the IAS examination—Mr. V K Subburaj, Secretary, Health. He was my pioneer.

You have written several books, most of them motivating youth to join the civil services. What is your impression about the youth of today?

I find happiness in the midst of children. My hobby is to motivate adolescents and I have written a book titled 'Be ambitious'. It is one of the interesting books that I wrote, and children like it. I was able to reach to more youngsters, particularly adolescents through this book. They talk to me freely, and interact through my website which has more than 43,000 hits and over 1500 interactions.

I also train youngsters on competitive examinations like civil services, and I have written a book titled 'You too can become an IPS officer'. From the beginning, I liked to guide children and I always find time for them. They are good and have aspirations, but their circumstances are not good—particularly their parents who have a different set of ambitions. For instance, if a youth wishes to pursue aviation or shipping, his parents would want him to study electronic communication.

Civil Services provides a person with a higher position and responsibilities at a much younger age. Is this an advantage or a challenge?

Young age gives one many advantages. You can take decisions fast, lead from the front, and you have all the energy. Even if you are given a high responsibility, you can discharge it to the admiration of those whom you lead. IPS

Dr. C. Sylendra Babu IPS talks to Marie Banu about the need for discipline in society today

Dr. Inspiration



Photo credit: no logo

training is for a period of 2 years and 4 months and it could be even more, if you include the probationary period. During the training, you would be taught law, investigation, evidences, management, and interpersonal skills.

Being asked to manage responsibilities at a young age is a real thrill, and I loved it. My first posting was in Gopichettypalayam when Veerapan was reigning supreme. He was in control of most of the villages in the hills and it was a big challenge. We fought against him for about a year and brought him out of his place. There were a couple of firings and encounters in which I shot two of his men, and he in turn shot my own men. I was fortunate enough to get such challenging postings.

You have been directly involved in rescuing accidents victims. If you were not a police officer, would you have still done this?

I really don't know. But there are many people who come forward to help accident victims. They offer help to

hospitalise the victims and even stay with them for a long time. I could have been one among them.

But, a vast majority of people avoid helping an accident victim. Maybe, they think that they will have to come for future litigations to give evidence about the incident. It is one's responsibility to give a complaint about the accident, if he is the only man who has witnessed it. To the maximum, you will have to appear in the court for one day to give evidence of what you have seen. But, if you wish to opt out of this, it is fine. We will find another witness or police themselves can serve as witness.

Helping a victim, assisting him in the accident site, and saving his life is in itself a great honor. In a lifetime, one may get only one chance to do this. I will advise every citizen who happens to see an accident to offer help immediately.

You organise summer camps for children in your neighbourhood and in this teach karate and spoken English for children. Would you like

to mentor such camps in rural areas?

Absolutely, if, there is a need, we will come. But, it would not be possible to do this on a regular basis.

We have been organizing summer camps at Mogappair in Chennai since 2002 for the underprivileged children as well as children who belonged to the middle income group. We started with a physical fitness program. As we had a good karate team in the city, we formed a boys club and offered free karate training. Few parents requested us to provide tuition for their children in English and mathematics. So, we extended our support by teaching spoken English besides karate training. Some of our students have excelled in school and college, and few have joined the software industry. My son is also a student in this club.

Your advice for people who are involved in social work?

Professional social workers are doing extremely well. It is better if social workers do not look at personal gains or

publicity and really do a good job. For instance, I know one Air India pilot Mr. Nandakumar who is running a school free of cost and he never claims to be a social worker. Also, I know a couple who worked in Kodai International School running a school free of cost in Thiruvallur. There are people like these who are silently doing good work. Social service should be obvious. One should do the best they can, the most they can, and talk the least about it. If you start doing things for publicity sake, the work will be less and concentration will be more in investing and meeting people, bringing them to your place. As a result, time is lost, and in this process effort is also lost.

What would you like to say to the Conversations readers?

This message which I have for the readers of this magazine is that self discipline is the solution for most of the social problems today. Individual persons should know his responsibilities better than rights. Today people are aware of their rights rather than their responsibilities.

In our place, in our dealings with other people, in our personal living, if every citizen is disciplined, it will be more useful to our society. I come across cases of dishonesty and people easily get cheated. If a man takes advantages of another person and takes away his property or money, the same person should be ashamed and he should realise that there is a society that is watching him.

The society should come down heavily on a man who is trying to cheat another person. Even his own wife, children and close relatives should hate him. Instead, if a man is amassing wealth and is well off, he is appreciated. People like to be his fan and would like to take a picture with this man who is successful, despite the fact that he has achieved success through the wrong way. We should aspire for a society that does not tolerate indiscipline, crime, corruption, and nepotism. Like Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam's vision 2020, we should have a super India with superpowers by 2020.

Editorial
Latha Suresh
Marie Banu

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