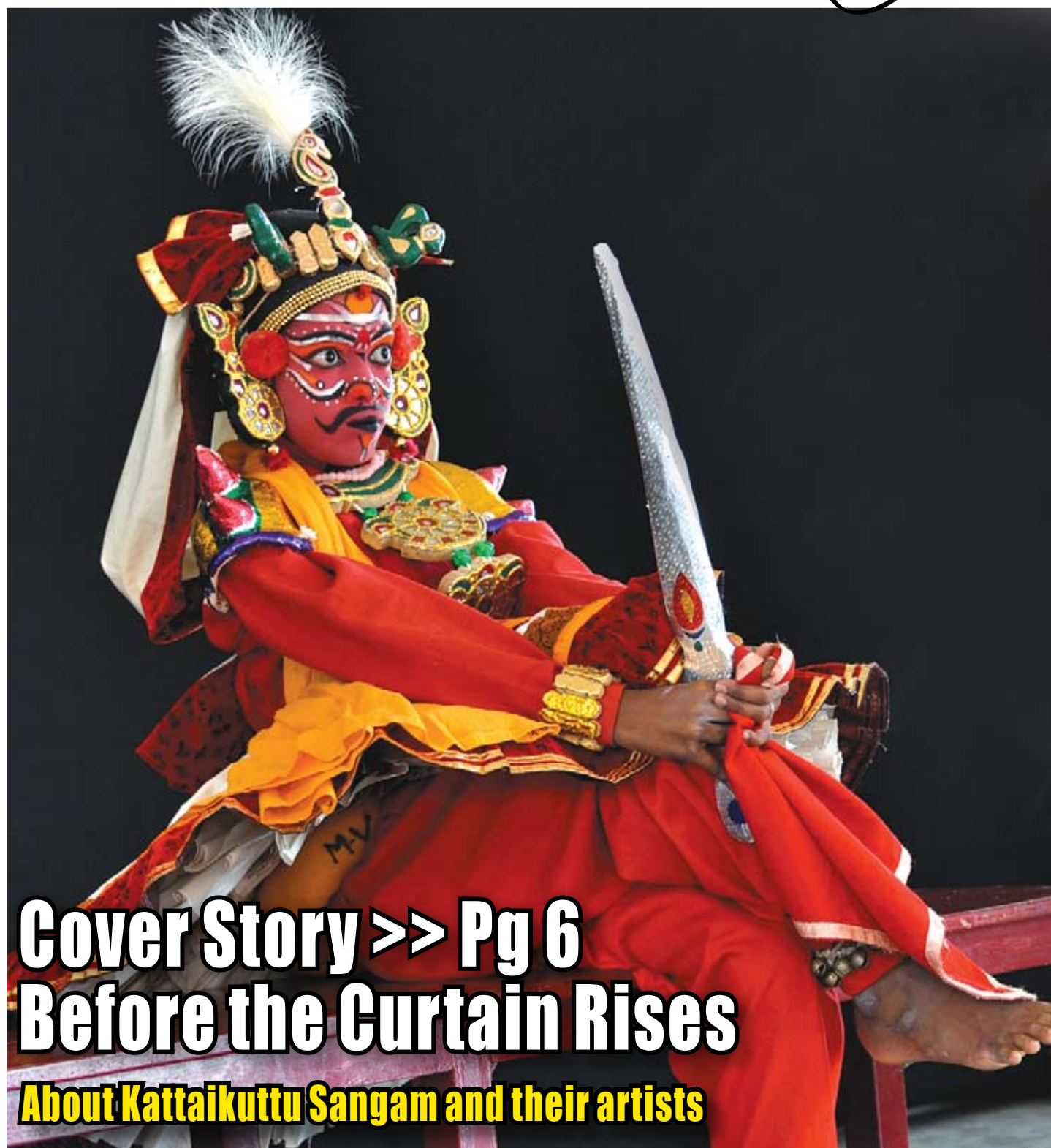


Conversations

A Chronicle of Social Currents

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Cover Story >> Pg 6 Before the Curtain Rises

About Kattaikuttu Sangam and their artists

Photo:AK

From the Editor

Dear Friend,

“There are two kinds of writers: those who make you think and those who make you dream,” says Brian Aldiss. In principle, I believe that every person has at least one good story to tell his friend.

Conversations gives you reasons to befriend many and tell the stories that are featured here, few of them untold.

The best friends are those who don't think like the others. That's why you should trust your instinct while choosing your companions. Join those who think

positive, sing, tell stories, and have happiness in their eyes. Because, happiness is contagious and keeps people away from worries.

Go, tell a story today.

P.N. Devarajan

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“If you can, I can. If Ramanathan can, you can.”

An exclusive interview with Abirami Ramanathan



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Traffic Updates



INFORMATION PROVIDED
BY THE COMMISSIONER OF
POLICE, CHENNAI FOR THE
MONTH OF MARCH 2012

Loss of lives due
to accidents

117

No. of accidents
reported

80

NUMBER OF CASES
BOOKED FOR TRAFFIC
VIOLATION

324,553

- Signal violation - 23,840
- Wrong side driving - Nil
- Over speeding - 7,215
- Violation of one way rule - 10,223

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**



One Step at a Time

“I couldn’t continue to live on my monthly earnings of Rs. 300. Since there was money crunch anyway, I decided to plunge into social work full time, and my father, wife and children have been really supportive.”

Jayapathi hails from Cheri Iyampettai, a village in Kaveripakkam at Vellore District in Tamil Nadu. He heads the Kaveri Jayabharathamatha Magalar Koottamaippu Arakkattalai (KJMKA)—a women’s cooperative welfare society—and reaches out to scores of women’s self-help groups and others in need, living in and around Wallajah Block, Vellore. This society is one of the five branches of the Kaveri Comprehensive Rural Development Society (KCRDS), an NGO working for the communities living in and around Kaveripakkam. The parent organization was founded in 1989 by R.S. Mani. It later branched out into five wings and KJMKA was formally registered in 2008. Jayapathi’s association with this organization goes way back to his early youth, when in 1999 he gave up his job as a power-loom weaver and dedicated himself to voluntary service.

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step; what started off as voluntary work soon became a passion that consumed Jayapathi so totally. “In those early years when I joined KCRDS to help create employment opportunities for the youth and to run a discussion forum, it was still in its project-stage. As a camp-officer for KCRDS, I volunteered in tuition centers, and organized blood donation camps and health camps. We collaborated with Shankara Nethralaya, Chennai for monthly eye-check-ups,” says Jayapathi.

“During one of our initial eye camps I came across an elderly gentleman who had lost his vision due to matured cataract and was totally dependent on his wife for support. When it was suggested to undergo a surgery, he dismissed the idea as being unnecessary. ‘After all I’m old,’ said he, ‘now all I want is to die.’ We coaxed him into giving in to our suggestion and the surgery was done on one eye. When he

regained partial vision, it was like re-birth for him. He had just regained his independence! Shortly, he agreed to have his other eye operated upon, and to his amazement regained vision in his second eye too. He told us that he felt 30-40 years younger. From then on, he started advising others in our area to welcome any eye camp or health check-ups. Watching this old man’s zeal got me hooked to this work”, adds Jayapathi.

“Back in the day I couldn’t continue to live on my monthly earnings of Rs. 300. Since there was a money crunch anyway, I decided to plunge into social work full time and my father, wife, and children have been really supportive,” he says nostalgically.

Today, KJMKA has expanded its operations to include several different activities and Singhvi Charitable Trust at Triplicane in Chennai offers health camps in this area every quarter. These camps mainly target women and around 1000 patients are attended at a time here. Eye and dental surgeries are undertaken at Sri Ramachandra Hospital and Government Hospital at Egmore, respectively. Besides, dental camps are also organized at schools.

Today, 286 self-help groups are currently functioning in Kaveripakkam. Through these groups, health and hygiene awareness, awareness on economic independence, and education related

programs are conducted. “For women’s education we tie-up with open universities and arrange for free course application forms to be distributed amongst women. We also organize career guidance and counseling sessions for women. Till date, we have assisted 22 girls seek admission in Nursing assisting/ Diploma in Nursing programs. Further, we have referred students and liaised with colleges like Bharthya Sarvavidya Kaingarya and the Sivakumar School of Nursing to offer subsidized fees. Through the women’s development corporation, a three-month course on – nursing and first aid, motivation, awareness, bringing together, skill-training, leadership-training, financial management training, and other such programs continue to be organized.

In 2006-2007, Jayapathi took up the PGDSIM course at CSIM, about which he says, “CSIM has touched the lives of several individuals I know. Earlier, with CSIM, we had installed solar power panels and satellite torches to illuminate an entire village at Edayanthangal in Vellore district. Abu Bakker, the Secretary of KCRDS who was a CSIM alumnus, advised me to take up this course. Since then, I have come under the CSIM-spell and upon my advice several of my friends have also undergone training at CSIM. Through this course I learnt how to

tackle the difficulties in managing finances. I am

now confident that if quality of services is good then there is ample opportunity for funds to flow in.”

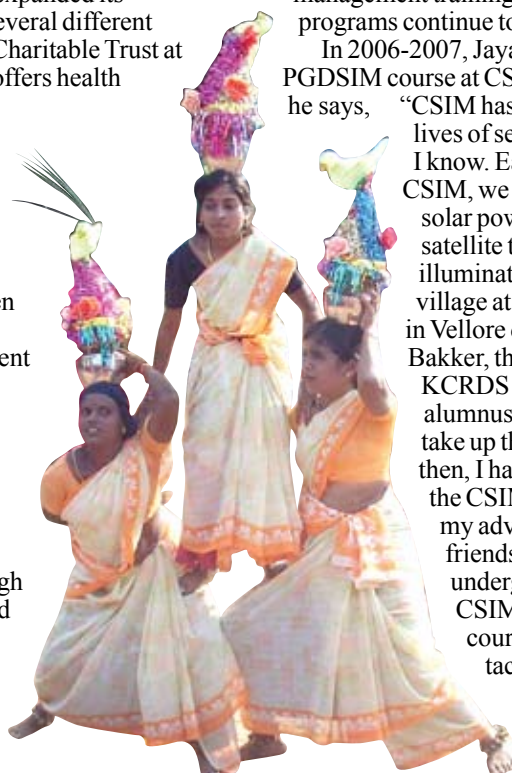
Today, with strong bank linkages, KJMKA helps people obtain scholarships, death claims, disability certification and allied benefits, accident-claims etc. “We notice that other organizations want to work with us. We offer consultation services at a nominal fee to those who seek us. We work with both the government as well as private organizations. If only we had a greater staff strength, we would be able to do much more,” says Jayapathi thinking out aloud.

So, where is Jayapathi headed next? “I have always wanted to promote a meditative environment in our area. I have a craving to create a peaceful space, where people can forget their worries and start leading healthy, fulfilling lives. We stand at a point in time wherein we can afford to dream of such new thrust areas to work on.”

“Our self-help groups have become independent and no longer need our constant supervision and handholding. Our commitment remains towards women’s development and we are looking at organizing personal counseling to curb any suicidal or self-destructive tendencies. We are gathering motivational videos, and stress-busting activities which can be incorporated in our schools so that children can grow up in a fun-filled, tension-free environment. Thus my work is going to be more focused on creating a total quality environment for the people of Kaveripakkam,” quips he.

Winners don’t do different things; they do things differently. May this winner inspire many more by his example!

—Archanaa R.



Chulha innovator can't stop from innovations

"Jayaprakash has improvised the portable stove by incorporating a secondary combustion chamber for burning the un-burnt bio mass and hydrocarbons. As a result, the thermal efficiency of the stove has improved while the pollution has reduced."



The adage "when the going gets tough, the tough get going," is very much applicable to the life of V. Jayaprakash, an innovator par excellence from Kerala.

For, the innovator of the improvised portable smokeless chulha (stove) that provides better fuel efficiency found each hurdle in life as insurmountable as the next but faced them with courage and overcame every crisis.

Jayaprakash came up in life the hard way, but today is a happy man. Possessing a flair for innovation right from childhood, Jayaprakash had acquired skills to make smokeless chulhas from ANERT (Agency for Non-Conventional Energy and Rural Technology), a Kerala government organization.

He began by making the chulhas and selling them in the market. But, the innovator in him could not remain idle for long and soon he developed 'three-burner' chulhas, which he started selling at Rs.6500 per piece.

Later, he developed the community chulha, which could cook about 70 kg

of rice at one go. He sold about sixty such units to hospitals and hotels.

But his biggest innovation came after his curiosity was aroused seeing a sudden flash of flame at the chimney of a hospital kitchen, where they had installed a community chulha.

He sought explanation for this phenomenon from ANERT. He was told

that un-burnt carbon particles when exposed to oxygen at the top of the chimney had burnt, completing the combustion process.

It set him thinking. "I thought of a two-tier burning process where there would be complete combustion of fuel," said Jayaprakash. After several trials he made a two-chamber stove that enabled

complete combustion without any smoke.

Fuel like wood or coconut shell is burnt in the lower chamber, while the resulting smoke and unburned hydrocarbons reach the second chamber, where the combustion process is completed.

The Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad tested the stove and found it to be more efficient than the other smokeless chulhas.

The National Innovation Foundation (NIF) states: "Jayaprakash has improvised the portable stove by incorporating a secondary combustion chamber for burning the un-burnt bio mass and hydrocarbons. As a result, the thermal efficiency of the stove has improved while the pollution has reduced."

These fuel efficient chulhas are mostly used in community cooking and sold in hospitals, hostels and hotels, which are saving on fuel expenses.

A study by ANERT found that a hotel in Kozhikode using the stove spends Rs.30 to purchase 75 coconut shells to cook 40 kg rice, whereas it required 10 kg of fuel at Rs.400 in a LPG operated system to cook the same amount of rice.

Jayaprakash's chulhas are mostly used in community cooking and sold in hospitals, hostels and hotels.

Around 500 improvised portable smokeless chulhas priced at Rs 1500 have already been sold. NIF has supported the innovator for the commercialization of the chulha.

Recipient of the Kerala State Energy conservation award (2008) and an NIF award (2012), Jayaprakash says that if the portable chulhas are mass produced then its cost can come down to Rs 800 per unit.

Indeed, Jayaprakash has come a long way since his poverty stricken childhood days. He was initially drawn to school for the mid-day meal they provided but later developed a penchant for science. His interest in the stream furthered as he started representing his school in various science competitions.

His childhood innovations include a pulley to lift load to specific height and a toy motor boat that automatically returned to the starting point after traversing a certain distance.

But he had to discontinue studies after higher secondary and worked as a daily wage labourer in Coimbatore (Tamil Nadu). In 1989, he returned to his village

Koyilandi (near Kozhikode) to start a small fruit business, where destiny took him to making chulhas.

Now, the innovator has plans to develop chulhas to burn used sanitary napkins and other waste.

—Kavita Kanan Chandra
theweekendleader.com

"I thought of a two-tier burning process where there would be complete combustion of fuel."





The XIII Sadguru Gnanananda national awards function was held on 3rd March, 2012 at Unnati Centre, Temple Road, Sadananda Nagar, NGEF East, Bangalore -560038.

Fellowships were offered to the following social workers this year:

- Ms. Akhila Ramesh, Architect and Founder Director, Nivasa, Bangalore
- Ms. Kushboo Kantharia, Founder, Disha, Mumbai
- Ms. Rubina Mazhar, Founder SAFA, Hyderabad
- Mr. Kamalakannan, Founder, Vizhuthugal Social Trust, Satyamangalam district

Dr. R. Balasubramaniam, Founder, Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement was the Chief Guest for the event, and Swami Nityanandagiri of Thapovanam was the Guest of Honor.

Three publications were released at the event. They were: *Unsung Beacons* – Volume 2; *Inspiring Conversations*, and *Keys to Social Entrepreneurship – Reflections for deep change*.

Unsung Beacons is a compilation of success stories of social workers and social entrepreneurs that were published in *Conversations* 2011. The foreword has been penned by Dr. J. Radhakrishnan IAS, Assistant Country Director (Head DM Unit), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The book was released by Swami Nityanandagiri and the first copy was received by Dr. R. Balasubramaniam.

Inspiring Conversations is a compilation of celebrity interviews that were published in *Conversations* 2010 and 2011. The foreword for this publication has been written by Mr. R. Nataraj IPS, Chairman Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission. The publication was released by Dr. R. Balasubramaniam and Sri. C.S. Sarangapani, MSDS Trustee, received the first copy.

Keys to Social Entrepreneurship - Reflections for deep change is a series of the articles penned by Dr. Kalpana Sampath and Dr. J M Sampath which were published in *Conversations* 2010

and 2011. Swami Nityanandagiri released this publication and Sri. PN Devarajan received the first copy.

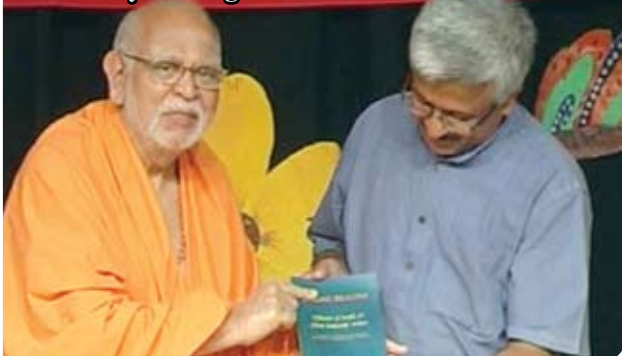
Following the book release there was a panel discussion on 'Quality, sustainability and replicability in social sector organizations: issues and opportunities'. The panelists were Ms. Shanti Raghavan of EnAble India, Mr. Vishal Talreja of Dream a Dream, Mr. Murali Vullaganti of Rural Shores and Mr. Umesh Malhotra of Hippocampus. Dr. J.M Sampath presented an overview of the issue and moderated the discussion.

The event concluded with a Bharatanatyam performance staged by the students of Samarthanam, an organization working for the visually impaired.

—Marie Banu

If you wish to buy a copy of these publications, please call 9884700029 or 044-42805365

Swami Nityanandagiri and Dr. R. Balasubramaniam



Dr. R. Balasubramaniam and Sri. C.S. Sarangapani



Sri. P.N. Devarajan and Swami Nityanandagiri





Before the Curtain Rises



An hour's drive from Chennai, far from the hustle and bustle of a metro, lies Punjarasantankal. A village difficult to pronounce, Punjarasantankal sits eight kilometers from the town of Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu.

Winding through the narrow roads, we reached Kattaikkuttu Gurukulam. Kattaikkuttu is a form of rural theatre in the northern districts of Tamil Nadu.

The Kattaikkuttu Gurukulam or Kattaikkuttu Youth Theatre School was established in 2002 by Rajagopal and Dr. Hanne M. de Bruin with the objective of training a new generation of Kattaikkuttu performers. The Gurukulam is the first residential theatre school where young people can learn the art without having to give up their formal education. The school enables students to combine comprehensive education with training as professional Kattaikkuttu actors or musicians.

Sivaranjini, 8, and Eesvari Devi, 10, welcomed us at the entrance with sandalwood paste, flowers, and sugar candy and led us to the hall which doubles as stage. The special visitor today, Mr. Bob Hiensch, Netherlands Ambassador, was already seated. Dr. Hanne, a Dutch lady who settled in India in 1990, greeted and introduced us to her spouse Rajagopal, a Kattaikkuttu actor, teacher, playwright and director. Dr. Hanne was strikingly tall and attired an olive green saree. She was at ease conversing in Tamil with the children and the audience.

Dr. Hanne has a Ph.D. in Kattaikkuttu and is the author of numerous books and articles on

the floor in neat rows and about 12 children waited in the green room. The make-up artists (senior students and apprentices) spent over an hour on performers to transform them into a demon, monkey, *sanyasi*, joker, or alien. The musicians tuned their instruments while the performers arrived backstage with their props.

Dr. Hanne gave a pithy introduction about Kattaikkuttu to the audience: "Most traditional Kattaikkuttu performances are based on selected episodes from the epic Mahabharata adapted to the local situation. Plays feature universal emotions and dilemmas of valor, jealousy, hatred, love, grief and despair, loyalty to one's family and friends, and folly. The play you are about to see, however, is written for children. On the request of his youngest students, Rajagopal (the author) incorporated special characters—a monkey and a doctor—in this contemporary children's play."

After a moment of silence, the show began. Rajagopal sang at high pitch and set the tone for the show. Musicians Rangasamy, Velusamy, and Loganathan took their turn to beat the drums, play the *mukavinai* and harmonium.

Selvarasu, 11, made a dramatic entry from behind a veil and captured the audience with his shrill voice and stomping feet. He was playing the role of *Maha Bhoodham*, demon, the centre piece of this act. The rest of the characters—monkey, alien, and children—joined him. After making a swift circle, a traditional custom while making an entry on stage, they enacted a story about two children and a monkey who approach the demon to save the aliens who have landed on earth by accident. The children request the demon to use his magical powers and send the aliens back to the planet where they have come from.

When the demon (Selvarasu) banged his sword on the bench, I startled. At first, it was difficult for me to decipher the dialogues, but as time passed by I comprehended the story.

The audience broke into a loud applause when Selvarasu said: "Why do we need aliens on earth when we have enough people here already?"

After the first play ended, Doraisamy, 19, and Murthy, 18, entertained the audience with their slapstick comedy. Their clown make-up and spontaneous reactions

made the audience double up with laughter.

Dr. Hanne then stepped onto the stage and narrated a synopsis of the next play that was to be staged—"Subhadra's wedding"—which was enacted by Jothi (Balaraman), Mahalakshmi (Krishna) and Tamilarasi (Arjuna).

Awe-struck by their performance, we wondered how much time these children would have spent to learn this art. Dr. Hanne led us to the library and classrooms on the seven-acre campus. Apart from books, the library had simple lab equipment. "Most of the children hail from the villages in the four northern districts of Tamil Nadu. The parents of some of these children are also Kattaikkuttu performers. Children are taught Kattaikkuttu for only three hours in a day. The rest of the time they learn academics and can opt to learn a musical instrument. After eight years, and going through a junior and a senior phase and performing in the school's professional repertory company, the children graduate. Selected graduates can work in the *Gurukulam* as apprentices and become assistant trainers in the school, in addition to learning financial and management skills. We have seven apprentices in our campus now," said Dr. Hanne.

Apprentices Doraisamy and Murthy were walking towards the green room to remove their make-up when I stopped them for a chat. Murthy was spontaneous, Doraisamy was shy. "My father is a Kattaikkuttu performer. I was interested to learn this art, so I joined Kattaikkuttu Sangam when I was 9. I now work as an apprentice and earn Rs. 3500 per month. I am also a member of the Kattaikkuttu Young Professionals Company. For each all-night show of the company we get paid an additional Rs. 300.

Last year, the Company did 40 all-night shows in villages. I am also pursuing my graduation in commerce through correspondence. I love this art and will continue to perform even after I complete my one-year tenure here," said Murthy.

Doraisamy too said he'd like to continue performing Kattaikkuttu even after his apprenticeship. His dream is to head the 'comedy department', which he envisages the school will need to have ten years from now.

Rajagopal, who was quietly observing our conversation remarked, "Till date, over 18 children have been trained in this art and are professional performers. We have bookings from neighbouring villages to perform during festivals and special occasions. The money earned from these performances is shared with the children and is remitted into their savings account. I want my children to perform in cities and towns as well. This art has a lot of value and needs appreciation and visibility."

It was interesting to watch the children remove their make-up. They first dampened their faces with coconut oil, and then used a cloth to remove the make-up. While every child was capable of doing this task, younger children were assisted by their older mates. This was one extended family.

A delectable south Indian meal was served, and we feasted.

We meandered around the sparkling clean

premises, no one stopped us. The rooms where the boys and girls resided had shelves that were neatly arranged with clothes and beddings. There were also guest houses that can accommodate 25 people.

"With 51 children in the campus, how is it possible to maintain it so clean?" I asked Sundaralakshmi, the head of education, who also oversees the kitchen. She smiled and replied: "All our children are disciplined. Our volunteers educate them on health and hygiene practices at the start itself."

We met Puck, Rebecca, and Alex who were at the Kattaikkuttu Sangam on three to six-months internships. While Puck and Rebecca are students of nursing from Holland, Alex is a voice trainer from Greece. Kattaikkuttu encourages volunteers to serve as interns. The school would love to have volunteer English teacher from India, too, but so far no candidates have come forth.

We heard sounds of musical instruments, and while we wondered if there was yet another performance, we were told that the children were practicing.

Dr. Hanne and I went to the room where the girls were rehearsing. Thilagavathy, 22, an apprentice, was training the younger children in dance. It was a treat to one's eye to see little children emote mythological characters. Sivaranjani, the

youngest of all, was shy to perform in my presence. We slowly exited, allowing them to practice at ease.

"Kattaikkuttu Sangam is a university in itself. Children feel this to be their second home. They are away from their family tensions and more importantly free from poverty and malnutrition. They are provided food, clothing, and shelter, besides education and training in Kattaikkuttu. We have

these children because of their talents—each of them is special—and not because they are from disadvantaged backgrounds. We treat all of them equal; boys and girls learn exactly and do the same chorus: in this once all-male theatre tradition, girls perform male roles, while boys learn here to sweep and cook."

"All of them are like our children. They address me as *Paati* meaning grandmother and Rajagopal as *Thaatha* meaning grandfather. Parents and guardians of the children visit during weekends. They are happy to see their children grow in a healthy environment," concluded Dr. Hanne.

Children return to their family once they finish their school education after 12th standard. A few children who have completed eight years of training in Kattaikkuttu opt to serve as apprentices here.

It was time for us to leave, and while approaching our car we noticed children playing in a clay ditch. With muddy hands, they showed us a crab and few shrimps they had found. And at one little request, they gave us an exclusive impromptu performance of a monkey dance.

If all the world's a stage, as Shakespeare said, this was going to be our favourite one. Encore!

—Marie Banu

If you are wish to apply for the position of English teacher at Kattaikkuttu Sangam, please contact Dr. Hanne at +91 9894299940 or email kattaiku@gmail.com. For more info visit kattaikkuttu.org.

Photos: AK

(marginalized) Indian art forms, such as Kattaikkuttu. She settled in Kanchipuram in 1990 and supports Rajagopal in managing the theatre school. The school is run under the auspices of the Kattaikkuttu Sangam, an association run for and by professional Kattaikkuttu performers.

I felt at home instantly and seated myself near the stage while my friend AK set off with his camera to capture interesting scenes both before and behind the curtain.

Over 20 children, aged between 5 and 18, sat on



Recognising Social Entrepreneurs

In 2003, the Society of Entrepreneurship Educators (SEE) pioneered a platform where faculty members interested and involved in entrepreneurship could come together. Besides the occasional conferences and competitions at the national and regional levels, the SEE has brought out a publication on cases on entrepreneurship titled 'Entrepreneurship Development: Indian Cases on Change Agents', edited by Prof. Dr. K Ramachandran, Indian School of Business, Hyderabad.

In an effort to give a boost to the activities, a national level academic conference and a case study competition was held at the Indian School of Business, Hyderabad on 29th and 30th March, 2012. Entrepreneurship academicians from prominent institutions including ISB, IIMs, TISS, NITIE and SRM University shared and discussed, in a workshop-cum-conference format, multiple approaches and experiences of developing and fostering entrepreneurship among students.

A national level case study competition was held for the faculty representatives from different parts of the country. The



educators were addressed by Professors from India and abroad, and issues relating to entrepreneurship education were discussed. Ms. Latha Suresh, Director of CSIM; and Dr. K. Prabhakar and Prof. K. Sadasivan of SRM University presented a case study on 'Mirakle Couriers: The Business of Silence and Signs'. This won the best case category with a cash award of Rs. 10,000.

Dhruv Lakra, a CSIM alumnus, had his social entrepreneurial seeds sown while

he was working in the coastal villages of Cuddalore district after Tsunami. Mirakle Couriers is one of its kind in the world that offers employment to the hearing impaired, and is recognized for its efforts to change societal perception on disability. Mirakle Courier is a business proposition with a difference. It is not a charity but a social business, where the social element is embedded in the commercial operations.

Dhruv Lakra, a Skoll Scholar from SAID School of Business of Oxford

University, learnt about the need for employment for the deaf while travelling in a bus serendipitously. It is estimated that 6 percent of India's population is hearing impaired and in this 66 percent are unemployed.

Hearing impairment is the most ignored among all disabilities as the disabled person appears to be normal. Dhruv Lakra left his job as an investment banker in Mumbai and equipped himself to become a social entrepreneur. After examination of different business propositions he finally selected courier business that is manpower intensive and volume driven. He started his venture with Rs. 16,000.

In the present case, Dhruv Lakra explored with the authors of the case, the definition of social entrepreneurship and the difference between social activists and social entrepreneurs. The case was evaluated by Professors from IIM and ISB and was found to address the social entrepreneurial dimension effectively.

Dr. Jayashree Suresh, Dean, School of Management, SRM University is elected as Vice Chairman of SEE for next three years term.

—Dr.K.Prabhakar

Gift of Vision

I spent the last weekend of March with my sister's family at Hyderabad. We visited the Inorbit mall hitech city for shopping and participated in an activity called 'Dialogue In The Dark' at level 5 of the mall.

Knowing about this activity, my sister was keen on experiencing the event as she wanted to assess the process whether it could be part of a corporate training module for which she is a consultant.

My brother-in-law, my niece, and I joined her in the experiment. Initially, I had my doubts whether at all I should venture into the exercise, which faded on seeing the enthusiasm of the rest.

At the start of the programme, a video was screened giving us instructions and an overview of what we can expect. We had to leave behind all our belongings—wrist watches, mobile phones, and any object that we carried which might emit.

Our group consisted of six people and we were lead into an area by a guide. Each one of us was given a stick (which visually impaired use) and the guide explained to us how to use it. We were then passed on to another guide who was visually impaired. This guide was introduced to each of us and he spelt our names to ensure that he pronounced it right.

All of us walked into a room of complete darkness, holding the person ahead of us and walking in a chain, as if we were

forming a train. I found myself focusing on the voice of my guide as that alone could help me proceed in this dark journey.

This guided journey of Dialogue in the Dark put us through several situations. As we walked, we felt the plants around us and realized that we were taking a walk in the park. A few yards later, we crossed a shaking bridge and entered a supermarket. We touched each object that was displayed here and recognized them by its texture and smell. An audio was played and we identified the persons, whose voices were heard, realizing that the voice of every person was unique.

We were guided into the boat, and after seating ourselves we gave away the stick. We sang and also proclaimed together loudly: "I am very happy." The boat took us to the cafeteria managed by a visually impaired person. We got back our sticks and we waded through the darkness, focusing on the guide's voice and went to the counter and placed an order for coffee and drinks. We also transacted with the cashier in the dark. We sat on the sofa and were served our drinks. The guide asked if we had any questions. We exchanged our views about what we felt through the process and expressed that we did not realize that we have spent an hour in darkness.

Once again we gathered one behind the other as instructed by the guide and moved



further until we saw light. After stepping out from the zone of darkness it took us some time to get adjusted to the light.

This journey enlightened me on many aspects of life. It seemed to be a meditation (moving) guided by the voice during which the space and time factor took a back stage and I experienced the present moment completely and peacefully. I also experienced self-awareness throughout the journey and felt that the rest of my senses—touch, smell and sound—were sharpened.

At the end of the journey, I thanked my eyes for empowering me with the capacity to see. I resolved at that instant, that I would donate my eyes.

I quote from *Vigyan bhairava tantra* (112 meditations for Self Realisation) a

translation and commentary by Mr Ranjit Choudary which has relevance here.

"Light and darkness are not opposites. They are different degrees of the same thing. Both are a pathway to the divine." This reminded me of our sages and saints who do penance in caves.

ACE, an acronym for Art, Culture and Entertainment has brought Dialogue in the Dark to our country for the first time. This is a very unique, innovative and entertaining activity. Being a social enterprise, ACE aims to empower the differently abled by creating meaningful employment opportunities for them and sensitizing people through their experiences.

—Jayanthi Karthikeyan



“Accrual demands regular work. We intend to provide all kinds of eye care services in our hospital.”

Hi-Tech Eye Care Services Approaching the Poor

Pammal is a town in Kanchipuram district of Tamil Nadu, claimed to be the second richest Panchayat Union in India after Ambattur. Yet, access to quality education and health care remained elusive for years to the people here.

In an effort to plug these gaps in the quality of lives of the people, Sri Sankara Vidyalaya was established in 1983. With the help of Rotary Club of Meenambakkam, Chennai, to provide healthcare at an affordable cost, Sri Sankara Health Centre was set up in 1984, which remained an out-patient unit until 1990. As primary and secondary health care needs of the people grew with time, it became imperative to start a General Hospital in Sri Sankara Nagar.

A 20-bed-hospital was instituted in 1990 on the land gifted by Appasami Real Estates. Despite growing to a 60-bed-hospital catering to the needs of general medicine, maternity and surgery, there still persisted an obstacle—access to doctors. Doctors disliked coming to the hospital as it was located far away. “This was the time when we had to introduce specialized services in the hospital and at the same time ensure that the services are accessed by the people,” says Visvanathan, Trustee and Secretary of Sankara Eye Hospital.

While the management was trying to make inroads in this regard, the Rotary Club of Madras Fort was instrumental under the leadership of B.P.Jain in establishing the eye care department here. By 1997, the activities of the General Hospital were closed down and it became an exclusive Eye Care Hospital.

“*Sarvendriyanam nayanam pradhanam*” —eye is the most important organ. People here required to be treated for refractive errors and other ailments,” explains

Visvanathan. Eye camps are conducted regularly since 1994 in the neighborhood villages and during these camps it was learnt that people from the rural areas were affected by cataract and other disorders. “We left no stone unturned in bringing the people to the hospital. Awareness building and free treatment had to be commensurate,” exclaims Visvanathan.

The outreach programme of the hospital is designed to reach the rural poor in the districts of Kanchipuram, Tiruvallur, Chittoor (Andhra Pradesh), and Chennai. Those with ailments are brought to the hospital, treated, provided with food and accommodation, and finally sent back to their villages. All they have to do is to report at the pick up point at the said time.

With ISO 9001:2008 certification, Sankara Eye Hospital began to be a part of the National Programme for Control of Blindness. “The hospital, besides a one-time grant to improve its services, is offered 625 rupees for every surgery that is performed” he informs.

Having performed 2000 surgeries between 1994 and 1999, assistance from the Central Government came in handy for Sankara Eye Hospital to increase the surgical output by providing better infrastructure.

“It’s true that our work speaks for us. We owe our sustainability to our sponsors – starting from Sight Savers International to the local banks, insurance companies, friends and others. For the record, the number of surgeries performed so far stand at 1.5 lakh, of which 92 percent were performed free of cost for the poor. The hospital also houses an eye bank in its premises,” states Visvanathan.

The project ‘Vanavil’ is completely dedicated to school students in the



region. With District Collectors acting as facilitators, around 12.13 lakh children are screened and 30888 spectacles are distributed.

The hospital has evolved ways and means to enable the staff recognize its patients. Diabetic patients are given a blue gown while those from Chittoor district are given a pink one.

“Mission for Vision’ has provided continuous support to help the management handle the shortfall of funds. “Consistent funding is a crucial challenge in tertiary health care,” explains Visvanathan, under whom the management decided to increase the number of paid surgeries to 20 percent so that a ratio of 20:80 is maintained.

“We are now engaged in marketing to popularize the quality of services provided at affordable prices,” he quips. The hospital has been recognized by the Government of India to raise donations that will be given a 100 percent tax exemption. Networking has built further inroads with insurance companies encouraging cashless treatment. Sankara Eye Hospital is now aiming at creating a corpus of Rs. 10 crores.

Sankara Eye Hospital has now delved into academics as well. National Board of Examinations has approved the

institution to conduct Diplomate in Ophthalmology. It also offers an 18-months fellowship programme in Comprehensive/General Ophthalmology and Medical & Surgical Retina for Indian and Foreign Ophthalmologists; and for candidates completing their DO/MS/DNB. Besides, the hospital also offers a two-year Diploma in Optometry for students who have completed their twelfth standard.

This quintessential institution has been recognized by various groups including District Collectors, Rotary, Lions clubs, besides others. Recently, the hospital was awarded the Dr K S Sanjeevi Award by CIOISA.

Speaking of future plans, Visvanathan says: “Accrual demands regular work. We intend to provide all kinds of eye care services in our hospital. With new reasons for eye ailments, there is bound to be continuous expansion of our work. Our management is extending support to a hospital in Odisha and share our expertise to achieving targets.”

More such accolades and a vision to provide good quality eye care services have allowed Sankara Eye Hospital to niche its own trajectory in tertiary health care. Let’s wish them all success in future!

—Shanmuga Priya R

Students who are interested to enroll in the academic programmes at Sankara Eye Hospital may contact Mr. S. Visvanathan at 044-22484799 or 044-22485299.

An Inspiring Conversation with Sri Ramana Maharishi

A European lady, Mrs. Gasque, gave a slip of paper on which was written: We are thankful to Nature and the Infinite Intelligence for your Presence among us. We appreciate that your Wisdom is founded upon pure Truth and the basic principle of Life and Eternity. We are happy that you remind us to "Be still and Know THAT". What do you consider the future of this Earth?

Answer: The answer to this question is contained in the other sheet. Be still and know that I AM GOD. "Stillness" here means "Being free from thoughts".

D.: This does not answer the question. The planet has a future – what is it to be?

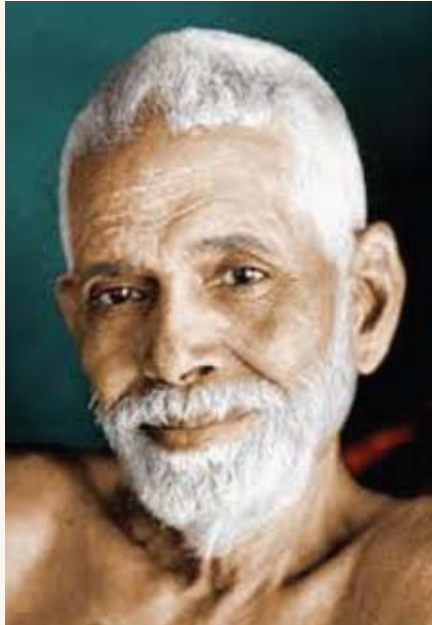
M.: Time and space are functions of thoughts. If thoughts do not arise there will be no future or the Earth.

D.: Time and space will remain even if we do not think of them.

M.: Do they come and tell you that they are? Do you feel them in your sleep?

D.: I was not conscious in my sleep.

M.: And yet you were existing in your sleep.



D.: I was not in my body. I had gone out somewhere and jumped in here just before waking up.

M.: Your having been away in sleep and jumping in now are mere ideas. Where

were you in sleep? You were only what you are, but with this difference that you were free from thoughts in sleep.

D.: Wars are going on in the world. If we do not think, do the wars cease?

M.: Can you stop the wars? He who made the world will take care of it.

D.: God made the world and He is not responsible for the present condition of the world. It is we who are responsible for the present state.

M.: Can you stop the wars or reform the world?

D.: No.

M.: Then why do you worry yourself about what is not possible for you? Take care of yourself and the world will take care of itself.

D.: We are pacifists. We want to bring about Peace.

M.: Peace is always present. Get rid of the disturbances to Peace. This Peace is the Self. The thoughts are the disturbances. When free from them, you are Infinite Intelligence, i.e., the Self. There is

Perfection and Peace.

D.: The world must have a future.

M.: Do you know what it is in the present? The world and all together are the same, now as well as in the future.

D.: The world was made by the operation of Intelligence on ether and atoms.

M.: All of them are reduced to Isvara and Sakti. You are not now apart from Them. They and you are one and the same Intelligence.

After a few minutes one lady asked: "Do you ever intend to go to America?"

M.: America is just where India is (i.e., in the plane of thought).

Another (Spanish) lady: They say that there is a shrine in the Himalayas entering which one gets some strange vibrations which heal all diseases. Is it possible?

M.: They speak of some shrine in Nepal and also in other parts of the Himalayas where the people are said to become unconscious on entering them.

—Excerpted from Sri Ramana Maharishi teachings

Belongingness in Organizational Context

One of the most challenging factors for a social entrepreneur is building an enterprise which needs a lot of people to run the same. With the dynamic ever changing world and challenges every day, how to find the right people, keep them motivated to stay, and make them contribute or to further the cause? What makes people feel to be a part of the organization they work for? What makes them 'belong'? In the following monthly series let us capture some of our thoughts with regard to people and belongingness. It will provide a pathway to not only understand the people who are moving into consciousness era, but also to develop processes and systems that will help manage the people dimension of the organization.

Whether it is a profitable corporate organization or an NGO or a small social enterprise, no one can deny the human resource to be one of the most important and dynamic capital in the growth of the organization; especially, in social enterprises where the reach is through people, for the people, and by the people. Talking about people, more from the era of information and knowledge, the two most serious issues that plague the industry are Retention and Development of human resource. The motivational theories of yesteryears propounded by Maslow and Vroom have proved to be of limited help in understanding and dealing with the so called 'knowledge workers' of the knowledge era.

When an extensive survey was conducted using the interview method with global corporate leadership, one consistent message that emerged was that the best-led companies knew and believed in the value of people. Therefore, the challenge of the



hour is to create, nurture and optimize human capital. Only those organizations and leaders who have optimally utilized human capital would enjoy a competitive edge and sustenance. This is further substantiated by the fact that the world's best-led, value-driven organizations derive an increasing proportion of their value from the collective power of their intangible assets, which consists of people, partners, brands, suppliers and intellectual property (Ashby and Miles, 2002).

The social entrepreneur's woes many a time revolves around people and human issues and very less about the ideas and ways of realizing the vision. The social entrepreneur may start working on an idea and continues to exist for the passion and deep felt need to respond to society. But, the other members who slowly form the organization and participate in building and reaching out the idea are there for their own individual reasons. The motivation of the members to remain and contribute in the organization is directly related to the extent

of belongingness they feel with the organization.

When I worked for different organizations during initial stages of my life, I saw my capacity to be self motivated and contribute change. The realization was that my motivation and willingness to stretch is dependent on how much I feel I belong to the organization. Not only that but also how much the culture of the organization was able to continually feed into that belongingness dimension. When I spoke to several people on what makes them feel 'belong', each story was different and interesting. The literature search led me to do my doctoral work in the space of feeling of Belongingness in an organization context especially amongst the employees of information era.

Belonging has been identified with motivation by Maslow (1943) long back. The discussion about belonging has existed in human resource development space in a minimal way since then, but gaining ground in the last decade. The differential philosophy of the east and the west has contributed heavily to the meaning for belonging. While the east has focused on human evolution as belonging, the west has seen this from ownership and togetherness perspective. The understanding that has emerged from the doctoral study is that the 'feeling of belongingness' is much more than an affiliate need. It is internal, tacit and grounded to what the individual human being is seeking for himself. The gratification of what the individual seeks leaves behind a sense of deep internal satisfaction leaving a pathway for further

A Series on 'Belongingness ... nurturing people connect.'

evolution. This is felt at the feeling level as 'Belongingness' resulting in a bonding that also evolves continuously. This makes belongingness not a destination, but a continuous evolving process.

The key characteristics of the feeling of belongingness are:

- It is manifested as a feeling element.
- It is subjective and specific to individuals, through a generality can be derived at the form level.
- It is dynamic and changes as the individual evolves.

Since it is integral to an individual, the dimensions of belongingness only stimulate and manifest the feeling. The dimensions should be present to constantly stir and evolve along with the individual evolution to bring in belongingness. Based on the above characteristics, the meaning of belongingness in an organizational context can be defined as a "state of being born out of a relationship, in which one experiences value for oneself, being cared for, with a space for continuous evolution leading to the need to fulfill the expectations of the relationship and beyond."

The thesis has thrown open nearly nine dimensions of belongingness and its inter-dynamics. In this series of articles let us reflect upon each dimension and its implication to the people and the organization; the way a social entrepreneur can nurture each dimension and ensure its continuity.

— J.M.Sampath & Kalpana Sampath

Meeting Project Objectives Differently

“Visually impaired people work together and make parts of boilers at Trichy for IOCL’s Paradip Refinery project.”



2 1st December 2011 has etched an unforgettable memory in my mind. I was at Tiruchirapalli on a mission to expedite supplies of Boilers at BHEL’s works for Power plant of IOCL’s ongoing Paradip Refinery Project. BHEL has outsourced non-pressure parts of these boilers to certain vendors nearby Trichy. ‘ORBIT’ is among such outsourced vendors and stands for “Organization For Rehabilitation of the Blind in Trichy” and makes Pins & Clamps for our boilers.

When we reached ORBIT works, we were greeted by their President Mr. P.R. Pandi, who himself is a visually impaired person. To my utter surprise, the whole ORBIT workshop is run by visually impaired persons. Though I was aware of certain special schools and institutions for visually impaired persons but never heard about any manufacturing industry run completely by such persons. What I saw next inside the workshop is quite difficult to believe.

I had never witnessed such well coordinated and coherent working by visually impaired persons. People were segregating the raw material, feeding the

raw material on cutting, shearing and punching machines with the help of their fellow visually impaired friends, collecting the final products and bagging them after quality checks. The whole manufacturing process was efficiently done and finished product was meeting the quality standards. I was lost in deep admiration seeing their untiring efforts for making vital parts for our project and was emotionally touched.

hearts. I was thrilled and compelled to think that dedicated and sincere working by these special people is a great example towards values of humanity which also enlightens the spirit of Project Management. Calm and peace prevail here in their coordinated rhythm of working against any feeling of industrial acrimony.

What came next was even more surprising. A physically handicapped

BHEL told me that every worker working here is fully conversant with the layout of workshop and does the job with calculated steps – concepts of time and motion study, well grasped by them by heart. I was overwhelmed by their indomitable spirit, everlasting zeal and working in perfect harmony.

At the end, ORBIT president Mr. Pandi requested me ‘Sir, if you come across any blind person, please direct him to me, we will make him our team member here’. I controlled my emotions, advised them to maintain timelines and quickly moved out with mixed feelings, thinking and admiring effort and passion of ORBIT in this endeavour and with firm conviction that Paradip Refinery Project will soon be a realized dream.

Truly said : “The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world’s problem.” -Mahatma Gandhi

—Arvind Kumar
Chief Project Manager
Paradip refinery project
Indian Oil Corporation Ltd.

“People were working with no ego and communication was being made not with vital sensory organs like eyes, but with their hearts.”

Their interpersonal understanding and collective effort was exemplary and far better as compared to normal workers engaged in other industrial units.

People were working with no ego and communication was being made not with vital sensory organs like eyes, but with their

welder was doing welding on the job and was assisted by a visually impaired helper. We saw his visually impaired helper almost running and going to store room next door to fetch the electrodes quickly. When enquired how he could do such job with much ease, my fellow companion from

“If you can, I can. If Ramanathan can, you can.”

Abirami Ramanathan shares with **Marie Banu** his journey as an entrepreneur.

Kalaimamani Abirami Ramanathan is a double graduate in engineering and holds a Masters in Homeopathy Medical Science. He is the Managing Director of Abirami Mega Mall—a family entertainment center in Chennai. He is also the President of Chennai City Film Exhibitor’s Association and Tamil Nadu Cinema Theatre Owner’s Federation.

He has served as the President of The South Indian Film Chamber of Commerce and as the General Secretary of Film Federation of India. He is also the Past District Governor of Rotary Club of Madras District 3230, a producer, and a film distributor.

Abirami Ramanathan is a recipient of several awards. To name a few, ‘Kalaimamani Award’ presented by the Government of Tamil Nadu, ‘Honourable Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi Award’ presented by All India Congress Committee; ‘Raja Sando Award’ presented by Government of Tamil Nadu in 2001; ‘Dr. M.S. Ashraf Award for Non-Medical person by the Indian Medical Association’ in 2002; and ‘Seva Ratna Award’ for the year 2002 - 2003 presented by the Centenarian Trust.

In an exclusive interview Abirami Ramanathan shares with Marie Banu his journey as an entrepreneur.

You are an icon for innovations. The Abirami Mega Mall broke the monotony of a theatre being a place only to watch movies. Where did you draw this idea from?

I was having business in Malaysia also. In 1983, while I was staying in a hotel at Kuala Lumpur I heard that there was a big celebration in the neighbourhood as the Prime Minister was inaugurating a mall. Mall was not common in those days and I was told that there were two old theatres which have been renovated to include a mall named ‘Chingaivanam Plaza’. I was curious, and spent two days to learn how the theatres have been renovated to include a shopping place. It then struck to me, ‘why not try this in India?’

Any consumer model that works out successful in another country would definitely be a success in India too. For almost 17 years, my wife and I traveled all over the world visiting malls in

each country. We would spend two hours in each mall to learn about the benefit and difficulties here. We went into details of how the food court has been designed; how the theatres were positioned; the parking space; the size of the kitchen in every food court; whether they used pre-cooked food or cooked the food at the venue itself; and other minute details.

We selected an architect who designed Mayajaal in Chennai and took him along with us on a second trip around the world to show him what we wanted. This mall is a result of all our combined ideas.

What is special about Abirami Mega Mall?

This is the only family entertainment center in India. Most of the malls across the globe target the upper income group, but we wanted to target the middle-income group. We focused on getting two-wheeler customers rather than those who arrived in a car.

We decided to control the prices of the food while maintaining the quality. Even though we have leased the food stall to somebody else, we would still inspect their kitchen; ensure that the stale food is removed at the end of the day.

The reason we wanted to have control on the price is because we did not want a coffee to cost Rs. 200 here. It could cost Rs. 10 to 15 maximum.

People started visiting the mall as Rs. 300 was enough to entertain their entire family. Even if the kids would want to visit another place, their father would insist on visiting this mall as it is easy on his purse. That is why on a Sunday we have not less than 20,000 people visiting our mall.

What is your advice for entrepreneurs who have innovative ideas but are not willing to take a risk to venture into business?

When we took this risk of converting a theatre into a mall, we did not have finances to the extent we required. We approached bankers and had to prove it to them that this initiative would work. Many bankers refused, and few banks who agreed offered us finance at a high rate of interest.

Initially there will be difficulties and you will have to face them. My advice for entrepreneurs would be: ‘Be straight forward, don’t try to cheat anybody, and plan properly.’

You are known as Abirami Mall owner; Producer; Distributor; Rotarian; Philanthropist—which of these roles would you like yourself to be identified with and why?

I would like to be identified as ‘myself’. When others are happy, I am happy. That applies to philanthropy, business, and everything else.

Can you share a memorable incident while rendering social service?

My wife is my

biggest strength. In fact, it was because of her I started rendering social service. One day in 1987, while she was driving down east coast road along with her friends to Mahabalipuram, she found children near Neelankarai studying under a tree. She found that their school had no classrooms. She instantly called and asked me to build a classroom for them.

Since then, I have been endlessly doing social work and have been asking many people to do it. In fact, I have adopted my own village—Pulankurichi of Sivagangai District, and spend around Rs. 25 to 30 lakh a year for its development. This year, we have plan to provide 100 solar street lights, which has become a necessity today.

What are the innovative programmes that you have planned for the future?

We are planning to provide a free *kalyana mandap* which has a capacity of 1000 in Pulankurichi village of Sivagangai District. At the moment, the *mandaps* in our village charge people Rs. 20,000 a day. This price could not be afforded by villagers, who are mostly farmers.

Our *mandap* will charge people only for the electricity on consumption basis and there would be no discrimination amongst the rich and poor. Bookings would be taken on first-come first-serve basis. This initiative would benefit 20,000 families in this village who can use the *mandap* for their domestic functions.

Another project that is in the pipeline is to launch another mall in Chennai. The concept for this is to re-create Venice.

Your message for our readers?

I have two policies. The first is: If you can, I can. If Ramanathan can, you can. The next is: Whatever happens is for our good. Any entrepreneur can be successful if he adopts these two policies.

Whatever we earn, we should divide it into four parts. One part is for the use of the company itself, so that it develops further. The second part is for your children—for their education. The third part is for the society. God has given you enough. So, give it to others and make them happy. The last part is for you. When a day comes when you cannot work, you must have a reserve. You should not depend on your children.

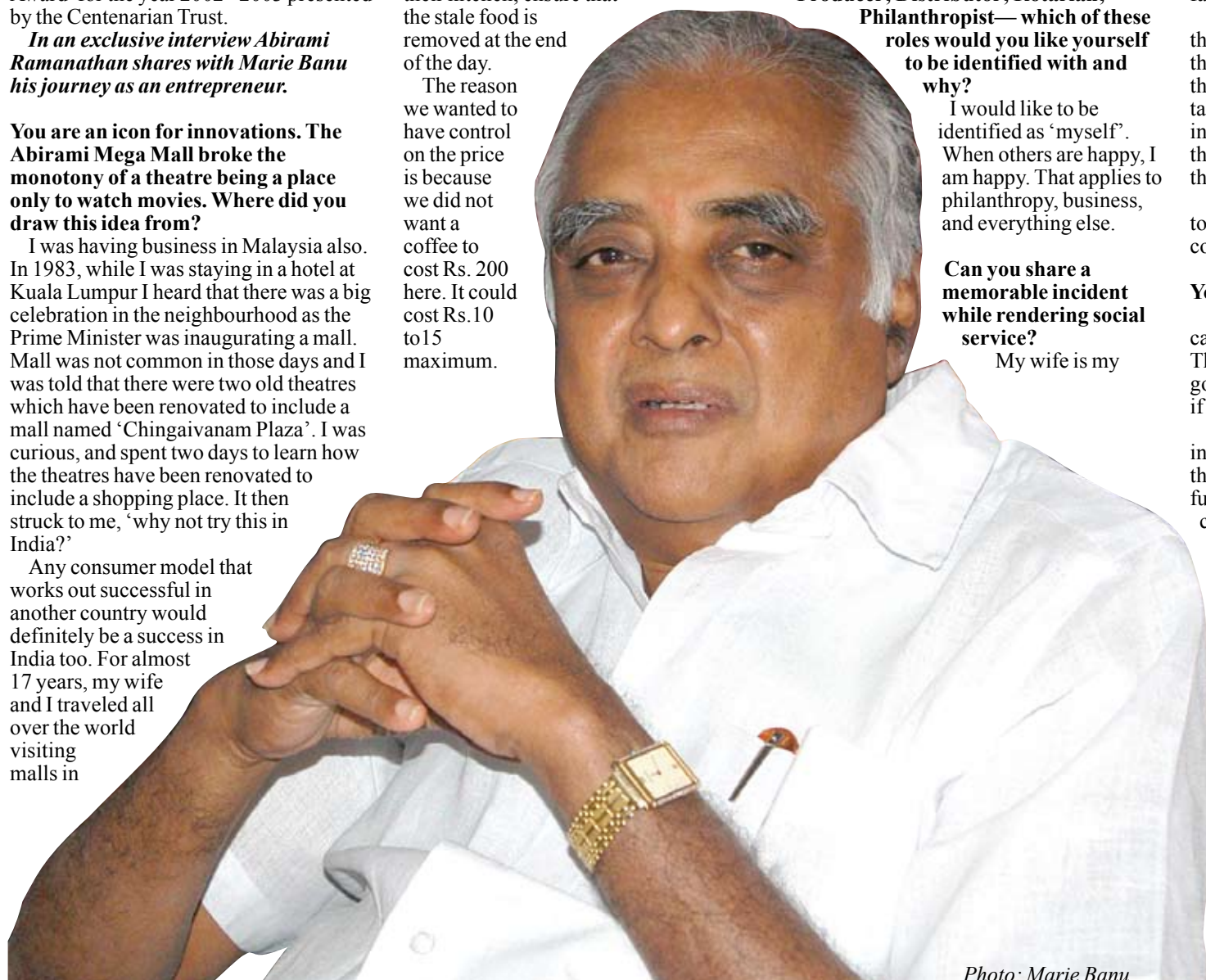


Photo: Marie Banu

Editorial

**Latha Suresh
Marie Banu**