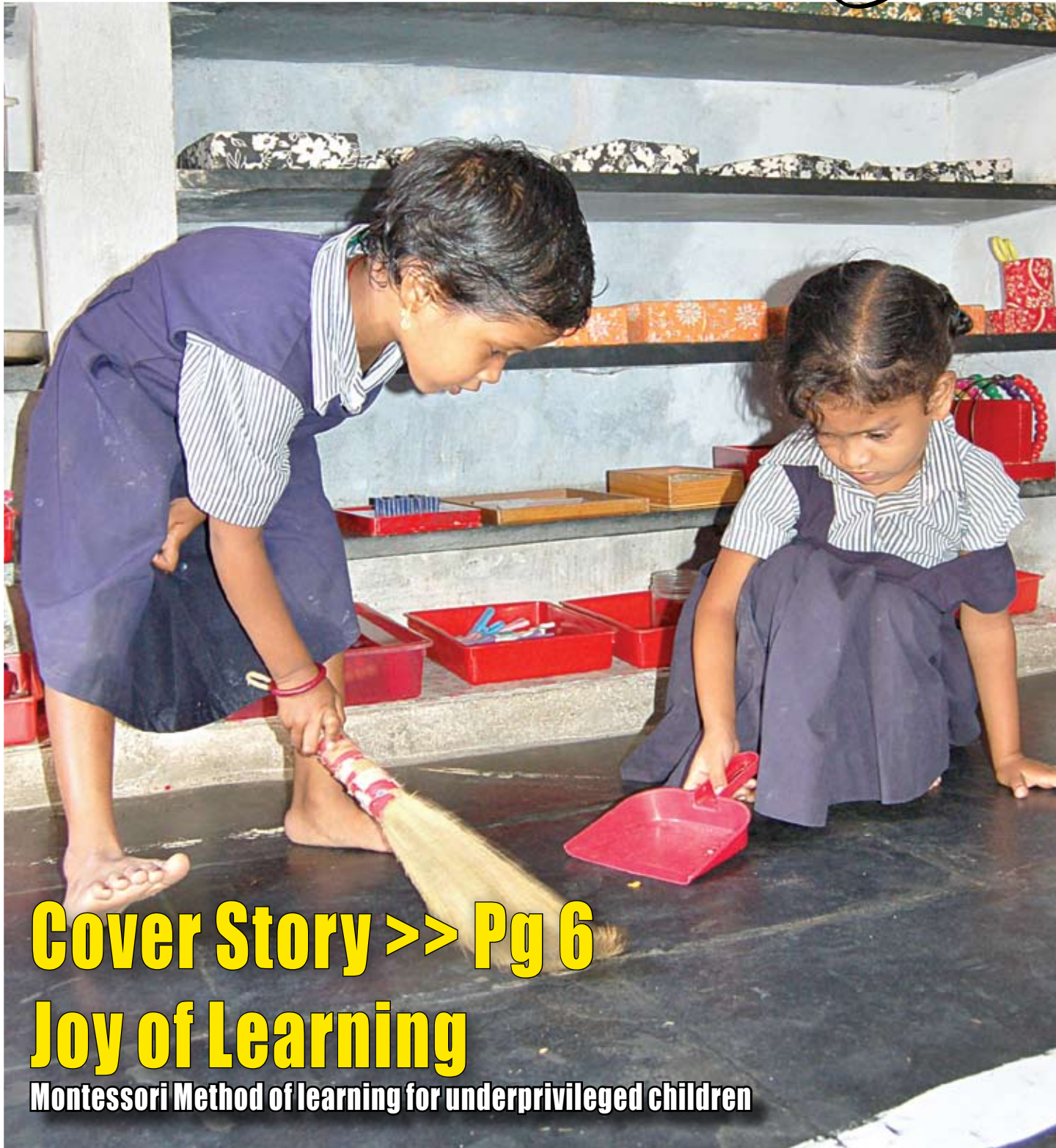


Conversations

A Chronicle of Social Currents

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Cover Story >> Pg 6 Joy of Learning

Montessori Method of learning for underprivileged children

Photo: Marie Banu

From the Editor

Dear Friend,

We beacon the New Year with hope and joy. It's akin to the arrival of a new child in the family.

New year is an event that happens when a culture or a community celebrates the end of one year and the beginning of the next year. Different communities representing different

cultures have different New Years. Thus, celebration is always, not only for a day.

For more than 5,000 years, the first day of the Tamil month of *Chithirai* has been celebrated as the new year for Tamils, without any declaration or official sanction from any author.

Puthandu or better known as Tamil New Year or *Chithirai Tiru-naal*, is the

celebration of the first day of the Tamil new year in mid-April by Tamils all over the globe.

This edition, we have taken special effort to profile more Tamilians who have made an impact in our society today.

To all who celebrate, my warmest wishes for a blessed and peaceful new year ahead.

—P. N. Subramanian

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An exclusive interview with
Shri. Karuna Sagar, IPS
ADGP-Traffic



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The Less You Have The More You Are

If you had lots of money, what would you choose for yourself: a piece of coarse cloth or colourful fine clothes?

There was a time when Gandhi would have chosen the latter. At school as a child and later as a student of law in England, he bought the best of clothes, in tune with the fashion of the time.

How then did the change to a mere loin cloth occur? Well, it did not happen overnight but in phases. The first phase in this shedding began during his stay in South Africa. Having suffered at the hands of the British rulers he came to feel that if Asians and Africans were to win over humiliation, they needed to stop imitating

Europeans at once.

At the same time, Gandhi was also influenced by the book *Unto This Last*. Real beauty, he learnt from this book, comes from within rather than from that which is outside. In Africa, therefore, his western clothes gave way to his native Kathiawari dress: dhoti, kurta and a turban.

It was in this elaborate Indian dress that Gandhi returned to India in 1915. Soon after, he went on an extensive tour of India. It was during this tour that he came to realise what poverty meant.

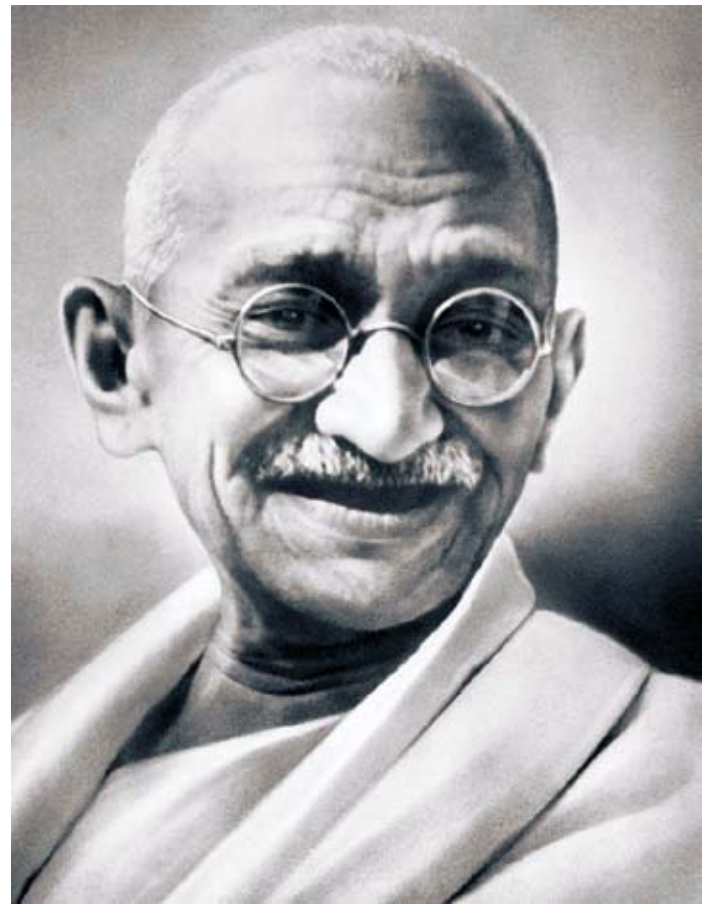
Once, in Madurai, he addressed a public meeting attended by a large number of men and women. That

night, the picture of those half clad men and women filled his thoughts.

Next morning, Mr. Rajan who was translating Gandhiji's English speeches into Tamil, came to fetch him. Finding Gandhi in a loin cloth, Mr. Rajan said, "It is time for the meeting. Please get ready soon." "I'm ready," said Gandhi.

Surprised, Mr. Rajan asked again, "Are you not getting dressed to go?" At which Gandhi said, "From today, this is what I am going to wear - the dress that every Indian wears."

—Source: mkgandhi.org



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**

We Cannot Ignore Our Farmers!

“CSIM helped me rediscover my field of work professionally, reintroducing it to me from the perspective of sustainability.”

The numerous debates and declamation on global warming have garnered some attention on the community that is usually neglected from our policy spheres—the farmers. Given that India is largely an agrarian economy, it becomes imperative to work closely with our farmers to ensure food security, against the challenge of global warming. Amsavel, Founder Trustee of NESAM (National Environmental and Social Awareness Programme) is working on this front.

Born and brought up in a village called Elanthampatti, 8 kilometers from Banrutti, Amsavel has always been a part of social activities happening in his village. As part of National Social Service (NSS) at school, he had participated in a number of campaigns and activities. He grew up moved by the atrocities against the dalits in the village. This wooed him to study Social Work, but he couldn't. He was forced to take up Economics due to low percentile in Twelfth standard. However, this did not affect his inclination towards social work. He was equally active as before in village activities and youth groups.

In 1995-1996, he became the National Service Volunteer of Nehru Yuva Kendra (NYK). It was a forum for youngsters to volunteer for different activities like presenting the villagers' letters or complaints to the District Collector, cleaning the streets, organizing sports events for children and adults, etc. To him, holistic development of villages is incomplete if all the sections are not involved. “That was a big lesson from my NSS days. Alongside NYK, I also observed the non-government organisations in the locality that were doing a lot of work on the ground. I grew more confident about taking it as a career option, despite coming from an economics background,” he recalls.

We all are aware of the change Green Revolution ushered in the quantity of food production in India. What is often left unheard is the voice of one of our ministers of that time who warned us that farming not in consonance with the principles of nature is only detrimental to our long term food security. Amsavel's work reminds us of all that.

NESAM organizes farmers in the villages and provides awareness programmes on organic farming and its usefulness. “Ignoring our traditional food crops like ragi, jowar, bajra, etc., and switching over to cash crops has depleted our soil to such an extent that if we do not act now, tomorrow might be too late. Our people must be supported by our food. And that is food security,” he dwells deeper into the subject.

To Amsavel, farmers are the people who



must receive immediate attention and policies pertaining to agriculture must be based on indigenous ecosystems. “Our leaders are not in line with these principles. That is why people like us come in to advocate for organic farming, against all odds,” he laments about people having forgotten their roots and is totally upset about the respect shown towards farmers and farming.

The aforesaid food crops, collectively referred as to as *siru-daniyangal* require less input for growth and provide food for a minimum of four months with ample nutrition. “We cannot afford to forget these crops that also have the inherent nature of revitalizing the soil,” warns Amsavel, who has organized men into groups to inculcate the habit of saving and depositing in a bank. So far, 43 such groups have been formed.

“But why men?”

“Women groups can be organized easily, whereas men's pattern of socialization does not allow one to do that. They take to alcohol easily. Thus, the necessity to organise these men and focus on them,” he explains.

The awareness programmes provide inputs on various techniques used in organic farming. *Meenpaagu*, for example, made from fish and jaggery protects the crops from insects and also enhances growth. *Panchakavya*, *amudakaraichal* are other products that can be produced by the farmers using their farm wastes, and involves no input costs.



“By dint of hard work, the awareness programmes are beginning to show positive results. It is during this transition that farmers need all the support,” he reiterates.

Alongside organic farming, Amsavel is also promoting the concept of planting trees in the villages. The most noteworthy of his efforts is the creation of local markets where farmers come together, decide the prices of their produce and sell it within themselves, without any intermediate. NESAM largely sustained by donations, is now preparing to launch a website.

Ask him how he manages the functioning of NESAM and he immediately sprang stating, “CSIM.” “Although I got to observe the functioning of an NGO very closely, managing it myself was a herculean task. The Social Entrepreneurship course at CSIM made all the difference.”

“I was not even aware of something called 80G! NGO management seemed a

whole new world to me during the course,” recalls Amsavel who applied and got the 80G certificate right after the completion of the CSIM course. He elaborates on how donations can raise speculations among the observers. When there was a need to tap a variety of resources, he did not know how to go about it. “Through the course I came to know about institutions like NABARD and others who can be approached. CSIM helped me rediscover my field of work professionally, reintroducing it to me from the perspective of sustainability,” he says.

On approaching NABARD, NESAM was given two lakh rupees to form farmers' clubs in the villages. The visibility received through this programme helped Amsavel expand his network and plan new initiatives for the farmers. His focus now is to create a *uyir soozhal gramam*, translated as an ideal village, that which has no use of plastics, fertilisers, or pesticides. The NESAM team under him is working to establish exemplar villages in Elandampatti, Thiruvamur, Eripalayam and Thenakottai of Banrutti Taluk.

In this endeavor, he has managed to register 226 organic farmers with the Tamil Nadu government's Department of Organic Farming. “With this certification, our farmers can export their produce anywhere,” says Amsavel with a pride indicating his faith in natural and traditional methods of farming.

—Shanmuga Priya.T

Slum Soccer

Creating Priceless Identities For Young Slum Dwellers

From as far back as we can remember, sports has been used as a means to bridge the gap between nations and between people or communities divided by religion, caste, history, etc. A unique initiative is using sport to bridge the gap between people divided by economic barriers in India. Meet Slum Soccer and see how they are bringing about a change!

Most of what we know about soccer begins and ends with the adrenaline rush, the vigor and the matchless entertainment. But there could be and there is more, much more. When the soccer ball gets rolling on field, kicked by the players who are slum dwellers, it takes a whole new meaning. It's about shrugging off the limitations of poverty; creating and living a priceless new identity. And Slum Soccer, a Nagpur-based NGO, has been proving it time and again.

12 years ago, when Vijay Barse, a retired sports teacher, saw a small bucket being kicked and passed, splashing muddy rainwater all around the diminutive playgrounds of a shanty town, it was a moment of clairvoyance. Vijay saw through the simple joy and fun; he saw a great tool of emancipation in soccer and realized that a sport transforms you when you are on the field. 'Jhoparrpatti' football, as it began to be called then, roped in youngsters coming from backgrounds of drug abuse, anti-social activities, conflicts and personal struggles. They all got together for a game of soccer, only to realize that their lives were slowly changing.

For Homkant Surandase, a runaway teenager from an impoverished village where its farmers were committing suicide, stumbling upon Slum Soccer was a sharp turn of destiny. He began to find his self-esteem while he played on the field. His destiny took him all the way to Melbourne to represent India in the Homeless World Cup 2008. He came back with the determination to make change happen in the lives of many who were like him. Homkant today is a coach to street children, slum and shelter dwellers and also single-handedly manages the Slum Soccer in Nagpur.

Now what about the girls in the slum? Their families would rather have them work as maids than play football. Slum Soccer was able to cut through this herculean difficulty of bringing the girl



Slum Soccer – a Nagpur based initiative that is using soccer as a means of developing an economically backward section of society.

'Jhoparrpatti' football, as it began to be called then, roped in youngsters coming from backgrounds of drug abuse, anti-social activities, conflicts and personal struggles.

child on to the field and make them great sportspersons. They found few girls, banked on their abilities and helped them find resonance with soccer. The rewarding part is, when one girl gets trained, she goes back to her slum, inspires and brings twenty more girls into the game. And you should know that Slum Soccer's girls' team gives a rather tough time to its boy's team – many unrecorded 'Chak de' moments.

Over 6000 players from various slums compete with each other at Slum Soccer tournaments every year. Many play for national level championships and represent India in international tournaments. The impact of such exposure in the lives of these youngsters is huge. Beyond the vital impact of changing the course of their lives, soccer has begun playing internally as well. They are growing up as confident individuals, they are brilliant decision makers, they take up the responsibility of enhancing the livelihood of their families, and they are individuals will look into your eyes and speak confidently. Slum Soccer then conceptualized holistic training to the players – basic hygiene, gender sensitivity, women empowerment, HIV, health issues and much more.

Through Slum Soccer, the players are able to find meaningful employment, jobs in schools and companies. Many of them serve Slum Soccer as trainers – trainers

who have themselves experienced the transformation that soccer has brought to them; needless to say that they make excellent trainers.

One person who's deeply influenced by the cause of Slum Soccer is Vijay's son, Abhijeet. Abhijeet, a Post Doctorate Fellow, had seen his father working for the cause of Indo-Pak peace, organize motor cycle expeditions to the border to talk peace, encouraging tree planting and then came the idea of transformation through sports. He found that his calling was in the cause of Slum Soccer and left his career in the US to join his father's mission. Abhijeet says, 'I could be doing a lot benefiting just me, but through Slum Soccer I'm able to do things that benefit the lives of many'. That's probably a philosophy that can change the way we do things in our lives.

—Ranjini Sivaswamy
Source: thebetterindia.com

Hero - Today and Tomorrow

“I want to be a hero like Rajnikanth.” After thinking for a moment, he added innocently, “I want to be a hero at Copper Chimney.”

Sankaralinkam, 24, is undergoing the work experience programme at Copper Chimney, coordinated by The Spastics Society of Tamilnadu (SPASTN). From housekeeping to hospitality, this young man is ace in his work.

SPASTN along with Copper Chimney has been providing special children with training since November 2011 and till date, 25 children have benefitted from this programme.

Conversations traces Sankaralinkam life's path from the age of 2 to 24.

When I entered the Copper Chimney restaurant on a Monday morning, I was greeted by Sankaralinkam who was cleaning the entrance glass doors.

“I have come here to talk to you. You may finish your work and join me,” said I cheerfully.

He looked at me curiously and smiled.

After he had completed his tasks diligently, we sat together to chatter.

“What are you doing here? I asked.

“I am working at Copper Chimney,” he said with pride.

Speaking of his family, his face lit up as he said, “My father's name is Kalaikannan and my mother's name is Rama Nachiar. I have two sisters—Aishwarya and Lavanya. I live in Perambur and Uncle Pannerselvam drops and picks me up from Copper Chimney every day.”

“Are you enjoying your work here? What do you do with your salary?” I probed.

“I like to work here very much. When I received my first salary from Winners Bakery, I bought Aishwarya, my sister, a new set of clothes for her birthday. It was an orange *churidar* and she liked it very much. We all went to the temple and even put some money in the *hundi*,” he stated without a pause.

“What do you want to become when you

grow up?” I enquired.

“I want to be a hero like Rajnikanth.” Pondering for a moment, he added innocently, “I want to be a hero at Copper Chimney.”

When asked who Rajnikanth was, he instantly narrated a comedy clip from one of his movies ‘*Chandramukhi*’ and prompted me to laugh. I was amazed at his memory as the scene appeared vividly in front of my eyes.

I took a break from our conversation, and spoke with his father Kalai kannan, to learn how he succeeded in bringing up his truly special son.

“I was living with my family in Abu

Dhabi as I was working for National Oil Company.

When Sankaralinkam was two and a half years old, the doctor diagnosed him with autism. My wife and I did not have food for three days as we were very depressed. The word ‘autism’ was new for us. We returned to India, and since then we have devoted our lives for the sake of our son,” he said nostalgically.

“It must have taken a lot of courage for you to overcome the trauma. Now, I am sure that you are proud of

your son,” I told comfortingly.

“Of course, yes! I am glad to say that my son has completed his 12th standard through National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and has even done his DTP training. Every day, he types a page from Abdul Kalam's book ‘*Wings of Fire*’. He expects me to treat him like an adult and involves in all household discussions,” he said humbly.

Speaking about his children, Kalai kannan said: “My daughters are very affectionate towards Sankaralinkam. Lavanya, my older daughter, has done her MS in Speech pathology. She pursued this course as she was interested to work for special children. Although she is in the

United States after marriage, she stays in constant touch with us. Aishwarya, my younger daughter, is presently studying at Velammal engineering college in Chennai. When she was in the eighth standard, she served as my son's scribe when he appeared for the 10th standard examination.”

“Are you happy that your son is working at Copper Chimney?” I asked politely.

“Yes, I do. I was hesitant at first to allow him carry out housekeeping tasks, but Ms. L.V. Jayashree, Director of SPASTN counseled me. She made me realize that there is dignity of

My advice for parents like me is: ‘You accept first. Then expect the society to accept and help you. Don't hesitate to ask for opportunities for your child.’

labor and about the value of the work experience programme. I am thankful to the staff at Copper Chimney for being kind towards my son and treating him equal,” he replied.

Kalai kannan acknowledges SPASTN and the support extended by Mr. Mahadevan and his staff at Copper Chimney for Sankaralinkam's growth today.

“My wife has visited most of the special schools in the city to seek admission for our son. Our expectation was high and it took a long time for us to accept that our child was autistic. My advice for parents like me is: ‘You accept first. Then expect the society to accept and help you. Don't hesitate to ask for opportunities to your child.’ Today, I am proud to say that my son is capable of being socially and economically independent,” concluded Kalai kannan wiping a tear.

—Marie Banu



Photos: Marie Banu



Joy of Learning

“In 2003, when I heard about the Montessori system, I wanted to introduce this method for the underprivileged children.”—Padmini Gopalan



Photos: Marie Banu

Ashwita, 4, was playing with her toys that was scattered all over the room. While her mother was busy preparing the Sunday lunch, her father Ramu gave her company.

“Appa, why is school closed on Sunday?” she asked.

Bemused by her question, Ramu replied saying, “Because, you should be at home, at least twice a week, to play with us.”

The reply did not comfort Ashwita, and she continued to play with her toys.

Like Ashwita, there were many more children who raised similar questions to their parents as they were feeling bored staying at home during weekends.

Ashwita studies at the Montessori section in Chennai School run by Chennai Corporation at Saidapet. In the recent past, this school has gained much recognition amongst others as it was the first amongst the other schools run by Chennai Corporation to introduce the

Montessori system for the underprivileged children free of cost. Following this, the Chennai Corporation started nursery classes in 40 schools in the city.

About 160 children study in the nursery section at the elementary school and they all come from varied socio-economic backgrounds. While the school infrastructure has been provided by Chennai Corporation, Sri Ramacharan Charitable Trust provides Montessori education for children aged between 3 to 6 years free of cost.

Sri Ramacharan Charitable Trust was founded by a group of women headed by Smt. Padmini Gopalan in 1999 with the purpose of providing quality education to underprivileged children.

The Trust sources funds from individual donors and provides Montessori training for teachers. They also bear the salary costs for 11 teachers who are employed in the Chennai School at Saidapet and provide all the required

learning materials for the school.

One has to see to believe! So, when Latha and I heard about this school, we decided to spend a day with the children, parents, and teachers to learn what was different and interesting for the children here.

We first met about 30 parents of these children who were assembled for the monthly meeting in the school premise. They had arrived ahead of time and welcomed us warmly. Our impression that only families belonging to the low income group would educate their children here was wrong.

“When I re-located to Chennai, I spend considerable time researching about schools in the city. I found this school way better than the others, and so decided to educate my daughter here,” said Archana, an employee of Cognizant Technology Solutions.

While some parents were proudly sharing anecdotes about their children, few were getting excited and not waiting for their turn to speak.

“My daughter said that she will not play with me when I return home, if I did not come to her school today. That’s why I am here now. Although her mother was free, she insisted that I attend this meeting. I am happy that I am here for her sake,” said Nathan, Raji’s father.

Following Nathan’s statement, there was a chorus from other parents stating similar reasons.

When we asked the parents what was interesting in this school, prompt came their responses. “My daughter Shobha keeps the house very clean. She will not allow even a paper to be strewn on the floor. She knows how to cut vegetables and handles the knife like a pro. I am happy that I enrolled her in this school. The school teaches my child everything,” said Usha, who works as a domestic maid.

“Anu, my daughter is the first to have her bath at home. She insists that I drop her at school, and because of her I am early to work,”

said Shekar, a mechanic.

“Balaji, my son, never uses his shirt to wipe his running nose. He waits and asks me to get him a handkerchief. He also tells me to close my mouth when I yawn or sneeze,” said a proud Uma.

Latha and I were overwhelmed hearing their comments and exchanged smiles. The discipline of the children and the cleanliness of the classrooms were extraordinary.

Jayanthi Karthikeyan, Trustee of Sri Ramacharan Charitable Trust joined us in our discussion.

“We select only teachers who have a passion to teach the underprivileged children. Although they are offered lesser salary when compared to the government paid teachers, they have shown much interest and satisfaction working here,” said Jayanthi.

After spending about an hour with the parents, we went around the school visiting the nursery classes where Montessori Method



Jayanthi Karthikeyan



Padmini Gopalan

Padmini Gopalan, 82 is full of energy when asked about her trust activities. “I started by having a small tuition centre in my verandah. When my children were young, I used to wonder who will teach children who did not have parents who could teach. In 2003, when I heard about the Montessori system, I wanted to introduce this method for the underprivileged children. As you would know, Montessori system always had the elite tag,” said Padmini.

“When I checked the cost of the learning materials, I was taken aback as it was amounting to 60,000 rupees. Therefore, I approached two people who were experts in the field to seek their opinion. But, both of them said that it was absurd; it won’t work; and it is too expensive. They expressed that Montessori means freedom, and therefore it would not be appropriate for the underprivileged section of the society who is being aimed at.”

“But, I noticed that none of them said that it was an inferior system. Being too good, it was a temptation for me. I approached Smt. Uma Shankar, Director, Centre for Montessori Training in Chennai who encouraged me to go ahead with my plan. I requested for two teachers to guide me, and she assigned them,” added Padmini.

Padmini checked with several vendors before she bought the learning materials from Kolkata. This set the beginning of the Montessori Method of learning to be introduced in schools run by Chennai Corporation. This method was first launched in Veera Perumal School at Mylapore in 2005, followed by Chennai School in Saidapet in 2007.

“What are your plans to make this system available for more underprivileged children?” I asked.

“If Chennai Corporation permits us, we will continue to work in their schools. The advantage of working with Chennai Corporation is that the children can continue studying in the same school for three years; one year in the balwadi and two years in the kinder garden,” she concluded.

One can see the effects of the Montessori system by enquiring about the child’s performance in the primary school. There is a visible advantage that these children have gained when compared to others.

We hope more children gain from Padmini’s initiative and the mindset that Montessori training is expensive and meant only for the elite fades away.

—Marie Banu

Distributed Risk and Reward

“Through its distributed delivery model, Next Wealth Entrepreneurs, a business process outsourcing company, aims to empower more than 10,000 rural graduates with jobs over the next two to three years.”

When Dr. Sridhar Mitta, former chief technology officer of Wipro, went to the U.S. in 1998, he was enamoured by the concept of entrepreneurship and wealth creation. When he returned to India, he started a company called e4e India, an IT enabled services and business process outsourcing company, in 2000. However, he always wanted to do something socially relevant – and he ruled out philanthropy – after his retirement from his professional life. During this period he was approached to help a small IT company in Elagiri in Tamil Nadu.

“It was essentially helping the local graduates to be self sufficient,” says Dr. Mitta. This experience and his subsequent visit to a college near Salem made him research the number of colleges, students and their capabilities in smaller towns. This is when he realised that there are many small town graduates who do not migrate to cities for various reasons – like girls prior to their marriage and people with disabilities. This was also when the IT industry was beginning to suffer from three problems – rising cost, increase in the rate of attrition and non-availability of skills.

“These are not different problems but a single problem of demand and supply not being met. There is a demand on one side and there is supply on the other side. But, they are not connected. I wanted to find a profitable and scalable business model to connect these,” recalls Dr. Mitta. That’s when he came up with the idea of a distributed delivery model and along with the three other founders (Anand Talwai, Mythily Ramesh and S. R. Gopalan), he started NextWealth Entrepreneurs (NextWealth), which promises social upliftment through an entrepreneurship model.

We measure our success by the number of jobs we create and not by the profits we make.

Incorporated in 2009, NextWealth, is a for-profit social entrepreneurship organisation that employs engineering and other graduates in non-metro centres (tier II, III, IV cities and rural areas) to perform simple to complex, technical or non-technical work for client organisations. It involves local entrepreneurs to run these centres and provides them the right training to run it effectively.

The delivery model

“The distributed delivery model is not very much different from the AMUL model and can be applied to any business,” says Dr. Mitta. The size of the centre is governed by a common set of principles like the geography, quality of the entrepreneur, staff training, performance measures, remote management, access to information and so on. This model ensures a large number of small centres located in non-metros in India, which is similar to the Internet or cloud model of computing.

As it is a distributed and entrepreneur-led model, the investment required is also distributed.



As a result, capital efficiency becomes very high and the entrepreneur not only takes the risk but also gets the reward. The total project cost to setup a NextWealth centre is Rs. 90 lakh which includes working capital costs until the centre breaks even. On an average, NextWealth offers 74 per cent of the equity structure to the entrepreneur while it retains 26 per cent.

An ideal centre starts by employing 20 to 30 people and increases to about 250 people in a year or two. Sometimes, it can even grow to a 500 people centre. Currently, the company has three centres – Mallasamudram which is close to Salem; Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh and Amargol which is between Hubli and Dharwad, Karnataka. The criteria for NextWealth’s selection of location for its centres are: the cost of living should be low, there should be a good talent supply in terms of a college or university, Internet bandwidth should be available from at least two independent service providers and access to the location should be a reasonable four hours from the city.

Delivery model

The company employs fresh graduates, mostly women, and trains them for a specific job. “Unlike a typical IT company, we do not have a pitch. We do not take general engineers and train them in

everything,” says Dr. Mitta. The company first gets its customers, understands their processes and then hires people for that process and the resultant training quantum is less and more specific. The employee, after the training, gets into the actual delivery. “One of the reasons for very high attrition in cities is that there is a mismatch between the quality of people and the jobs they do. We see a lot of people resigning within a few months of joining. This does not happen much with us,” adds Dr. Mitta.

As far as the customers go, NextWealth’s services cost at least 50 per cent less when compared to what they would pay for in the city. “In absolute terms, it works out to US \$3 to US \$5 an hour. In the city, I do not think they get anything less than US \$12,” he explains. This is because we do not have any bench cost and transportation cost and have low retraining cost due to very low attrition and low real estate cost,” he explains. NextWealth also has the flexibility to try out new models and new customers without affecting the current structure.

Addressing the challenges

When NextWealth was incorporated the team had three concerns. One, whether the company would be able to get sufficient quantity and quality

of graduates; two, whether they would be able to identify an entrepreneur who has the right qualification and experience to start a centre, and three, the company’s ability to access customers. While the first two concerns were addressed without much fuss, customer acquisition continues to be a challenge. “We are still facing the mindset issues which are similar to what the American managers felt 15 to 20 years ago,” says Dr. Mitta.

The company currently has more than a dozen customers. It is using its work to get new customers and is also marketing through the web. In addition to the traditional IT and BPO services, NextWealth is also setting up new types of services like a social media command centre. Some of the services it offers include content monetisation, chat-based support, digital image applications and tech services. NextWealth also picks up processes and customers in such a way that it does not test its staff in what they are not good at. “We do not take up any call centre jobs as we do not want to test them in their weakness area. On the other hand, the processes where input and output is well defined are where they perform,” says Dr. Mitta.

NextWealth has its eye on the ever expanding healthcare sector as part of its growth plans for the future. While around 500 graduates are currently employed by the company, its aims to create about 10,000 jobs in the next two to three years. It plans to meet this target by setting up about 40 centres and identifying good entrepreneurs to lead these centres. In fact, it has already identified 10 other centre locations and entrepreneurs. Through its business model, NextWealth hopes to impact the social and economic ecosystem of its centre locations. “We measure our success by the number of jobs we create and not by the profits we make,” concludes Dr. Mitta.

Concept in brief:

NextWealth is a for-profit social entrepreneurship organisation that employs engineering and other graduates in non-metro centers (tier II, III, IV cities and rural areas) to perform simple to complex, technical or non-technical work for client organisations. Some of the services it offers include content monetisation, chat based support, digital image applications and tech services. It involves local entrepreneurs to run these centres and provides them with the right training to function effectively. As it is a distributed and entrepreneur-led model, the investment required is also distributed. The total project cost to set up a NextWealth centre and run it until it turns profitable is Rs. 90 lakh, which includes capital expenditure and working capital. On an average, NextWealth offers 74 per cent of the equity structure to the entrepreneur while it retains 26 per cent.

—Poornima Kavlekar

This article was first published in The Smart CEO Magazine (www.thesmartceo.in)

GIVING BACK TO THE SOCIETY

Social Work is probably the only realm where handling multiple roles is not equated to being a 'Jack of all trades'. We all come across individuals who suddenly change their fields of study or work. Rarely do we come across people who change fields to 'give back to the society'.

This is the story of one such man—Gopalan, Founder, Akshaya Trust. After selling his company Aqua Chemicals & Systems to the US in 1999, he made a very conscious decision before hopping into the second innings of business.

"I wanted to give back to the society. And the non-compete agreement of three years with the acquiring party gave me the space to do so," says Gopalan, who started the Akshaya Trust in 2001. The trust identified the students who were most in need of resources to continue their education. Besides financial support, the trust also conducted once in every two months Personality Development classes, Public Speaking workshops, and regularly monitored their performance. Eventually, these extra classes were made compulsory so that all the students reaped its benefits.



man, taxi driver, and hospitals, the home has evolved a culture of management where every inmate and staff know all the requisite numbers that would come handy in any emergency situation.

Now, ten years after its establishment, the home is managed without Gopalan's presence. "They do not need me anymore. Right from acquiring provisions to medical care, responsibilities are shared by the inmates

this practice and within two months, late coming reduced drastically. After four months, this system was stalled as there was no need for it anymore.

Gopalan's excitement helped him recognise ways of motivating the children to follow good habits. He formed a group of volunteers amongst the students, who would assess the best student and best class in the school. And the prize was what the children of the winning class wanted. "Asking my students what they wanted marked a massive difference in our relationship, we became closer. The children became confident of voicing their difficulties and needs. The communication between the management and the students was alive, like never before," he remarks exuberantly.

The team under Gopalan concentrated on providing all the necessary amenities in the first three years of taking over. Reverse osmosis plant for drinking water, additional toilets, and an auditorium were built.

The focus was then turned to the quality of education. He says, "Education cannot and must not stop with textbooks and subjects. Imbibing the right values is also the responsibility of this system. Voluntary attitude must be inculcated at a very young age, else it would be too late to imbibe them."

Socially responsible children (SRC) cell was introduced to encourage students to contribute to their school and the nearby locality. "The sense of giving back to society must come in only now. Because at this age, school is society to them and all the little changes they contribute to will inculcate a positive attitude towards individual's commitment to societal development," he asserts.

The concentration on subjects and values was well balanced here. On observing that the children were not good at the fundamental concepts of math, the management decided to find out the best possible way of attending to every child, considering their ability to grasp concepts. The search culminated at www.khanacademy.org, a website that provides free education anytime,

anywhere. The adaptive assessment and the feature of breaking down every problem into simple steps makes it user friendly.

E-learning of math concepts was introduced for classes 6 and 7. The one-on-one learning helped students to progress at their respective pace and take up any number of practical tests. Soon, regular mathematic classes were discontinued and computerization was taken up on a large scale. "The children no longer have to feel bad or think before asking any doubts. All they have to do is replay the video and look at the examples. Self-learning is encouraging for students. From Mathematics, to English is the aim in the coming years."

Instead of giving scholarships to top three scorers, the management decided to recognize and support those students who showed improvement, be it even from 40 to 50 percent. These targets were fixed by the students themselves and once they achieved they were awarded. This made the children compete with themselves, and not with the top scorers.

One of Gopalan's dreams has been to develop a self-reliant village, which found no directions until 2012 Diwali. The trust provided houses and household articles to all the six houses that were damaged in the fire accident in the slum located near the school. With fresh rapport built in the region, Gopalan is all set to embark on the journey of developing a self-reliant slum.

Assistance for education, health, vocational training, and interest free loans are on the cards and 150 slums



"I wanted to give back to the society. And the non-compete agreement of three years with the acquiring party gave me the space to do so."

Gopalan tried to imbibe the 'chain of giving' in these students, wherein they would give back to this initiative after they gain employment. Of the 300 students who had been supported by the Trust, 50 are employed; 40 are contributing towards this initiative. Today, children of street vendors, *dhobis*, and auto drivers are all educated and employed in enterprises such as TCS, and earn a minimum of 20,000 rupees a month.

Giving back to society knows no limits, at least in our country where wealth and poverty co-exist. Gopalan seems to have gotten to the root of this principle. In 2002, the Trust established a home for the aged at Mudichur, near Tambaram in Chennai, for destitute senior citizens. The home provides the inmates with food, clothing, shelter, medicines, as well as recreation. On admission, the inmates are all categorized so that the healthy senior citizens can take up simple responsibilities at the home on rotation basis, and those who are terminally ill or bed ridden can be taken care of by the staff.

With regular recreation programmes, *bhajans* and a local tie up with an auto

and the staff," he says excitedly.

The man who donated his first property to the trust for constructing the home, is today happy in being no more than a well-wisher. Mr. Gopalan's enthusiasm to work in the field of education received fresh energy when he came across an 83 year old school—Sri Karpakavalli Balika Middle School—in Mylapore at Chennai. This school was apparently at the verge of closure in 2008. Little did any onlooker know that his entry marked a whole new beginning for this aided school. Gopalan believes that education is the only means to bring about a constructive change in any society.

"There was no discipline or system and to make things worse, punctuality was the worst hit casualty here. Half the students would not come in uniforms," recalls Gopalan, who had tried numerous methods to reverse this situation.

He introduced the penalty system where every late comer would walk into his room, take one rupee and drop it in the box that was placed in every classroom. His intention was to admit his inability to change these children. The students began to feel embarrassed about



around Mangolai will be covered under this initiative. From business to slums, the Trust has come a long way under Gopalan's aegis.

Was all this planned?

"Way back in 1980, I had no such ideas. I entered business, and sold the company at the right opportunity. I realized that money was not everything in life and I must give back to the society. The urge was very strong and still keeps me going," he signs off.

—Shanmuga Priya. T

Conversations with Shri 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.

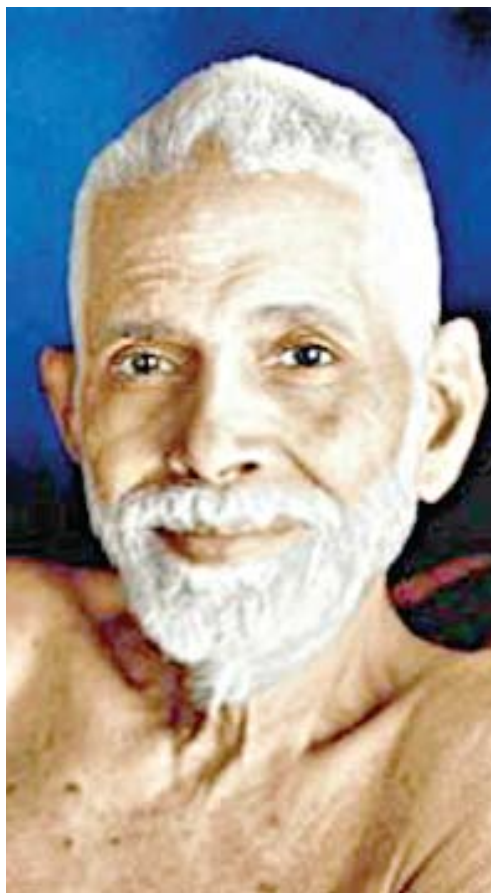
D.: Time and space will remain even if we do not think of them.

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 Talks with Sri Ramana Maharishi

What Gives a Man or Woman the Right to Lead?

It certainly isn't gained by election or appointment. Having position, title, rank or degrees doesn't qualify anyone to lead other people. And the ability doesn't come automatically from age or experience, either.

No, it would be accurate to say that no one can be given the right to lead. The right to lead can only be earned. And that takes time.

The Kind of Leader Others Want to Follow

The key to becoming an effective leader is not to focus on making other people follow, but on making yourself the kind of person they want to follow. You must become someone others can trust to take them where they want to go.

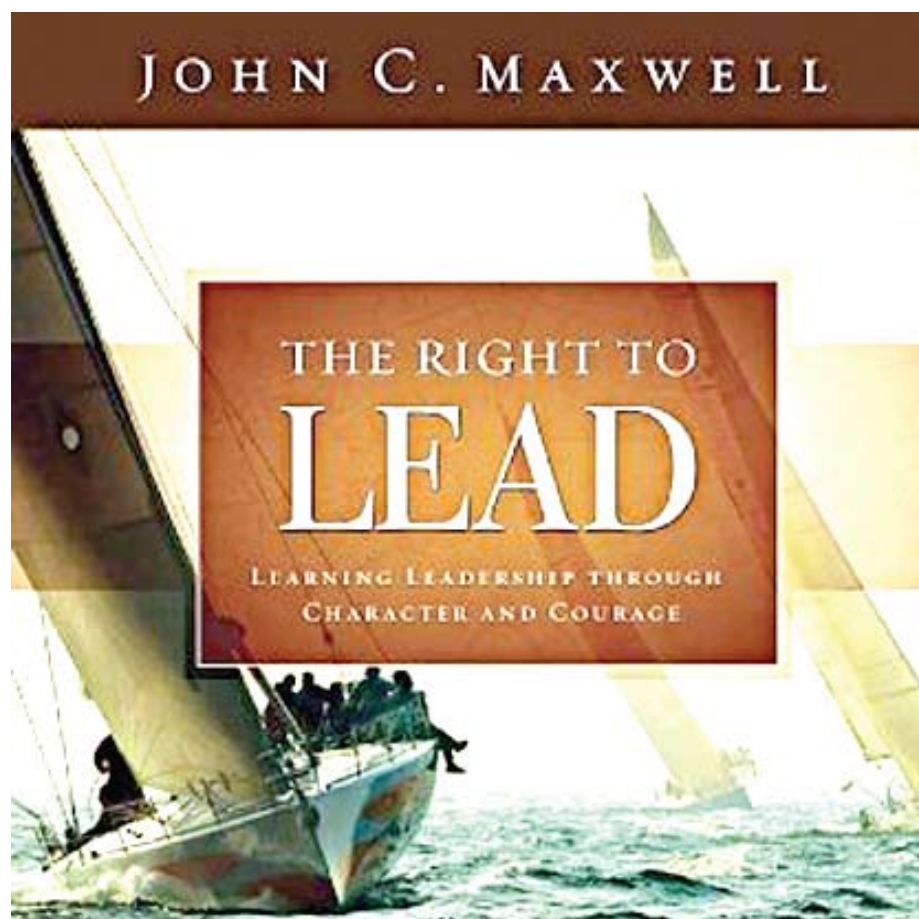
As you prepare yourself to become a better leader, use the following guidelines to help you grow:

1. Let go of your ego.

The truly great leaders are not in leadership for personal gain. They lead in order to serve other people. Perhaps that is why Lawrence D. Bell remarked, "Show me a man who cannot bother to do little things, and I'll show you a man who cannot be trusted to do big things."

2. Become a good follower first.

Rare is the effective leader who didn't learn to become a good follower first. That is why a leadership institution such as the United States Military Academy teaches its officers to become effective followers first—and why West Point has produced more leaders than the Harvard Business School.



3. Build positive relationships.

Leadership is influence, nothing more, nothing less. That means it is by nature

relational. Today's generation of leaders seem particularly aware of this because title and position mean so little to them. They know intuitively that people go

along with people they get along with.

4. Work with excellence.

No one respects and follows mediocrity. Leaders who earn the right to lead give their all to what they do. They bring into play not only their skills and talents, but also great passion and hard work. They perform on the highest level of which they are capable.

5. Rely on discipline, not emotion.

Leadership is often easy during the good times. It's when everything seems to be against you—when you're out of energy, and you don't want to lead—that you earn your place as a leader. During every season of life, leaders face crucial moments when they must choose between gearing up or giving up. To make it through those times, rely on the rock of discipline, not the shifting sand of emotion.

6. Make added value your goal.

When you look at the leaders whose names are revered long after they have finished leading, you find that they were men and women who helped people to live better lives and reach their potential. That is the highest calling of leadership—and its highest value.

7. Give your power away.

One of the ironies of leadership is that you become a better leader by sharing whatever power you have, not by saving it all for yourself. You're meant to be a river, not a reservoir. If you use your power to empower others, your leadership will extend far beyond your grasp.

—An excerpt from *The Right to Lead* by John Maxwell

Belongingness Dimensions – the inter-dynamics and implications

The last 9 articles have focused on discussing about the nine dimensions that nurture belongingness in an organizational context. They were clarity on organizational vision; professionalism; rewards; alignment of personal and organizational values; ownership; development of the potential; material comforts; emotional satisfaction and value for contribution. The relevance of each to social organization was also explored.

Most of the time organizations tend to focus on one or two dimensions and develop the same. The complete benefit is not accrued since other dimensions would anyway be pulling energy leaving behind human issues. Therefore, it is essential that the organization is well rounded and focused on enhancing these nine dimensions in order to nurture the feeling of belongingness amongst its members.

In the inter dynamics between these dimensions, there are certain implications that affect the functioning of the organization. Some of these implications are worthwhile to discuss here.

1. Clarity on organizational vision is Low

The functioning of the organization will be stuck with traditional systems rather than being focused towards goals. People would be more caught up with systems and processes since the vision will not drive them. The organization would be more people driven than processes driven. There would be more instant gratification syndrome since people in the organization would not know what they need to focus on.

When it comes to vision and value alignment, the goals would be sacrificed easily in order to stay by values. The growth of the organization would be affected leading to low morale. Multiple intentions would guide the organization. Every team activity will focus on being together rather than going ahead to achieve what they can. At times, there could be a sense of complacency than taking risk to venture into new areas of business.

Unclear ROI from learning and training can be a possibility due to unclear vision. Non-chartered movement of the organization due to non clarity of vision may lead to possible wastage of resources. The sustaining factor of motivation may not be there and therefore the motivation from infrastructure provided over a period of time diminishes. There could be confusion on what contribution is required by the organization. Originality and creativity can be valued, but not be of much use when vision is not clear. Though contributions will be made and acknowledged they may not be valued since vision is unclear and usage of the contribution cannot be determined.

2. Professionalism is Low

There could be challenge in vision formulation and the understanding will not be disseminated well into systems. The vision and people skills will not be matched. The translation of the intentions

into action will be affected. Bureaucracy may develop and values will be affected. Though sense of pride exists, it can be seen as a bias. Though people trust, they thrive on chaos leading to frustrations. Information communication may not happen smoothly due to lack of processes. Lack of prioritization could lead to difficulty in optimization of resources. Though compensation would be adequate, management of compensation would be an issue.

Bias creeps due to high level attachment. When professionalism is not there, the informality can breed grapevine, which can communicate both positive and negative information. There can be some chaos when the feelings, emotions and thoughts are not channelized in a professional manner.

3. Rewards are Low

When rewards are not flowing appropriately, there could be low morale, because efforts are taken for granted. The career path will not be linked to the vision clearly. Clear distinction in analyzing technical competence and people competence will be absent. People would function only within the system and do not stretch themselves. Intentionally people would be valued, but not seen in actions. Any extra effort would be seen as a matter of acceptance & not acknowledged. Commitment will be taken for granted. There is a possibility of looking at sense of ownership from sentimental value. There would be weak links in career growth strategies and learning initiatives. There is likely to be less motivation to integrate and convert all learning into work due to lack of rewards.

Emotions would be used to share frustrations instead of sharing positive feelings. With freedom, contributions would come into the organization, but may not be adequately rewarded. Those who expect rewards will over a period of time contribute lesser than their ability to contribute.

4. Alignment of personal and organizational values are Low

When the alignment of values is low, the rightness of the vision itself will be questionable. 'Somehow' achieve the vision will be the trend. The vision will be difficult to disseminate due to non alignment of values among people. Organization may experience value conflicts in decision making processes. Personal bias would play heavily in reward & recognition decisions. There would be lobbying and non-clarity though reward & recognitions exist in the organization. There would be fragmentation among people. Learning and training activities are not linked to organizational values due to non-clarity in the same. Usage of resources will be at question. Clique formations will be plenty more driven by the multiple value systems that may exist in the culture. Multiple elements operating in the culture may sap the energy of the organization.



5. Sense of Ownership is Low

When the sense of ownership is low, there is no clear responsibility and/or accountability for actions. Driving the organizational vision will be everybody's and nobody's responsibility. Deeper level of identification with vision will not be there. Passing the buck is a natural syndrome since accountability is not clear. There would be possibility of issues escalating to the Top. Sharing of knowledge will be difficult due to low trust. Cost cutting will be low more by a personal choice. Each group will have unique ways of satisfying themselves emotionally.

Driven by personal choices of identification with organization, Individual contributions will be more.

6. Exploration and Development of potential is Low

When the organization does not pay attention to learning and development, the speed of competence update will not match the speed in which vision should move. Learning from mistakes will be absent. Cross-functional learning will be poor. Feedbacks will be used to settle their biased opinions rather than for development. The rewards and recognition will not be aligned towards motivating them to strive themselves to go further. Change and continuous clarification will be difficult here, there would be very less extraction of learning among cliques. People contribution would be left to self and not be a systematized / channelized process.

7. Material Comforts is Low

People would work more for the vision than what they get. The purpose binds the people. Those whose personal vision is aligned to organizational vision, they will work with full dedication. Sacrifices will be high and accepted as normal expectation. But, there would be frustration to go through a number of systems and procedures.

Benefits accrued as Rewards will not be matched with material benefits. There would be over a period of time pockets of

dissatisfaction when tangible rewards are not experienced. Mobility will be high among those employees who seek material benefits. There could be a wide disparity with the market standards. The organization will find it difficult to attract good talent. Loyalty will be valued than the gains out of it. The organization will be used as training ground or stepping stone by employees. There would be high level of selfishness amongst employees to learn than think of contribution that organization desires. The organization will struggle to grow at faster pace due to mobility of employees and poor infrastructure / resources. Family atmosphere and attachment will drive the place. If one moves – teams move. It will be a risky proposition. Possibilities of constant cribbing about the facilities within cliques would be common. There would be a struggle for the individual to convert ideas into products due to poor technology and infrastructure.

8. Emotional Satisfaction is Low

When emotional connect is not a value in an organization, people will be only considered as means to achieve the vision. Organization would have a very individualistic culture. Warmth will be absent amongst employees. There are possibilities of sensitive employees feeling lonely. Employees will be individualistic and can get selfish leading to manipulative culture.

There could be purpose driven relationships. Fault finding will be high amongst those who do not share the values. More task focused than people focused culture. Each of the employees will be interested in "what's in it for me" in their actions. Learning would be more individual based than group based. People will be working for money and monotony will set in. There would be low team work due to less emotional bonding. Comradeship will be low.

9. Value for Contribution

When contributions of the people are not valued, only a set of top management or founders will have to drive the vision. Low action orientation from employees to contribute in lines of furthering the vision would be seen. The innovation and creativity that come from the employees may not be in line with the vision of the organization.

Conviction and self confidence will drive contributions. So the contributions speed, quality and quantity will be erratic. Personal ownership over the contributions can bring down innovation. The sustainability of the organization will be in question. The Collective energy of the group will not be well utilized.

Reflections:

1. What are the implications that I see present in my organization?
2. How can I identify those spaces and what remedial measures can I take to build each of the dimensions in my organization?

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath, PhD.

“I am very passionate about equality before law.”

Karuna Sagar IPS shares with **Marie Banu** his passion towards social causes.

Karuna Sagar is the Additional Commissioner of Police, Traffic, Chennai. He joined Indian Police Service in 1991 and presently heads the Traffic wing of Chennai police.

He has held several positions including that of DIG of Police, Crime Branch CID, Chennai; DIG of Police, Armed Police, Chennai; Commissioner of Police, Thirunelveli; and Commissioner of Police, Trichy.

In an exclusive interview, Shri Karuna Sagar IPS shares with Marie Banu his passion towards social causes.

What motivated you to become a police officer?

Basically, I come from Bihar. We have seen what a good law and order can do to a State and what a bad law and order can do. I was very interested since my early school days to join the Indian Police Service, since I thought that police has a big role in terms of being a social changer; creating a consumer atmosphere; and creating a society where there is equality of law.

We recently saw a discussion on whether Sanjay Dutt can be relieved from punishment. You can have sympathy for one person, but law has to be blind. If you are talking about one individual, what about the human rights of those who have been convicted earlier?

I think IPS gives you an excellent platform to transform your ideas into concrete action, and that is the reason why I wanted to join.

What did you study in College?

I did my Graduation as well as Post-graduation in History from Delhi University. History is a subject I am very passionate about. Because, it tells you everything that happens in society—all the changes, all the events, all the developments, and the progression in society is chronicled in History. I consider it as a holistic subject that gives you a perspective of many things - science, art, literature, and social developments.

Which of the social issues are you passionate about?

I am very passionate about equality before law. Wherever I



Photo: Pradeep. D

take charge, the first thing I tell my officers is that the weaker section of the society (whether they are minorities or SC or ST or women or elderly or disabled or those who are somehow disadvantaged in the social system), should be given due protection and we have to be very proactive.

I am very passionate about social issues. In fact, all my readings are books that deal with social issues. I am very alive about what is happening in the society and I closely watch.

Police and Social work – Your thoughts?

I think that policing is a tool to do something good for the society as a whole. It is a very strong mechanism where you can deliver. You can make sure that a rape victim gets quick and correct justice; and we can interfere when an old man or old woman is badly treated by his or her children. The kind of interference powers that police have is phenomenal and we can do tremendous amount of social work by being in the police.

In case of any natural or man-made disaster, it is the

policemen who are the first to engage in rescue operations. Is there any ongoing disaster preparedness programme that your department engages in?

We do coordinate disaster management programs for our department from time to time. But, the way we have been trained to work, we know how to respond to a disaster. For instance, if a flood or tsunami occurs, the policeman is the first person to respond. In case of a fire accident, even before the fire tender reaches the spot, the policeman arrives here. So, we know that we are the first responders. Being the first responders there are certain kind of actions which is expected of us, and those things we do.

There is a lot of talk about Disaster Management. The State and the Central Government have a Disaster Management committee and there is a National Disaster Management Force which is now operational all over our country. A structured force is always welcome, but to cover one lakh police force in Tamil Nadu will take some time.

The city traffic is chaos during peak hours, and more during school hours. Do you think that

like school uniform and common syllabus a compulsory school bus service could make the traffic scene better at least for the school going children?

Actually, that is a wonderful idea! The schools today are established in busy localities. They were established 20 or 30 years back. For example, Don Bosco at Egmore, there is no space for parking except on the road. So, when the parents come to drop and pick up their children there is traffic congestion.

If you take one car, you will be taking one student; whereas one bus can carry 50 to 60 students. It is to that extent we can reduce congestion, and a bus may take the space of three cars. Therefore, it is a very logical idea. It makes all the sense in an urban living today. We are talking about car pools for gentlemen who are in services. So, for children to have a mass transportation system is absolutely the best thing to happen.

Unfortunately, the Traffic Police cannot enforce this rule as I do not have the powers. The decision has to be taken by the school management and the authorities.

About the health of the policemen, especially police women who serve on bandobust duty for several hours with no proper toilets nearby. What steps have been taken by your department to address this issue?

For women, the toilet access is definitely an issue. But, they are posted only for a short time. I don't have regular women police manning the traffic. It is only during major bandobust that we assign them. At the most, they would spend two to three hours a day. We arrange to pick them up and dropped back to their place of duty.

More so, the women traffic police are aged between 21 to 25 years. They are young, smart, and physically fit. They are from the Tamil Nadu Special Police and have just joined the force.

For the other traffic police, we are providing them with buttermilk twice a day and giving them pith hats so that they do not suffer from heatstroke. I am also trying to revamp my traffic umbrellas so that they are better. The signal controls will be transferred to the umbrellas so that the policeman can sit and man the traffic.

Your advice for social workers?

One of my passions is Social Work. I think that the whole NGO system is extremely important. They should be above pettiness, above corruption, and deliver the goods. Because, they have been tasked to deliver the goods where the governments' reach does not transcend.

Right now, at my level, I do small things with the help of other NGOs. In future, I plan to involve myself in Social Work in a big way.

I wish the NGOs all the luck and hope they continue doing a good job.

Editorial

**Latha Suresh
Marie Banu**