

Conversations

A Chronicle of Social Currents

Volume 2 | Issue 12 | December 2011 | For Free Circulation Only | A CSIM Product

inside



Cover Story >> Pg 6 Long March Ahead

About the need for inclusion and mainstreaming the disabled

Photo: AK

From the Editor

Dear Friends,

It has been said that one of the most beautiful compensations in life is that no man can help another without helping himself. Anytime is a perfect time to start a ripple that can change the world. The magic formula for putting more joy into your life can be summed up in one word—'kindness'.

So friends, let us add one more item in our 'to-do list'—to perform a

random act of kindness. By doing this, you'll bring joy into your own life as well as in the lives of others.

Whether you choose to volunteer your time, pay it forward, or simply share *Conversations* with others—your random act of kindness has the potential to transform the world. This could be a life-changing read for someone! Also, don't forget to share this copy with your friends, family,

and coworkers. They'll surely thank you for doing it.

The stories featured this month are about selfless people who in spite of their imperfect conditions have been trying to create a perfect world for many. Let us all spread their joy by acknowledging their work.

Merry Christmas!

P. N. Devarajan



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**'True empowerment is
when women can ask
questions'**

An exclusive interview with
Dr. C.K. Gariyali IAS



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High Beam Hazard

Shalivahanan (M/s. Sri Meenal Agency, Karaikudi) a colleague of a fellow Rotarian had met with an accident along with his family (his wife, son, and nephew) while returning from Namakkal after celebrating his daughter's birthday.

Shali lost control of his vehicle due to the high beam distraction that came from the lorry on the opposite side, and drove out of the road hitting a tree. All of them were left helpless for nearly one hour, and were later admitted in Apollo Hospital at Karaikudi by the local people.

Shalivahanan suffered a hip bone crush and a fracture in his left leg. He underwent an operation and doctors have advised him bed rest for three months. His son had a fracture on his left hand and right leg, while his nephew fractured his back bone and his upper-neck. His wife was the one who had to suffer the maximum. She had both her legs crushed and suffered severe injury



in her head and face. She will have to undergo an operation for both her legs only when she is considered to be medically fit by the doctors.

It is unfortunate that all of them will have to bear their impairment for a life time. Several of Shali's friends are helping him to meet part of the

expenses which costs over Rs. 20 Lakhs.

Due to the high beam distraction that come from vehicles that drive in the opposite direction, these accidents are bound to happen. It is our responsibility to be cautious!

—Rtn. Narasimhan Rajagopal

**Information provided
by the Commissioner
of Police, Chennai for
the month of
November 2011**

**Number of road accidents - 641
Loss of lives due to accidents - 93**

**NUMBER OF CASES BOOKED
FOR TRAFFIC VIOLATION**

- Signal violation - 26,480
- Wrong side driving - Nil
- Over speeding - 5,140
- Violation of one way rules - 7,191
- Violation of no free left - Nil

ADD SPARKLE TO THE SEASON WITH A
TOUCH OF THE ORIENT AT **China Town**
A SIP OF SCINTILLATING SPAIN AT **Zara**
A TINGE OF EXOTIC THAILAND AT **Benjarong**
A MESMERISING SENSE OF NORTH INDIA
AT **COPPER CHIMNEY** A SPLASH OF COASTAL FRESHNESS
AT **Kokum** A MÉLANGE OF SPICES AT **ENTÉ KERALAM**
AND VEGETARIAN GOODNESS AT **Cream Centre**


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Anna Nagar 43500181 | Zara: Cathedral Road 28111462 | Anna International Airport 22560779

FOR NATURE, FOR US!

“You don’t have to do anything. Just do not disturb them! They have their own mechanisms to survive and birds are their distributors.”



Discontinuing studies after tenth standard did not affect Mahendran’s childhood dream of becoming a businessman. “It was my love for nature that brought me here,” says Mahendran, Managing Trustee of Annai Bhagyalakshmi Trust.

Nature amazed him in many ways. Observing the plants and trees grow in his home town, he realized that plants must be protected and preserved. “Whenever I saw a useful plant, I used to request my neighbours and friends to plant it on their land. I would then frequent the place to ensure that the plant is safe, and it is watered regularly,” he says. Today, Mahendran revels at their growth, appearance, and usefulness.

“Unlike humans, plants cannot deceive anybody. They gave way to our development dreams unquestioningly. The chain of usefulness multiplies in multiple ways. Helping plants is equivalent to helping thousands of people,” he states.

Owing to his interest and concern, Mahendran started reading zealously about plants and herbs, their needs, usefulness, methods of cultivation, seeds preserving techniques, and role

of earthworms.

“Every variety of plant has a unique way of keeping the earth’s temperature under control. For example, Jackfruit tree is said to have the ability to attract rain to earth, and hence has the ability to contain global warming. But people are not aware of this, and continue to live with misconceptions and stereotypes,” laments Mahendran.

Voracious reading led Mahendran to his Guru, Mr. Shanmuga Sundaram who expanded his knowledge manifold. His influence made him even more passionate about plants and its presence which is a non-negotiable for the survival of humanity. “You don’t have to do anything. Just do not disturb them! They have their own mechanisms to survive and birds are their distributors,” he states.

In this context, he expounded the disappearing trend of sparrows. “It is the warmth of the birds that is responsible for the seeds of the peepal tree to germinate. Similarly, a region with no crows has no neem trees, for crows are the carriers of the seeds and pollens. With the increasing number of mobile signal towers, nature’s mechanisms are getting disturbed,” says a worried Mahendran.

“We do not do good, nor do we let the birds and trees do their part—we are humans!” he shrugs.

After discontinuing his schooling, Mahendran had a brief stint at a gum making factory. He worked in two shifts a day—from 6:00 A.M to 2:00 P.M; and 2:00 PM to 10:00 PM—and earned a meager amount of thirty rupees a day. Later, he worked with a matchbox supplier, and then started his own small store opposite Ramachandra Medical College at Porur in Chennai.

“Do you remember the earliest model of train that we used in India?” he asks with inexplicable excitement. Pausing for a while, he says: “It also comes in the Tamil movie Indian.” Mahendran bought a railway coach from a film studio in Chennai and started a tea stall named “Indian Tea Stall”. His creativity worked with the tea stall as well. The unusual interiors gained him popularity in the region.

“One day, unexpectedly, the trees and plants on both sides of the road were cut off for the expansion of the road. I could not stand the heat and so did everybody. I went to Bangalore, bought four trees and planted them in front of my shop. When

the expansion was reworked, it was time to give up the stall,” he reminisces.

In the early 1990s, at a time when possession of a mobile phone was a rarity, Mahendran was among the very few who had a mobile phone. He knew how to operate it thoroughly, so much so that he used to guide others. He was offered a commission for every recharge card that he purchased for others. “I did not have any formal education. Only practical knowledge kept me on,” he says.

On the advice of a friend and well-wisher, Mahendran decided to open a showroom. “I wanted it to be different and inexpensive. I designed the shop using used and discarded pieces of log and wood. My love for nature and creativity worked wonders. It was the first shop in my circle,” he recounts proudly.

With the business growing successfully, his love for nature also grew. He launched the Annai Bhagyalakshmi Trust. The core activities of the trust included planting trees in public places such as temples, parks, and hospitals, and regularly inspecting their growth. The trust also provided plants to other like minded NGOs and individuals.

“It was during the formative years of the Trust that my friend referred me to CSIM. On his suggestion, I decided to do the Post Graduate Diploma in Social Initiative and Management. My communication skills have undergone a remarkable change. Besides the course content, the interaction with resource persons has made me feel more confident as a socially responsible person,” he states.

In an area of 1800 square feet, his building occupies only 450 square feet. The rest, undoubtedly, make the garden. Insulin, *tulsi*, neem, oregano (known as *karpooravalli* in Tamil), lemon grass, cloves, and around 30 varieties of plants decorate his garden. With plans only to continue his work uninterrupted, he wishes that people start realizing the importance of plants and our interdependence.

Let us support his mission by planting trees wherever we can!

—Shanmuga Priya.R



Soultalk Homes

Andrea Gutwirth radiates. She is a living embodiment of what Benjamin Zander calls 'shining eyes'—eyes that instantly convey passion and purpose.

When Andrea's world was seriously rocked in 1992 by her two children being taken from her by her ex-husband diplomat, it really unlocked her passion and gave her a brand new purpose—a purpose that shows itself these days in Soul Talk—loving homes for women in crisis.

"I realized then that if I was going through this, there must be plenty of other women in similar situations," Andrea says. "I wanted to do whatever I could to make sure that other women could avoid making the mistakes that I had, or if they did, there would at least be a safety net and resources to help them," she adds.

Soul Talk is a B1G1 Worthy Cause and

has been since the beginning of B1G1. And so many women continue to be helped by Andrea and her team at a time they need it most.

Yet what's especially great about Andrea is that she doesn't rest on her laurels. More Soul Talk Loving Homes are being created, and most importantly, Andrea is able to put her fantastic entrepreneurial skills to the task.

She does that so well that the prestigious American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong just voted her 'Entrepreneur of the Year'. The Judges comments say it well: "Andrea Gutwirth is not dedicating her entrepreneurial capabilities, her time, her energy and her managerial skills to make lots of money, but is focusing on making the biggest possible personal impact instead. Her charity SoulTalk does nothing less than to improve the lives of hundreds of women in Hong Kong. It does certainly need an excellent entrepreneur and manager to establish, to grow, and to run a charity of this size, so we found her to be an unusual but very well-deserving winner of the Entrepreneur of the Year Award."

Well done, Andrea! Such a wonderful example of 'shining eyes' in action.

"Eighty-five per cent or more of the women who come to us do so because of a relationship problem. And for all of them,

the very first thing we do is to listen. Soul Talk is not an advisory body. All of our counselors are professionally trained, and their first objective with any woman calling in is to understand the nature of the problem and then to explain what the available choices for her are. In fact, one of the most important steps to take is to help the woman move towards an understanding that, however bad the behaviour of her husband, boyfriend, or partner has been in leading her to this point, it always takes two to cause a relationship problem. It is only by owning up to her own role in bringing about a situation that may have taken years to evolve, that she can take possession of her problems and begin to resolve them," Says Andrea.

The shy, retiring English-born Andrea Gutwirth, now a divorced mother of four grown-up children who live in Australia talks with a precision and clarity of purpose, that very gently forbid your attention to wander and hint at the power of the personality within.

The name Soul Talk, which in Chinese translates as 'Heart talk', is the key to understanding Andrea Gutwirth's motivations and mission. She says that there have been many developments globally that have served to further the

cause of women in relationships overall. These include the growing number of professionally qualified women in good jobs, the impact of the internet in 'liberating' new generations to communicate more openly, the gradual introduction of laws to protect women in difficult relationships, and an increasing readiness to implement them.

Nonetheless, there remain alarmingly large numbers of women who find themselves living unhappily, in damaging relationships, isolated, often fearful of retribution if they seek help, and without any knowledge of what to do, or any resources to do something if they did know.

"There is a need for a much bigger Soul Talk. People call us after hearing about us from lawyers, doctors—maybe a flier on their estate notice board, and by word of mouth. And there's no doubt there are many more who don't get to hear of us," says Andrea.

"Charitable people's first instinct is to give to children's charities. But who has to look after the children?" she says. "What we aim to do at all times is to help a woman get back her self-esteem, her confidence, and above all her sense of happiness. That's what the problem always comes!

—Source: b1g1.com

Social Entrepreneurship Outlook program E-learning module (eSEOP)

Duration : Four months

Eligibility: Knowledge of English and computer skills essential

To promote the concept of social entrepreneurship amongst individuals who have an inclination towards social work

Participants gain a clear understanding of Social Entrepreneurship. The course helps in understanding the development sector and practical knowledge on NGO Management and legal requirements.

For details contact



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Tenth Annual Convocation

CSIM's 10th Annual Convocation was organized on 12th November, 2011 at MOP Vaishnav College Auditorium, Chennai.

Tmt. Kannegi Packianathan IAS, Secretary, Department for the Welfare of the Differently abled Persons, Government of Tamil Nadu delivered the Convocation address and conferred the Post Graduate Diploma in Social Initiative and Management (PGDSIM) upon our eight Social Entrepreneurs and awarded Certificates to 28 participants of the Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Programme (SEOP).

Mr. Srinivasan K Swamy, Chairman & Managing Director, R K SWAMY BBDO Pvt.

Ltd release the CSIM Annual newsletter.

Dr. Nirmala Prasad, Principal, MOP Vaishnav College for Women presented the best Outgoing Student Award to Ms. S. Bhakiarani, and the 'Best Field Work' practice award to Mr. T. Vidyapathi.

Speaking on the occasion, Tmt. Kannegi Packianathan said that she was happy to learn about CSIM's effort in promoting social entrepreneurship. "Our Government surely needs the support of NGOs to implement their programmes and most importantly to identify the gaps. I am happy that CSIM is training NGOs to deliver their programmes effectively," she said.

—Marie Banu



LONG MARCH AHEAD

From the ages of getting rid of the disabled through practices like throwing them into the river, our civilization has traveled a long way. Today, we hear of policies and legislations ensuring their rights. Reliable data on the number and prevalence of different kinds of disability is only the first positive step. With efforts from different quarters, the journey finally began.

What next? Theories propose medical, social, bio-psycho-social models, and others to understand disability. Fortunately, our comprehension has evolved over the years leading us to accept the disabled as differently-abled, giving rise to a holistic approach in addressing their needs, facilitating the movement from welfare to rights based approach.

Different acquaintances expound different realities. While in college, I had a friend who was visually challenged. While dropping her at the railway station, I forgot to warn her of a large boulder on the way. When I apologized, she smiled and said, "Don't be so. Bumping into things is as normal and usual as breathing for people like us." That was an educated girl, who lived independently in the country's financial capital. But, in the train, we can see many disable persons selling stuff or seeking alms—all of them trying to live their lives in their own ways.

On one hand we have the achievers who have braved all odds to succeed, while on the other we have those who struggle to access basic amenities and facilities. Certainly, not all places are disabled friendly. Are they? This insensitivity is best handled only by them, it seems.

In this context, Ms Bertha Gyndykes Dkhar of Meghalaya definitely needs a mention. Affected by Retinitis Pigmentosa, she lost her vision while during her graduation. She invented the Braille code in Khasi, a popular tribal language in the state, and devoted herself to establish a model of schooling for the visually challenged along with other students. Efforts in this direction won her the Padmashri Award in 2010.

If inclusion and mainstreaming is the best way forward, how articulate are our policies in addressing the needs of the disabled from this perspective? Let's consider education! The provisions of Persons with Disability Act and the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education are questioned by many activists and civil society groups. According to the latter, education of the disabled will be implemented

in the lines of the former Act. However, the question remains—how inclusive is this? Assistant Coordinator of the District Legislative Unit, Vidyasagar School enunciated the difficulties in enrolling the disabled children in the neighborhood schools. "Why should our education be administered by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, unlike the other children who come under the purview of Ministry of Human Resource Development?"

Intriguingly, the Indian Association of Pediatricians (IAP) called for the inclusion of children with learning disabilities in the Persons with Disabilities Act, (1995) at a workshop that was held recently.

The availability, quality, and utility of

untuned. They are all dreamers, dreaming for a better deal in the cycle of development. For these dreamers empowerment is synonymous with economic independence.

"Am a graduate in music now. I would like to do programmes and earn my living. All I dream of is to be by myself," said Geetha Mohankutty Rao, whose vision was impaired due to congenital diabetes. Her hobby is listening to radio programmes. "Quiz shows are my favourite. Knowing that I cannot read, these programmes were an easily accessible source of knowledge for me," she added.

Many organizations in the country are now working to facilitate the realization of these dreams. To mention one of them, "TeamLease,

"If inclusion and mainstreaming is the best way forward, how articulate are our policies in addressing the needs of the disabled from this perspective?"

physical adaptations in public places is another concern that has remained for decades.

Construction of ramps at the District Disability Rehabilitation Offices (DDROs) has taken not less than nine years of petitioning. Every step calls for patience, struggle, and perseverance. They have learnt their ropes well!

Access to health care facilities is another crucial factor in the welfare of the differently abled. "Research in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu found that cost (70.5%), lack of services in the area (52.3%), and transportation (20.5%) were the top three barriers for disabled persons to avail health facilities." (Source – World Report on Disability 2011).

With World Disability Day being celebrated this month, it might be perceptive for us to look around and observe our family, friends and neighbors, amongst whom we can find different shades of opinions, biases, and misconceptions about the various types of disability. Worse is the case of mentally challenged, who have to depend upon care takers for every single need, and face the music of 'stigma' throughout their lives.

Inspiringly, the journey continues to move on. Individuals and organizations alike have consistently voiced their concerns in every platform that gave way. No stone was left

a Bangalore-based staffing solutions company through its subsidiary Indian Institute of Job Training (IIJT) and Wadhvani Foundation partnered to train and recruit about 2,000 people with disabilities (PwDs) across the country. The initiative is with the support of the Wadhvani Foundation through its key programme 'Opportunity Network for the Disabled.' Through this, Wadhvani Foundation funds part of the candidate's fee to undertake skill development training and courses across 120 IIJT centres across the country. IIJT will impart training to PwDs on a specially designed curriculum that will help candidates to find jobs in the areas of customer relations." (Source – The Business Line, November 23, 2011). This project is all set to kick start on 3rd December 2011, which marks the 20th World Disability Day.

Yet another dream that often goes unnoticed is that of a 'collective consciousness'—that there will come a day when all of us, irrespective of our differences, will raise a unanimous voice against the injustice done to the differently abled and demand their right to development. If any, it is this spirit that needs to be celebrated on the 3rd of December!

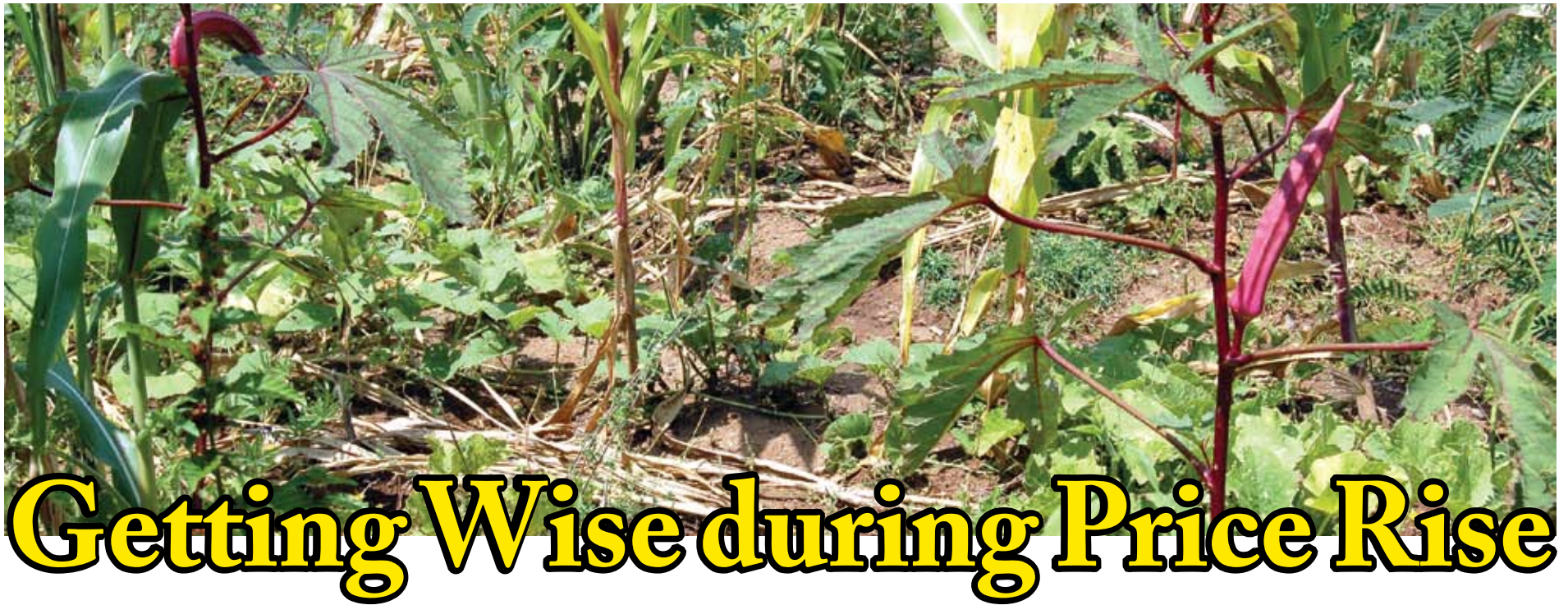
—Shanmuga Priya.R



Photos: AK



"With World Disability Day being celebrated this month, it might be perceptive for us to look around and observe our family, friends and neighbours, amongst whom we can find different shades of opinions, biases, and misconceptions about the various types of disability."



Ever been to a vegetable market lately and decided to quit being a vegetarian? Well, as the prices of vegetables continue to rise, the farmers of Chimlapur at Raichur district in Karnataka have adopted a simple technique to counter it.

Paddy, cotton, pulses and groundnut are the major crops grown in Chimlapur village. Many farmers here have tried their hand at growing vegetables and given up. The major hurdle in growing vegetables for these farmers is that they are perishable. The fear of low prices, since the maximum shelf life of vegetables is around two days when compared to grains that can be stored for around two years, stops them from growing vegetables. Another concern preventing them is the theft of these vegetables by local villagers and people from adjoining villages.

But farmers like Amrappa continue doing so in a smarter way. Amrappa, a lean, sturdy man in his mid-fifties takes his cow for grazing in his fields twice

every day. He owns two acres of land adjacent to the village. On one acre he cultivates cotton and on the remaining area he cultivates pulses (dal). While walking through the cotton lanes in the fields, at the far end are a few plants other than cotton. In between the cotton plantations Amrappa grows vegetables like onions, brinjals, chillies, mustard, coriander, radish and tomatoes.

"Vegetables have become so expensive now that it is impossible for a poor household to buy them. Growing these vegetables in the field, works out much cheaper for us, since we are only three members in the family," said Amrappa. He grows just enough for his family's consumption. Amrappa has a wife, two sons and a daughter. His sons have migrated to Dharwad and Bengaluru city in search of better employment opportunities. To buy vegetables or any other requirements one has to go the nearest town, Manavi, which is about twenty to twenty five minutes away from Chimlapur. Also, since the

condition of roads is pitiable, it becomes difficult for a man of his age to travel to Manavi regularly.

It is therefore easier for Amrappa to grow these vegetables in his backyard, but in order to safeguard it from the other villagers he chooses to grow it in his fields.

"I did try growing it in my backyard once, but someone would always steal the vegetables. Now, no one knows that I grow vegetables in my fields. Though there are some pest issues, it is much safer to grow them in the fields," he says. Like Amrappa, quite a few farmers in this village have now adopted this method to meet their vegetable needs.

Even the farmers have not been able to escape the effects of the upsurge in the vegetable rates. Yet, while the government continues to struggle with the inflation issue, people in small villages have found a solution for themselves, a way to survive.

—Pooja Naik
Asian College of Journalism

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

The November issue of *Conversations* was very informative. Aid India's effort to promote education amongst rural children is commendable and Dr. Kamala Selvaraj's interview is inspiring.

My sincere appreciation to the *Conversations* team for your good work!

Regards,
A. Viswanathan

Dear Editor,

I thoroughly read the articles published in *Conversations* every month. Each of them is in its own way an inspiration.

My best wishes to you and your team!

Regards,
Prof. Arul Sreedhar
New College, Chennai

Dear Editor,

Greetings!

Congratulations for your efforts to sensitise people on social causes! This newsletter is indeed unique and I am happy to be in your mailing list.

Best regards,
Pradeep Kumar

Dear Editor,

Thank you for mailing me *Conversations* regularly. I enjoy reading your publication every month.

Regards,
Kalpana R.

Editorial

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu



In Life, As After

“It is a universal fact that most people do not want to die alone in sterile, impersonal surroundings, hooked up to tubes and machines, and cut off from their family and friends, and everything that’s familiar, nor do they want to die in pain.”

Deepa Muthiaya, Founder and Managing Trustee, DEAN Foundation talks about quality of life, preparedness for ‘the final separation’, and careers in palliative care. Archanaa R. listens in.

It is a universal fact that most people do not want to die alone in sterile, impersonal surroundings, hooked up to tubes and machines, and cut off from their family and friends, and everything that’s familiar, nor do they want to die in pain. They would prefer, if possible, to spend their last days at home, alert, and free of pain, among the people and things they love. Dean Foundation is dedicated to making this possible.

The Dean Foundation (Dignify and Empower the Ailing and the Needy) began in 1998 with the following objectives:

- To offer free Palliative Care on an out-patient and home care basis to the poor and homeless
- To provide care to the children and the elderly keeping in mind their special needs
- To create an environment of caring, acceptance, peace, and unconditional love
- To extend information to those suffering from life threatening diseases about choices between or combining western, eastern, and alternative therapies; and thereby achieving the best end-of-life quality
- To support and comfort those experiencing grief, bereavement, loss, and those who require counseling or befriending thereby helping them to heal and grow
- To provide a database on allied health services in the city through networking and referrals

The service is provided on an out-patient basis and a Home based programme is run purely on donations. In April 2000, Dean Foundation along with the State Government, under the IAPC, amended the Narcotic Rules of Tamil Nadu in a record time of six months, with Tamil Nadu being the seventh State to carry out this amendment in India.

On 4th March 2010, under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), the first pilot project in Palliative Care was carried out for the State in a Government Primary Health Centre at Tiruppukuzhi, Kancheepuram District, Tamil Nadu.

As part of the service, the care for terminally ill children resulted in Dean Foundation being conferred the Elizabeth Kubler Ross award in 2003, by the Children’s Hospice International, USA. In continuation with this effort evolved the idea of a Pediatric Hospice. On the 15th of July 2010, the first Pediatric Palliative Care Ward in the Tamil Nadu Government Health Care System saw the light of day, in the Institute of Child Health and Hospital for Children in Egmore, Chennai. This valuable space in one of Asia’s premier Institutes, run by Dean Foundation, enables easy access and consultation of specialists from other disciplines. Seamless care is facilitated with a multidisciplinary approach.

Advocacy being one of the core aims, efforts are also directed to promote and increase access to hospice and palliative care throughout the State. Dean Foundation is currently working with the State Government’s Department of Health and Family Welfare and the NRHM, in developing a Policy and mobilizing support. On the State Government’s directive, Dean Foundation’s medical team has traveled to each government medical college hospital

throughout the State, setting up a team and sensitizing them, as the first step in beginning Palliative care services.

Thus over the last 13 and a half years, the foundation has cared for 3,233 patients of whom 2,748 were suffering from cancer, and the rest from other terminally ill diseases like neurological disorders, geriatric related illness, AIDS, etc.

“Instead of seeing the rug being pulled from under us, we can learn to dance on the shifting carpet” - Thomas Crum

“We all die, but will I die soon of this disease?” is the question. Some do not want to voice their fears and do not want to hear that there is no hope. They simply are not ready to face the answer and do not want to know. Others know, but do not speak of it. Preparations can never be enough, complete, or finished in time.

The main inspiration behind beginning Dean Foundation was the Book titled ‘Tibetan Book of Living and Dying’ by Sogyal Rinpoche. I wondered how a good death could be brought into the lives of those who were dying of life threatening illnesses. I was led to the answer! ‘Hospice and Palliative Care’ is aimed at relief of suffering and improving the quality of life for persons who are living with, or dying from advanced illness, or are bereaved.

Often, patients and families feel shunned, or are reluctant to ask for support because of fear of being treated like lepers. Most people stay away because they find it awkward to face them or make a polite conversation. There is a great need to provide an environment of caring and celebration; not distance and depression. All one needs to do is to be normal and talk about normal things that happen in our day to day lives. If the individual wishes to talk, then quietly listen. If he is silent, you can hold his hand and wait with

him. Being there is what matters!

A career in Hospice and Palliative Care

Careers in Palliative Care are very similar to the usual ones, but with Palliative intent or pathway. For example: Palliative Care Doctor, Palliative Care Nurse and Nurse Managers, Social Worker, Psychologist, Dietician, Spiritual Counselors, Palliative specialists in Rehabilitation Medicine, Hospice Manager, Hospice, Fund Raiser/Media Consultant/Brand Manager, Hospice Volunteer Co-Ordinators, Bereavement Befriender, Specialists Pediatric Palliative Care, Psycho-Oncologists and Clinical Psychologists. Careers in Complementary and Alternative Therapies include Aroma Therapist, Music Therapist and Art Therapist. In Palliative Care we also need Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists and Speech Therapists. There is ample scope for research in Psychiatry, Sociology, Spiritualism, etc.

When life begins with an act of love, shouldn’t it end that way also?

This is the premise on which Dean Foundation was set up. The palliative care movement is not about joining a new ‘cause’, but becoming part of a philosophy of living that reflects and role models our commitment to other human beings through the palliative care philosophy of physical, emotional, spiritual, and information supports for people who are dying.

Our vision is to end all unnecessary suffering, improve end-of-life quality, and support the bereaved throughout Tamil Nadu, even to the most rural parts of this State. We are willing to achieve this in partnership with others, or in collaboration with any organization which has similar goals.

For more information please visit deanfoundation.org



Diet Regulation

An inspiring conversation with Ramana Maharishi and his disciple on diet regulation.

Mrs. Piggott returned from Madras for a further visit. She asked questions relating to diet regulation.

D.: What diet is prescribed for a *sadhak* (one who is engaged in spiritual practices)?
M.: *Satvic* food in limited quantities.

D.: What is *satvic* food?
M.: Bread, fruits, vegetables, milk, etc.

D.: Some people take fish in North India. May it be done?
No answer was made by the Maharishi.

D.: We Europeans are accustomed to a particular diet; change of diet affects health and weakens the mind. Is it not necessary to keep up physical health?
M.: Quite necessary. The weaker the body the

stronger the mind grows.

D.: In the absence of our usual diet our health suffers and the mind loses strength.

M.: What do you mean by strength of mind?

D.: The power to eliminate worldly attachment.
M.: The quality of food influences the mind. The mind feeds on the food consumed.

D.: Really! How can the Europeans adjust themselves to *satvic* food only?

M.: (Pointing to Mr. Evans-Wentz) You have been taking our food. Do you feel uncomfortable on that account?
Mr. Evans-Wentz: No. Because I am accustomed to it.

D.: What about those not so accustomed?

M.: Habit is only adjustment to the environment. It is the mind that matters. The fact is that the mind has been trained to think certain foods tasty and good. The food material is to be had both in vegetarian and non-

vegetarian diet equally well. But the mind desires such food as it is accustomed to and considers tasty.

D.: Are there restrictions for the realized man in a similar manner?

M.: No. He is steady and not influenced by the food he takes.

D.: Is it not killing life to prepare meat diet?

M.: Ahimsa stands foremost in the code of discipline for the yogis.

D.: Even plants have life.

M.: So too the slabs you sit on!

D.: May we gradually get ourselves accustomed to vegetarian food?

M.: Yes. That is the way.

—Excerpted from Sri Ramana Maharishi teachings

Sustainable growing—true spirit of social entrepreneurs

What is the power that social entrepreneurs have that will sustain them and their efforts through the years? Its funny how sometimes people ask us, “So, what are you doing these days? Same thing? Values? Still going so strong? Two decades and more?” But, we wonder, “Is it so long? Should we be doing something else in life? But why? I am enjoying what I am doing so much.”

Last two weeks we went on a pilgrimage tour visiting the houses and places of great masters who have been on the path of self-realization in the last 200 years and have dedicated their life to a purpose. Mother Teresa’s ashram was one of them. Looking at the beautifully laid out story of her life mission, it brought the realization yet again that when life’s true purpose and vision is realized, it becomes truly a life worth living. Added to that, the realization that anything one does is drudgery where there is only work and no soul in it. What does it mean to be connected to one’s own soul? The parable below makes so much sense in this context.

A woodcarver called Ching had just finished work on a bell-frame. Everyone who saw it marveled at it, for it seemed to be the work of spirits. When the Duke of Lu saw it, he asked, “What sort of a genius is yours that you could make such a thing?”

The woodcarver replied, “Sir, I am only a simple workman. I am no genius. But, there is one thing. When I am going to make a bell-frame, I meditate to calm my mind. When I have meditated for three days, I think no more about rewards or emoluments. When I have meditated for five days, I no longer think of praise or blame, skillfulness or awkwardness. When I have meditated for seven days, I suddenly forget my limbs, my body; and I forget my very self. I lose consciousness of the court and my surroundings. Only my skill remains. In that state, I walk into the



forest; stop at the tree which will give me the bell-frame. I see the bell-frame in all its perfection. Then my hands go to the task. Having set myself aside, nature meets nature in the work that is performed through me. This no doubt, is the reason why everyone sees that the finished product is the work of spirits. (Sampath. J.M. story 76 *Discovery—3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998*)

One of striking realizations is that the extent of involvement brings the extent of passion, and that in turn results in sustainability. For most of the great social entrepreneurs, the number of years they toil journeying on the path of their vision does not seem to count. There is a time that one can see their life; their vision and their work are all an ensemble. Then, they are no longer talking in terms of their ‘personal life’ and ‘work life’ as though they are two different parts of existence. There is just one to life and in that one there are several spaces and that’s all. The identity of the individual is totally submerged and the vision becomes larger

than self. They allow the consciousness then to work through them being in the flow than getting caught with structure. Time disappears and only the path remains until reached. This is true of any task, profession, relationship, and so in Social Entrepreneurship. To create the best and give the best it calls for 100 percent involvement. The quality of work is directly proportional to the extent of involvement that one has in what one does. Quality directly contributes to sustainability.

Involvement brings in:

- A high level of focus
- Great extent of context sensitivity and appropriateness
- Ability to connect deeply to all dimensions of the space at a given point of time
- A high level of commitment
- Consistent quality and responsiveness
- Ability to sustain for a long time and giving meaning to one’s existence.

A Series on Growing -Reflections for Deep Change

Yet another realization is that the ability to involve is innate and we are more afraid of it rather than incapacitated to live it. Life of passion and involvement is not easy until that becomes a way of life. It calls for whole lot of sacrifices and constant awareness of the choices we need to make to get the best. It calls for deeper level of alignment to one’s vision. It calls for total submission. When it is done and it becomes a way of life, it augments living to a degree that dissolves time and space. More than saying sustainability is difficult, one has to truly introspect and agree if giving oneself to a cause is difficult. Then for a social entrepreneur sustainability goes beyond self and things move and grow even after their mortal existence has gone.

“Perfection is nothing less than 100 percent of me being in what I am trying to perfect”. (Sampath. J.M. *Inner realities, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 200. p 60*)

Points for Reflection:

- What are the activities that I do in a day in which I get bored after a while?
- What are the activities that I do in a day in which I feel I forget myself?
- What wakes me up every morning?
- What makes me turn out my best?
- What actions do I consciously take to enhance my level of involvement in anything I do?
- What efforts do I put to align my life vision, work, everyday living tasks, relationships, thoughts, feelings, and choices—all that is ME?

—J.M.Sampath & Kalpana Sampath

On A Soulful Trip

“In the midst of all the pressure to work and earn success amongst other things, there comes a time when one must take the plunge for what one wants to do more than anything else.”



For those wanting to experience their holiday, and not just have a holiday experience, there is Travel Another India. Simple and clear! No extravagant adjectives, yet pregnant with meaning, the name of this community based tourism organization says it all. “The India that most tourists see is the one with ancient architecture, busy bazaars and the picturesque beaches. But, there is another India—simpler, but more beautiful; where the traveller actually meets and sometimes lives with the real charm of India—its people!” says Gouthami, founder and CEO of Travel Another India and 2010 Asia Laureate of the Cartier Women’s Initiative Awards.

Listening to Gouthami it is evident that the enterprise was born out of a passion to make a difference, combined with a relentless love for travel.

“I graduated from the Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA) in 1991 and worked for fifteen years in with organizations that fund NGOs. I travelled across India as part of the job and enjoyed the hospitality of different people in different parts of the country. In 2005, I joined Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan. One of the projects we worked on was a rural tourism project supported by the Ministry of Tourism and UNDP in Hodka village. The idea of using tourism as a means of bringing about development perhaps came from my own travel experience mixed with the Hodka experience. Thus, I co-founded Travel Another India 2009,” says Gouthami.

‘A nation’s culture resides in the hearts and souls of its people’—a popular saying. Travel Another India’s travel packages allow the traveler to step into the shoes of the local people, experience their traditions and learn the local crafts. Furthermore,

the traveler gets to witness first hand, the day to day lives of the locals as they stay in a guest house in the village itself.

“All our destinations are owned and managed by local communities,” says Gouthami. Guest houses are built at each destination and the local community is responsible to manage them. Travel Another India provides management support for the first three years after which it becomes completely self-reliant. At present, Travel Another India offers action-packed tourist packages at eight destinations: Ladakh and Spiti in the Himalayas; Hodka in Gujarat; Pranpur in Madhya Pradesh; Curtorim in Goa; Khanapur, Kundapura; and Mysore in Karnataka.

“Our work is guided by the triple bottom line of People, Profit, and Planet. We do make a profit in our business. However we ensure community involvement in which there are direct and indirect positive consequences. First, jobs are created in these places, traditional local arts and crafts are given a face lift, and decision making is largely held by the community. By creating or increasing an external interface for the villages, we are subtly bringing about different perspectives to the villages themselves. The interaction of the

tourists with the locals has led to many an interesting turnabout in these communities,” says Gouthami, going on to relate the story of how a single question raised by several tourists prodded the community to think differently.

“There is this particular community which refrained from sending their girls to school because they did not want their girls to leave the house. When one tourist after another inquired about the obvious lack of opportunity for the girls, the community decided to take a strong stand on this issue and hired a teacher to exclusively to teach the girls in the school. When a community hits a eureka moment and say ‘Let’s find a way!’—that is the milestone that validates our cause” says Gouthami passionately.

Travel Another India propagates responsible tourism through its simple and appealing guidelines for travelers. Another interesting aspect is that of accessible travel. “We have made a start with Ladakh where we have ensured that the package is designed for guests using wheelchairs, although we are happy to host non-disabled people also to these places.

Accessibility is a natural corollary to our plea for responsible tourism.

After all a place is only as beautiful as it is accessible,” adds Gouthami.

With increasing numbers of government Tourism Boards in different states engaging in some very trendy publicity for both well-known and little known destinations, not to forget the slow but steady improvement in the public

transport system, the tourism industry is on a boom. Tourism being one of the free sectors, there is ample scope for improvisation and customization of travel. “I derive a lot of pleasure in showing off the place and in enabling people to enjoy it in all its glory,” says Gouthami, adding that “my team shares my enthusiasm for hosting guests. They are all well-traveled people themselves, therefore their inputs come with keen research and prior experience. We have no office anywhere and our team is based in Delhi, Bangalore, and in Chennai as there is a lot of travel involved.” says a cheerful Gouthami.

For all the aspiring and budding entrepreneurs out there, Gouthami says, “In the midst of all the pressure to work and earn success amongst other things, there comes a time when one must take the plunge for what one wants to do more than anything else. Stop thinking about all the constraints! Just go for it!”

In saying so, she recollects about her own beginnings as an entrepreneur, “In these three years I have had to change so many business partners and face other dynamic shifts. What keeps me going is my passion to be a host. I started Travel Another India because I thought it was fun to start a travel based firm. That’s about it! In three years from now if we expanded to 35 destinations, with each destination directly supporting at least 20 families, then I will have lived up to my goals,” signs off Gouthami with a smile.

Did we just hear a couple of bags getting zipped up already?

—Archanaa R



“The India that most tourists see is the one with ancient architecture, busy bazaars and the picturesque beaches. But, there is another India—simpler, but more beautiful; where the traveller actually meets and sometimes lives with the real charm of India—its people!”

‘True empowerment is when women can ask questions’

Dr. C K Gariyali IAS shares with **Marie Banu** her views on women empowerment.

Dr. C.K Gariyali, a post graduate from the Delhi School of Social Work and a doctorate in women’s studies from the Mother Teresa University is a senior IAS officer. She has studied poverty alleviation at the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex University and Women’s empowerment at the Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford University. She has served as Principal Secretary to the Governor of Tamil Nadu and as Secretary Social Welfare Department. She also held the position of Collector of Chennai and South Arcot districts, and was the Secretary to the Hon’ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu.

In an exclusive interview Dr. C K Gariyali shares with Marie Banu her views on women empowerment.

You have held several portfolios in the government. Which of them did you cherish most and why?

Indian Administrative Service is a great opportunity to serve the nation. I have cherished each and every portfolio and I don’t rate them high or low. I think each of them opened up new opportunities for me to help somebody in different segments of the society.

However I cherished most my work in the Correctional Administration Department. During the year 1979, I worked with children who were involved in petty crimes; kids who had failed an exam or got beaten at home and just hopped on to a train and landed at Madras Central; girls who had lost their parents and were wandering the streets; orphans; and women who were apprehended and remanded under immoral traffic act. While there, I was terribly moved to see these unfortunate human beings, who were young and vulnerable and mostly victim of circumstances. Every morning I had to think of devising new ways to help them—to get them out of correctional institutions, to find their parents, to get them back to their homes and families, or alternatively, to place them in foster care or adoption. There were many issues that we were struggling with, but we eventually made a lot of improvement to the system and the prevailing laws. When I was transferred, I cried for days. I still keep in touch and send occasional gifts for girls in the Kellys home.

While serving as Senior Secretary, Government of Tamil Nadu, you were also on special duty as the Relief Commissioner for Cuddalore district. Can you share your experience working for the tsunami victims?

It was a very sad experience! I have never seen such a devastation in my life. The morning of the tsunami, the Chief Secretary asked me to immediately head to Cuddalore as I was at that time overseeing the administration of Cuddalore District.

I drove directly to the hospital as the dead



bodies were brought there and all the survivors were gathered outside. I had never before seen people who have lost everything—their children; their family members; their homes, their belongings, and even their livelihood. Before I could get down from the car, a woman came rushing towards me, held me by my neck, started shaking me, and asked me screamingly to go to the sea and bring back her three children. She did not need any other type of assistance from the government. All that she wanted was to get back her kids. In her mind a person of authority could simply miraculously bring back her children.

I could see that the survivors of tsunami were in a terrible state of depression and I was worried if they would kill themselves. Therefore, the first thing I did was to call Dr. Thara of SCARF and ask her to rush a team of psychiatrists, psychologists, and mental health personnel to Cuddalore. Then, I made other calls to the Institute of Mental health in Chennai, National Institute in Hyderabad, NIMHANS in Bangalore, NGOs in Madurai, and requested them to send as many therapists and counselors as possible along with anti-depressant drugs to treat the survivors.

People had lost the will to live. Our government did not spare any expense and the NGOs also chipped in. The first thing I did was to re-open the schools because

unless children settled into a routine, parents could not be able to put their lives together. Another important thing was that we involved survivors in their rehabilitation and used a participatory approach where political leaders, local leaders, and survivors jointly worked together.

Cuddalore became the laboratory to generate the customized and personalized rehabilitation strategies and ideas for all tsunami affected districts. The work in Cuddalore was highly commended by Medha Patkarji as well as Bill Clinton and our work received international acclaim.

Known as the ‘Mother of SHGs’, can you tell us about the SHG Movement in Tamil Nadu?

Deep inside me I am a feminist and I passionately care for women. I am happy that they are getting stronger and more empowered. The SHG Movement started in Tamil Nadu in late eighties, when Dr. M.G.Ramachandran was the Chief Minister. Since then, Tamil Nadu Government including our present Chief Minister Dr. Miss. J. Jayalalitha has been very much pro-SHG and pro-poor. In the last three decades, poverty reduction has always been the main agenda for our Government.

As a result, Tamil Nadu has achieved maximum poverty reduction in our country. The credit for this would go to women’s

self-help groups as they organized and empowered themselves economically, socially, and politically. Today, almost every SHG woman is contributing in some way to her family’s income.

In the early years, it was challenging to bring women into the SHG fold. Women going out of their homes to attend meetings and training were jeered at by the local people. However, once families realized that woman could bring in extra money into the household, the attitude changed.

Do you think that the women of today are empowered enough? What according to you is woman’s empowerment?

I have written four books on this subject. The first one is titled ‘Inching Forward’ which talks about the empowerment being a slow by sure process. The second one is titled ‘Woman’s Own’ which is about the SHG Movement itself. It shows that SHG woman had to first empower themselves within the household and then only they could empower themselves economically, socially and politically.

True empowerment is when women can ask questions, take decisions, and bring transparency in local governance. Today, we have over 10,000 SHG women elected as representatives in local governance. Tamil Nadu should be really proud of achieving this.

In economic empowerment of SHG women, what is the role that the government, banks, and different financial institutions play?

We have a lot of money allocated by the State Government as well as the Central Government to provide seed money and revolving fund for the Self-help groups. Once SHGs are credit rated and graded, they also become eligible for availing bank finance. Majority of banks lend funds to the self-help groups at an interest rate of 12 to 13 percent. However, the banks are not able to meet the entire requirement of SHG women. They are particularly unable to lend to the urban poor as they fear that they would migrate. In reality, the urban poor actually live for decades in the same place and they are also in need of financial assistance. In cities like Chennai, banks do not even have adequate staff to open bank accounts for hundreds of SHG women. Hence, there is a big gap in credit access to the poor.

This credit gap is being filled by micro-finance institutions. However, few MFIs have been lending at a very high rate which had led the RBI to set up Malegaon Committee to address the issue. Now the RBI has issued rules based on the recommendations of Malegaon Committee to regulate the MFI sector. With this kind of regulations in place, the MFI sector can play an important role along with the Government and banks in providing credit to the poor.