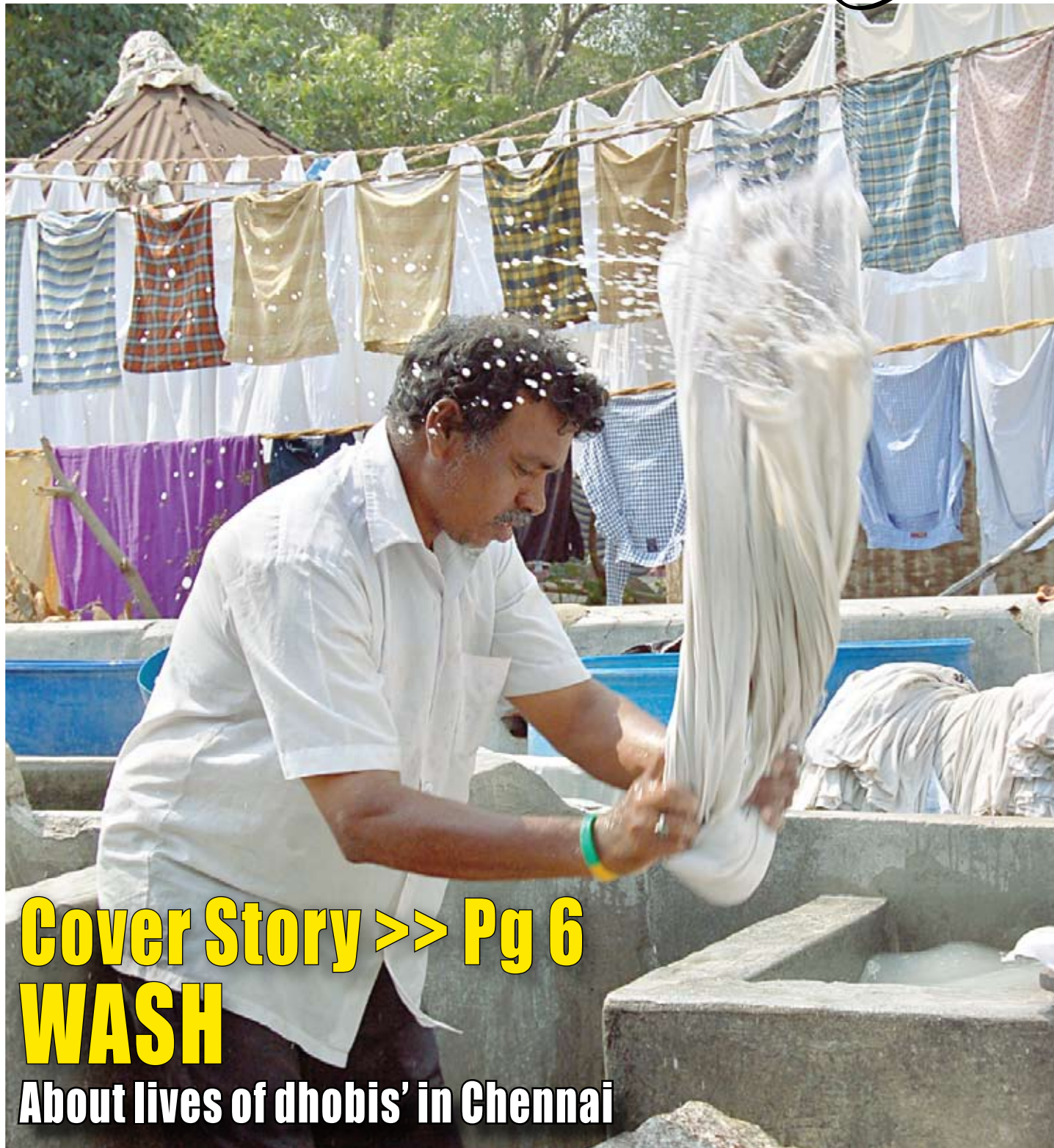


# Conversations

*A Chronicle of Social Currents*

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## Cover Story >> Pg 6 **WASH** About lives of dhobis' in Chennai

Photo: Marie Banu

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**"For us, merit is not only based on marks, but also on social criteria."**

An exclusive interview with Rev. Dr. Boniface Jeyaraj S.J., Principal of Loyola College

## **From the Editor**

Dear Friend,

A trend that has gained a good amount of attention in the last two decades is for families to give seasonal gifts to those who are in need. These gifts go beyond the writing of a cheque to a social service organization.

The idea, of course, reinforces the concept that a seasonal gift is important, but so is a donation made at any time of the year — they could make a difference in one's life!

The changemakers featured in this edition have made a remarkable impact in the lives of many. Hope you enjoy

reading about them.

Let us share with the less fortunate what we can during this festive season. Remember, it is a privilege to give than to receive.

Merry Christmas!

**P. N. Subramanian**



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## Does CEO's ignorance on CSR augur good for company?

**R**ecently I read an interview of Ms Chanda Kochar, CEO of ICICI bank and was aghast to read that how happy she is that ICICI has a foundation and they every year provide more than 1% to the foundation and how good their CSR practices are!

I thought this is a classic example of a CEO being totally ignorant or purposefully evading this important topic which if not looked well will spell doom for the bank as surely she has not known what is a good CSR?

She would have not also done any stake holders mapping for her bank as she would know that if stakeholders are happy then shareholders are automatically happy. Otherwise, she would have known that Microsoft does not claim any benefit from Gates Foundation for CSR as CSR of a foundation is totally different from a company's CSR and even lower ranked CSR professionals would know that!

Gates Foundation gets money from everyone and I am sure that most CEO's who are building Foundations in India know that they will not get any Public Money for their Foundation. If they do not get that support from public, what is the reason? It does not need Rocket Science to understand that every Business impacts People, Planet and Society. But, businesses are viewed with suspicion and even governments all over the world does not have good opinion for corporates and their Businesses!

Companies need to come clean on such perceptions and it is their abundant duty to remain credible and



ethical at all times. Good companies should work on robust corporate governance, transparency, promoting green, saving energies and introducing innovating good practices to create an image of being a responsible corporate citizen at all times.

If corporates do not have expertise on CSR, they are well advised to start with basics that CSR revolves around four pillars—market place which is customer; workplace which is their employees; Environment in particular; and Society in general. These are their stake holders and they need to be happy to make their shareholders happy! They can further do a stakeholders interest mapping analysis and draw a priority to spend their CSR budget accordingly. They should remember that CSR is not a cost centre, but a profit centre. It is a very important tool to help them grow their business's manifold.

World today is moving towards a concept called 'shared vision' where good corporates are imbibing in their core strategic vision concept of not just Financial Returns, but also Social Returns. It is very clear that those who do not spend on their stake holders are writing their own demise and would be simply wiped out sooner than they expect! It is time they turn to experts and devote sufficient energies and focus on CSR best practices for not only meeting their aspirations and goals, but for their own survival and expansion.

—Rajesh Tiwari  
CEO of Indian centre for CSR  
and Editor of CSR Today

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  
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# Need a Light? Take a Liter

Entrepreneurship, innovation, and networking are three words whose definitions have seen a sea-change in the last decade. Thanks to a simple but significant prefix—‘social’! There’s no denying that social entrepreneurship, social innovation and social networking has, in the recent past, changed the way people live, even as these processes have done their bit in breathing a whole new life to the seemingly mundane. However, in a world that has snuggled up to social revolution (be it networking, entrepreneurship, or innovation), it takes an entrepreneur par excellence to add a spin to the usual, drawing that extra bit of mileage from the world around us.

Earlier this year, when CSIM (Centre for Social Initiative in Management) alumnus Ram Mohan Katla, observed a young lad trying his very best to explain what he (the boy) believed was a game-changing idea, he couldn’t quite manage to get the boy’s drift. “His English wasn’t great. But he was trying his best to tell me something with a bottle,” says Ram, “Only when he took me to one of the houses in the village, I realized what he was trying to explain to me. The lad had stumbled upon a way of generating light through a plastic bottle.” In many ways, that was how Ram, Vice President, Ikya Global Group and Founding Trustee, Ikya Global Foundation, began what would later be known as his pet project — Liter of Light.

However, to understand how his path led to that one incident, it is perhaps imperative to know a bit about the man himself. Ram, soon after graduating from

CSIM in 2010, knew that social entrepreneurship was his calling. “After my course, I was associated with CSIM for a considerable period, taking up various assignments that were more or less connected with social entrepreneurship,” he says, “I identified that my passion lay in enabling the younger generation discover opportunities. In the process, I began discovering myself.”



It was fairly easy for Ram to decide that the surest way of testing social entrepreneurship skills lay in empowering the rural population. It was around the same time that his enterprise, Ikya Global Foundation came to be. “We stuck to our primary objective—bringing about grass-root innovations and introducing surrounding villages to the same,” he says, “We at Ikya decided that we were in a good position to connect with these rural

communities, discover the problems they faced, and unearth solutions to counter these issues.” Ikya started by adopting a cluster of villages near Hyderabad: “We based our activities out of the local Mandal headquarters, an area we termed the Rural Impact Hub.” Part of Ikya’s work in these villages lay in the formation of common interest groups among women and farmers. “Through these measures, we helped these people build micro-enterprises,” says Ram, “These small enterprises had a great deal to do with areas like energy and agriculture, to other non-farming activities.”

Ikya had announced its arrival. Within a short span of time, the organization began collaborating with reputed institutes like IIT Madras and the Rotary Club. “But the urge to do our bit for the urban slums kept tugging at me,” says Ram, “That was when Liter of Light came to be.”

Good or evil, every organization or person has that one feat that it is generally remembered by. Sachin Tendulkar for instance, will always be remembered for his 48th ODI hundred, simply because it was the first time in One-Day-Cricket history that a batsman scored a double-century. Likewise, even as it was going big guns, Ikya’s—and Ram’s—defining moment came its way during its novel ‘Liter of Light’ initiative. “The moment when that youngster, Pradeep, showed me what he had done with that humble bottle, proved that there were greater things ahead,” says Ram. He knew for certain, that Pradeep’s idea held great potential. Through a drive termed VInAct

(Volunteers in Action), Ikya mobilized several hundreds of youngsters, in spreading the word about generating energy from a plastic bottle. “The idea virtually held good itself. We could power homes that didn’t quite enjoy a basic necessity like electricity,” says Ram.

Not surprisingly, innovation then began taking Liter of Light to the next level. “These bottles could power a home during the day-time,” says Ram, “Merely fitting a solar panel atop the apparatus ensured that you had light even during the night.” However, by Ram’s own admission, one of the greater fallouts of the Liter of Light initiative was the inspiration that it provided to youngsters. “Many of the volunteers who worked on the project began believing that they could indeed do a great deal to further their cause,” he says. With the right kind of social-media marketing — “Youtube videos that went viral got us a great deal of mileage,” says Ram — Liter of Light was all set to enter the big stage. “Around 140 liters of light have been installed from polythene, plastic, asbestos and tin,” says Ram.

The initiative began gaining rapid ground, spreading to countries like Columbia, Spain, and Mexico. However, Ram feels that the initiative is far from complete. “We now plan on drawing awareness towards the use of eco-friendly bricks, from plastic. We started building awareness by recreating monuments like the Char Minar in Hyderabad, using these bricks. Chennai is on our mind, next. Hopefully, we’ll be there soon.”

—Daniel Almeida



# Creating innovators

*Butterfly Fields is currently present in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. It works with 3000 government schools in Andhra Pradesh and an additional 1000 schools spread across the private sector in the three states.*



**L**earn by rote, score well in exams and get the best course with great job prospects – the life of a student is mapped even before he or she even understands the purpose of education. As a result, schools become machines that churn out high scorers, and the focus all along remains on coaching students to get higher scores.

From Aamir Khan to Azim Premji, everyone has busted the myth that high scorers are good at their jobs and this has led to some efforts being taken to correct the learning methodologies. Apart from the government announcing measures to change the method of assessment, especially in the central board, there are also a few who believe that they can contribute by facilitating hands-on learning so that students understand the underlying concepts. One such is Hyderabad-based Butterfly Fields, started by K. Sharat Chandra, an alumnus of IIT- Bombay and IIM-Ahmedabad.

Butterfly Fields provides low-cost models for application-oriented learning to children from 8 to 16 years of age. Started in 2005, it works with government and private schools, and has developed

models that integrate with the school curriculum, regardless of the board the school is affiliated to. It also supports schools and trains the trainers.

## The genesis

Sharat Chandra was on an exchange program to Germany while doing his entrepreneurship course at IIM-A and worked with the SME (small & medium enterprises) sector there. What impressed him most was the amount of innovation



that was evident even at these businesses, which he realised was because of the education system followed in Germany that encourages students to think out of the box. And this was a complete contrast to the Indian system, where the application of what is learnt is completely ignored, with a greater focus on learning for exams. “Of course, there are growth stories amongst the Indian industry, but mostly in the services segment, not much in product development,” he points out. He realised that right from childhood, if children are encouraged to innovate and develop their own products, this would create a confidence to experiment as adults.

Convinced that the need of the hour was to move away from traditional teaching methods, K. Sharat Chandra started working on developing low cost experiments that can be used for project work in schools.

Sharat Chandra examined the systems used in the West and realised that the class sizes are smaller and the government invests heavily in education. This is unlike the Indian system where class sizes are large, with an average of 70 children per class in government schools. The investment is also lower from the

government. The onus on the teacher is high and the dependence on paper-pencil-chalk-board teaching is inevitable. “Any innovation means a hike in the school fee, which many in India cannot afford,” he adds.

Convinced that the need of the hour was to move away from traditional teaching methods, Sharat Chandra started working on developing low cost models that can be used for project work in schools. These projects are based on the concepts from the curriculum. Though each board has its own schedule to teach a particular topic to a child, the concepts taught are the same. “So, one topic may be introduced in Class 6 by one board and in Class 8 by another,” he explains. Therefore, the models can be common, only used for different age groups by different schools depending on the board they follow.

Since this is a social venture, the primary focus is on government schools. However, Butterfly Fields also has private schools as partners, who source the models from the company. The revenue it generates from here is used to cross finance its social venture of working with government schools.



### The reach

Butterfly Fields is currently present in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. It works with 3,000 government schools in Andhra Pradesh and an additional 1,000 schools spread across the private sector in the three states. Sharat Chandra states that government school requirements are more intense so, he intends to create a foundation before expanding aggressively. In the government segment, budget becomes a big constraint, and the focus is to deliver products in a box so that there is less of a programme/service component.

The company also works with corporate entities that focus on education as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. In the CSR segment, it works with several private companies such as GMR group, Chennai-based Ramky, Microsoft and Sarah Dell Foundation, which are active in supporting education for the underprivileged. Butterfly Fields works with around 70 schools in this category.

In the private segment, Butterfly Fields focuses on mid-range schools which charges a school fee in the range of Rs 12,000 a year. In all the three states, the company focuses on the top two

cities. In the next 15 months, the company plans to reach out to 10 states. Offices will be setup in five states by November 2012 and discussions with schools are already on in Kerala and Maharashtra. "Here, the sales cycle is longer as there are multiple stakeholders and so, the decision making time is that much longer," he says.

Butterfly Fields is also active in providing hands-on training programmes after school hours and is targeting an expansion in this segment. Many private schools too opt to encourage this since the regular fee is not affected and the decision to send the child for these classes lies

with parents. It's also working with partners for this and Hyderabad-based Eenadu Group is already a partner and does workshops in 20 districts in Andhra Pradesh. By the summer of 2012, the company had 70 summer camps under this model, with 30 through the Eenadu tie-up. The plan is to expand the reach across the geography.

Interestingly, the schools business is a seasonal one and the after-schools classes make up during the lean months. The company is also looking to take the retail route by the next year and create off-the-shelf boxes that parents can buy for their children, so they can try the concepts at home.

### The growth story

The company was self-funded and worked on a bootstrap budget till in September 2010, until Aavishkaar, a social venture capital fund, invested in Butterfly Fields to the tune of Rs. 5 crore. This enabled the company to scale up. As

Butterfly Fields plans to enter the retail segment, it expects the finance requirement to go up and plans to seek a second round of funding by September this year.

One of the major challenges the company faced in the initial years was that of acceptance. But with the introduction of continuous and comprehensive evaluation in central board schools, there has been a perceived need to introduce alternative teaching methodologies. Referrals are another factor that has enabled the company to expand its customer base.

In the initial three to four years, the company doubled its revenues. This year, the company is targeting a four-fold growth to touch revenues of Rs. 7.5 crore to Rs. 8 crore by 2013. The back end is being made scalable to match the growth. Butterfly Fields clearly has an eye on profits, but also has a social purpose, which it fulfils through its work with government schools and companies active in CSR. Most importantly, it aims to bring the children up to speed and fulfil the Indian dream of enabling the youth of tomorrow to innovate.

—S. Meera

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



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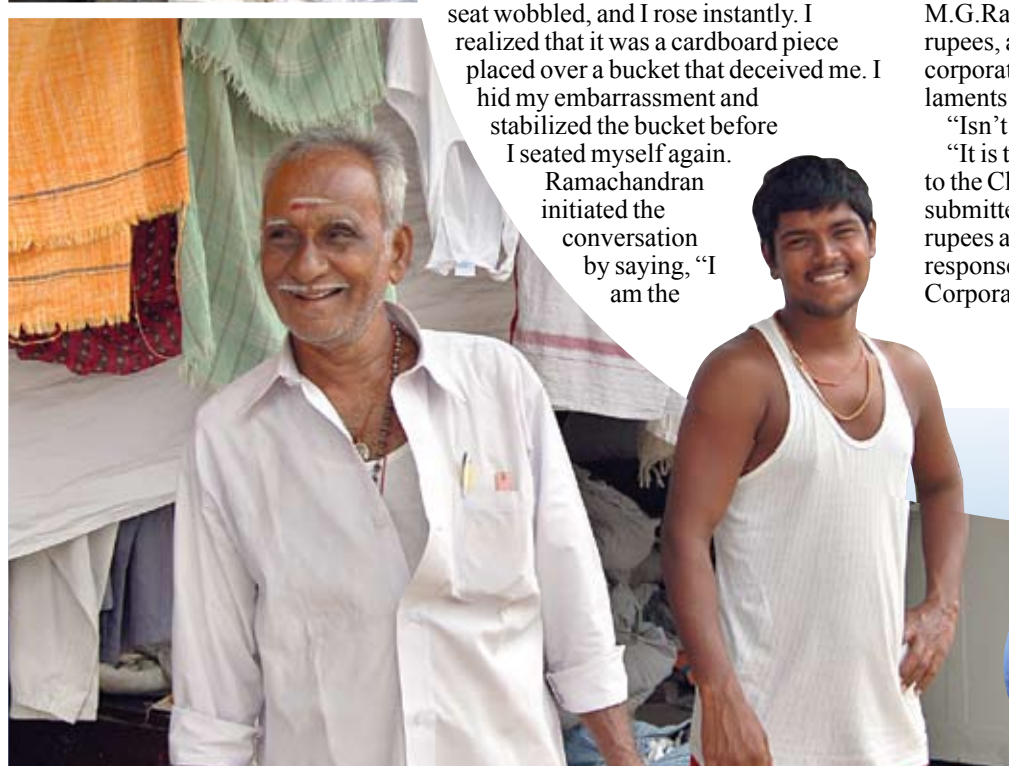
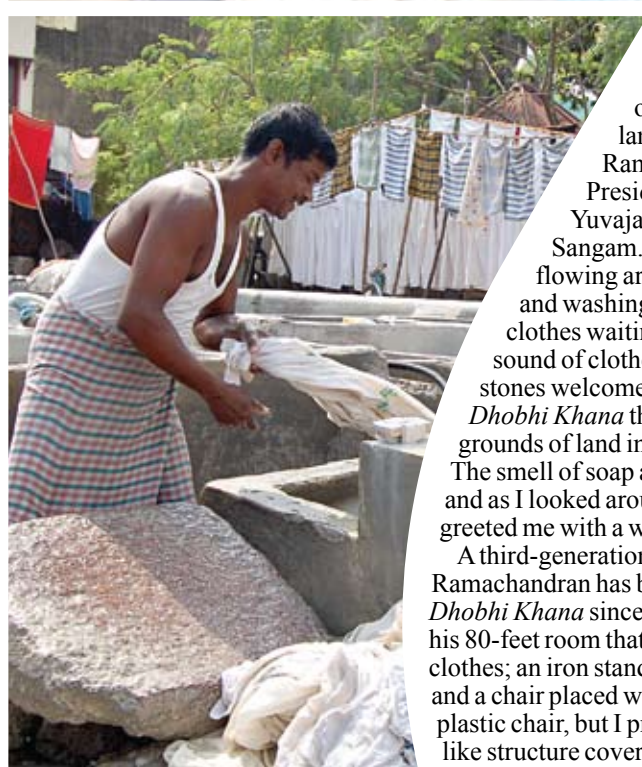
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# WASH

## A day at Chetpet Dhobhi Khana



**A**midst the hustle and bustle of Chennai city, I wind through one of the narrow side lanes at Chetpet to meet Ramachandran, the President of Chennai Rajaka Yuvajana (Sakavaiyalar) Sangam. The soapy waters flowing around the ironing shed and washing area, the line of clothes waiting to get dried, and the sound of clothes slapping on the stones welcomed me to the century-old *Dhobhi Khana* that is spread across 20 grounds of land in the heart of the city. The smell of soap and starch was pleasant, and as I looked around, Ramachandran greeted me with a warm smile.

A third-generation *Dhobhi*, Ramachandran has been working at the *Dhobhi Khana* since the age of 10. I entered his 80-foot room that was overflowing with clothes; an iron stand, a washing machine and a chair placed within. He offered me a plastic chair, but I preferred to use the stool-like structure covered with a towel. The seat wobbled, and I rose instantly. I realized that it was a cardboard piece placed over a bucket that deceived me. I hid my embarrassment and stabilized the bucket before I seated myself again.

Ramachandran initiated the conversation by saying, "I am the

President of *Dhobhi Khana* for over 15 years. When Moore, a British, inspected this site in 1902, he offered to construct restrooms and washing platforms for 120 *Dhobhis* who worked here. There were huge bungalows in the neighbourhood, unlike hotels and beauty parlours that are present today. These residents recommended to the British to also provide us with metro water. The *Dhobhi Khana* was thus launched on 8th December, 1902."

*Dhobhis* were allowed to use the *Dhobhi Khana* only when there was supply of metro water in the mornings and evenings. The rest of the time, the premise was locked. The 120 restrooms increased to 128. As years passed, the number of *Dhobhis* increased to 2000 and they started re-locating elsewhere as there were not enough restrooms to accommodate them. But, they continued to work at *Dhobi Khana*, as additional washing platforms and water tanks were constructed and offered to them at a nominal rent.

"What are the rental charges," I enquire.

"From 1950s to 1970s, we were charged a monthly rent of 3 rupees for the restrooms and 50 paise for the washing platforms. In 1984, the restrooms were re-constructed and the rent was waived by the government. But, the washing platforms were continued to be rented at 50 paise a month. During the Chief Ministership of Dr M.G. Ramachandran, the rent was hiked to 7 rupees, and later to 50 rupees. Recently, the corporation has enhanced it to 75 rupees," laments Ramachandran.

"Isn't the rent too low?" I ask directly.

"It is ten years since we have remitted the rent to the Chennai Corporation. Our association has submitted an appeal to reduce the rent to 50 rupees a month, but we haven't sought any response as yet. When we approached the Corporation Bill Collector with a consolidated

payment of Rs. 46,000 recently, he refused to accept it by stating that our ledger was missing. I am worried if the rent arrears would increase to an amount that we cannot afford," he sighs.

Ramachandran lives with his wife and four sons in the neighbourhood. While two of his sons have studied up to BSc and DME, and work as salesmen in shopping malls in the city; the other two assist him at the *Dhobhi Khana*.

Apparently, it was a week after we had submitted our petition to Smt. Indira Gandhi in 1984, that she was assassinated. Scheduled Castes have more privileges offered by the Government than MBCs. The education scholarship is Rs. 2,000 for SC while it is only Rs. 150 for MBC," he says.

"Have washing machines affected your trade? Has the charges for your services increased?" I question.



"Are the earnings from laundry enough to meet your family needs?" I probe subtly.

"No. There aren't any sufficient benefits from the government either. We belong to the Most Backward Community. Since early 1980s, we have been requesting the government to categorize our community as Scheduled Caste.

"Not much! We have our regular customers. Our quality of service has been lauded by many of them. In fact, one of my customers, Mr. Venkatesa Narayana Reddy, recently sent across a donation cheque for Rs. 10,000 to our association."

"During the 1960s, the charge for wash, starch,

and iron was around 50 paise per garment. Now, it is 15 to 20 rupees, depending on the material. For bulk orders that is sourced from hospitals, hotels, and beauty parlours, we charge only 2 rupees," he answers.

Ramachandran took me around the *Dhobhi Khana* introducing me to his fellow men who were at work. They were happy to get their pictures clicked and were curious to learn which newspaper I represented. The washing stones were queued neatly and each of them had a small water tank that had metro water flowing into it. Women were also present, and some had their children assisting them.

"Today is a school holiday. She is therefore helping me rinse the clothes," says Padma.

The day for the *Dhobhis* start at 4 AM and they work until 7 AM. After lunch, they return in the afternoon to iron the washed clothes and deliver it to their customers. While few of them own auto rickshaws, most use two-wheelers to commute. During monsoon, they need an extra day to dry the clothes and for urgent orders they use a washing machine.

"I am finding it difficult to meet the transportation costs and the electricity charges. It is hard to cope with the rising prices. On an average I earn around 15,000 rupees a month, and I don't have any savings. Some customers who provide bulk orders don't make timely payments. Despite all these challenges, I strive towards providing quality service to retain my customers," concludes Ramachandran.

Almost four generations down now, the *Dhobhis* don't have any other choice than continuing the same trade. Even though their profession is slowly fading away, they still manage to make their living out of it.

—Marie Banu



**D**hobhi is the name of the washerman community. This name has been derived from the Hindi word *dhona* and the Sanskrit word *dhav* which literally means to wash.

In Tamil, *Dhobhis* are called *Vannar*. Other names include *Vannan*, *Panicker*, and *Salavai thozhilale*. The *Vannar* population is around 3.5 million and majority of them belong to the middle class.

Photos: Marie Banu

*"During the 1960s, the charges for wash, starch, and iron was around 50 paise per garment. Now, it is 15 to 20 rupees, depending on the material."*



# Classrooms Unplugged

**“Each center runs on a nominal operating cost of Rs. 3500 and it takes about Rs. 50,000 to initially set up a center.”**

“Give two hours of your time today, to create a better tomorrow” is the mantra advocated by Venkat Sriraman, Founder, eVidyaloka. A CSIM Hyderabad alumnus and a successful management professional from a reputed computer manufacturing company, Venkat started eVidyaloka along with Satish Viswanathan, a friend and former colleague of his, two years ago.

He says, “While we were toying with the idea of a community level project, the problem which we saw glaringly affecting people was a shortage of teachers and poor quality of available teachers. In order to address these two problems, we started eVidyaloka as a pilot project aimed at removing any obstacle standing in the way of education, especially for children studying in government schools in remote villages with poor teaching-learning environments. We thought that an idea in action is worth two on paper, so the project took off to a fighting start, in three different linguistic regions—Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Jharkhand. In each place we targeted the students of classes six, seven, and eight, as they were found to be the right age group to introduce this kind of technology enabled learning environments to.”

The model that eVidyaloka applies is a synergetic model in which the project ropes in local non-governmental bodies to partner in the managing of these remote classrooms. The advantage here being that the NGOs in question would already have the trust of the local residents, and the partnership works out cost-effectively for both parties. eVidyaloka classrooms uses a simplistic, non-intrusive four-gadget set-up, enabling children to enter and use the classroom in a hassle-free manner. The medium of instruction is the regional language, and the modules are basically the same as prescribed in school text books, only enriched with pictorial and audio-visual presentations.

Presently, five centers are operational—three in Tamil Nadu and one each in Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh. Says Venkat, “We strongly believe that we can use technology to connect people and intertwine relationships. We are particular about wanting to work with remote villages



***“While we were toying with the idea of a community level project, the problem which we saw glaringly affecting people was a shortage of teachers and poor quality of available teachers.”***

only, as the need is greater there. We ensure that we do not tamper with the school lessons, instead merely bolster those lessons with relevant videos and presentations. We have a very strong value-oriented approach to our classes and we adhere as best as possible to local cultures of the regions which we reach out to.”

Teachers of eVidyaloka are incepted on a voluntary basis. “We have actually tested and found that volunteers make greater impact on the children due to their higher levels of commitment than paid-for teachers. There is also the fact that we cannot afford to pay teachers at the moment. However, we hope to arrive at a sustainable quality-control model in



due course of time,” says Venkat enthusiastically.

The project, still in its nascent stages, presently runs on private donations. While the classroom space, internet and electricity expenses are largely locally managed, one person is employed by eVidyaloka to manage the equipment at each center. Each center runs on a nominal operating cost of Rs. 3500 and it takes about Rs. 50,000 to initially set up a center. Venkat observes that the operating cost, starting at Rs. 80 to 90 per student per subject per month, reduces by almost half in the course of the year, given that each center caters to about 40 to 50 children.

Venkat plans to get into managing eVidyaloka full time in the next few

months, and has already drawn up elaborate plans for expanding the project. “We are looking at scaling up our operations from 5 to 50 centers in different states in the next two or three years. With a strong delivery model in place, we are sure to be able to fulfill our mission to bring quality education to the doorsteps of children,” says he.

“To educate anywhere, anytime” is the byline of eVidyaloka. With a well-equipped and easily navigable website, eVidyaloka educates the reader on various policies and statistics pertaining to education in India, besides displaying lesson plans and modules. Following overall transparency and a welcome tone, eVidyaloka’s commitment towards connecting people is palpable.

“We have realized that it does not take much time nor money nor efforts to bring about a change. Those who really make the greatest changes, start with the simplest of things—giving away two hours of their time, for instance. I would urge anybody who is willing to participate in the change-making process to start with the same—two hours of your time and passion coming through in your action. This is enough material for transformation,” says Venkat.

Now isn’t that some inspiration!

—Archanaa R.



# A Story of Toil and Rejuvenation

“Through all these years of service to the communities, Zonta Resource Center remains predominantly known for its care for HIV positive women.”

**T**he Zonta Club of Madras has been in operation since 1966. Its members, known as Zontians, have been working on women's issues, namely, conducting vocational guidance and placement programmes, giving career talks in schools and colleges, conducting workshops, and

***The first woman Chief Engineer of Tamil Nadu Housing Board Mrs. May George and her friend Late Mrs. Janaki Krishnan founded the Zonta Resource Center with little resources and lots of passion.***

training women to take up offbeat occupations such as being masons, auto-rickshaw drivers, etc. Since 1989, however, a proposal was put forth to establish the Zonta Resource Center, an autonomous non-governmental organization that would better fulfill the mission of the Club with respect to empowerment of women. This proposal was fructified in 1990, when the first woman Chief Engineer of Tamil Nadu Housing Board Mrs. May George and her friend Late Mrs. Janaki Krishnan founded the Zonta Resource Center with little resources and lots of passion. The present Board members include Mrs. May George, Ms. Sampoorna Garine, a counseling psychologist, architects Ms. Kalpana Shanmugham and Ms. Mythili Babou, and Mrs. Latha Suresh Director, CSIM.

The octogenarian Mrs. May George comes across as a treasure trove of rich, labor-laden memories. “I forget a lot these days,” she says a little apologetically, but when she begins to talk, there follows many a fascinating anecdote and her zeal is infectious. The center has been serving as a placement bureau for women, has conducted adult literacy programmes, and is a short stay home for women and children living with HIV/AIDS.

In the 1990s when several women were being rescued from prostitution in Bombay, the Zonta Resource Center (ZRC) took in several of them into its shelter. These women were provided care and counseling. Upon finding out



that some of the women were infected by HIV, the center vowed to provide timely medical care, good nutrition, and also helped them become self-reliant by providing them training them on vocational skills. At the short stay home, these women were taught soldering and assembly; embroidery and tailoring; mat weaving; screen printing; mehendi; natural mosquito-repellant making; handicrafts; candlemaking; and doll-making. Further, the center also provided these women with job opportunities.

Setting up this short stay home has involved laborious toiling on the part of its founders and their associates. Says Mrs. May, “We first stayed at a rented premises at Palavakkam. We moved a couple of places until we could finally purchase a piece of land at Madambakkam. In those days the place

used to be more village-like. At first, the government allotted us a large plot of land right on the ECR. Due to some inter-party rivalry that allotment was cancelled. It is then that we decided to purchase our own land by sourcing private donations. Once the construction work began at Madambakkam, we even engaged some of our trained women masons.” She adds with some pride, “we used the zip-lock system, (which I introduced in Chennai) to hold the building together.”

May reminisces her friend Janaki's contributions by saying, “She took care of everything pertaining to the day to day affairs of the center. She was a great administrator.”

Zonta Resource Center developed a literacy programme for women residing in slums. Training was offered

to teachers and the program was conducted mostly during the afternoons so that working women could also attend the classes. As the enthusiasm of the learners kept increasing by leaps and bounds, it led to the starting of 40 different adult literacy centers all over Chennai. The program continued until the Tamil Nadu Government took up the Arivoli Iyakkam with the same objective. This literacy program has successfully reached out to more than 500 women till date.

Through all these years of service to the communities, Zonta Resource Center remains predominantly known for its care for HIV positive women. Rehabilitation of these women through counseling, medical attention and vocational training has enabled several hundreds of women to gain a new lease of life.

When the Tsunami struck in 2005, ZRC offered shelter and care to women who were rendered homeless. It also participated in the psychological counseling programme for tsunami affected persons as well as in the drawing up of structural designs.

In the last few years, ZRC has been part of the Government of India sponsored Women's Helpline Program. It is a 24 hour helpline available to girls and women in distress who are in need of counseling and advice, and a shelter too if need be.

Speaking to Mrs. May George rekindles a fire within the listener to strive for those who are less provided for. After all, she has dedicated her entire life to the service of the marginalized people. As for the Zonta Resource Center, it is a place where the sweat and passion of a group of passionate women has combined, along with the goodwill of their supporters.

—Archanaa R.





# First meeting with John D. Rockefeller

**M**r. X, in whose home Swamiji was staying in Chicago, was a partner or an associate in some business with John D. Rockefeller. Many times John D. heard his friends talking about this extraordinary and wonderful Hindu monk who was staying with them, and many times he had been invited to meet Swamiji but, for one reason or another, always refused. At that time Rockefeller was not yet at the peak of his fortune, but was already powerful and strong-willed, very difficult to handle and a hard man to advise.

But one day, although he did not want to meet Swamiji, he was pushed to it by an impulse and went directly to the house of his friends, brushing aside the butler who opened the door and saying that he wanted to see the Hindu monk.

The butler ushered him into the living room, and, not waiting to be announced, Rockefeller entered into Swamiji's adjoining study and was much surprised, I presume, to see Swamiji behind his writing table not even lifting his eyes to see who had entered.

After a while, as with Calvé, Swamiji told Rockefeller much of his past that was not known to any but himself,



and made him understand that the money he had already accumulated was not his, that he was only a channel and that his duty was to do good to the world — that God had given him all his wealth in order that he might have an opportunity to help and do good to people.

Rockefeller was annoyed that anyone dared to talk to him that way and tell him what to do. He left the room in irritation, not even saying goodbye. But about a week after, again without being announced, he entered Swamiji's study and, finding him the same as before, threw on his desk a paper which told of his plans to donate an enormous sum of money toward the financing of a public institution.

"Well, there you are", he said. "You must be satisfied now, and you can thank me for it."

Swamiji didn't even lift his eyes, did not move. Then taking the paper, he quietly read it, saying: "It is for you to thank me". That was all. This was Rockefeller's first large donation to the public welfare

—Source: *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*

## Exploration and Development of Potential – the sustenance factor

**I**f an organization has to sustain, the learning in the organization has to be ongoing. In the present day knowledge industry, learning opportunities are a main attraction for employee retention. A sure way of monotony and sluggishness entering in members of the organization is when the organization ceases to be a learning organization and they begin to compromise on development of people.

The fast pace in which the changes are occurring, organizations have to be on the cutting edge to survive competition. One of the critical aspects that employees seek from the place of work is the opportunity to learn. There needs to be opportunities to explore what one has learnt, increase the competence through experimentation and harnessing of one's potential. The learning should enable the person to evolve.

According to J.M. Sampath, "Learning is the willingness to be open to the input that comes from the environment, with a commitment to apply one's mind to understand this input and passion to stay with the understanding long enough to be able to derive one's own insights. This followed with conviction to integrate one's own understanding and insights into real life contexts makes learning a meaningful process." (2001). The initiatives in development therefore will have to look into creating insights for the person, enabling a process of evolution and growth within.

Usually organizations focus on training in enhancing competencies; increase productivity; teach technical nuances; related knowledge inputs; upgradation of knowledge in job related processes and so on. Very rarely do the organizations focus on enhancing clarity; deeper questioning of purpose and role within the organization; formulation of vision and

clarification of values; deepening process orientation; integration of learning; enhancing multiple intelligences within... in effect, learning to learn those that actually are the foundational and enablers of excellence. Those are the ones that are actually and vitally more important. Without focusing on those, the true development of potential will not happen.

Social organizations are dynamic in nature responding to the needs of the community and customizing their interventions on a continual basis. This makes learning imperative. The maturity and speed of decision making and response at work is limited to the learning competency and maturity of the individual on the job. If it is accepted that a social organization is in essence a collection of specific people and their thoughts driven by their passion to make a difference in the chosen sphere, then their individual learning becomes a deciding factor for the sustenance of the organization. If it is agreed that a sense of growth and evolution is a natural seeking within a normal person, then giving them the opportunity to grow, develop and evolve becomes a significant connect to the feeling of belongingness. It also becomes a dimension that can retain the member of the organization and get them to be deeply engaged with the organization.

In a social organization where the funds are limited, people engagement may be of varied types, resources like time and infrastructure is limited, and it is extremely challenging to have ongoing learning opportunities in a structured manner. Most learning happens in the field on the job. Usually the social organization focuses on the actions but not on documentation and review of the learning. They do not dedicate enough time and energy for



knowledge management. As a result the intangible cost of people leaving will be very high. They also find redeployment as a very tedious process since the knowledge and experience are not captured effectively on an ongoing basis.

In reality, working in a social organization many a time is a deep humanizing process. Many of them have shared in retrospect the benefits of working in social organization, but have not appreciated the learning while they are part of it. Added to these, there are some attitudes that are detrimental to capturing the learning in a social organization, like:

- The usual attitude of developmental sector seen as lower in status than the corporate sector by many which makes the people not take cognizance of the learning that they get by making a difference to the world around
- The feeling that their engagement could anyway be a filler or short term

and they will get into mainstream soon

- Lower self esteem as though they cannot survive in corporate and have chosen to work in social space
- It is a fad to say that one quit a high paying corporate job to get into a social organization for a while

People therefore don't value their own rich experiences and capture the inner evolution that being in a social organization enables an individual.

Hence, it is essential for the social organization to have as a part of their work schedule sufficient time for review, articulation, reflection, sharing, and documentation. Learning and evolution should be a way of life. Every member of the organization should be given the opportunity to take cognizance of the learning, capture the essence and have space to share and impart the same to others. This would make them as well as the organization alive, energetic and contributing, thereby leading to sustenance.

### Reflections:

1. What kind of learning opportunities do I enable through my organization?
2. What is the extent to which the organization members are willing to learn, develop and evolve in my organization?
3. What efforts and methodologies are used currently in the organization to document and share the tangible and intangible learning? How can it be bettered?
4. To what extent do the processes in my organization allow reflection, articulation and introspection as a way of life?

—Kalpana Sampath, PhD





*Chennai Mission team spends a morning at the Bakery unit at Puzhal Prison - I.*

# Bread and MOULDS

**T**he Central Prison is located at Puzhal in Tiruvallur district, about 45 km from Chennai city. It is operational from 2006 replacing the erstwhile Chennai Central Prison.

Spread across 212 acres, it is the largest prison complex in India. Bigger in size, the campus houses three complexes—Prison - I for convict prisoners, Prison - II for remand prisoners, and Prison - III for women prisoners.

As Sundar and I waited at the entrance for the official nod from the Jail Superintendent to let us in, I looked around curiously.

The huge gate at the entrance appeared familiar. “The gate is like a movie set. I have seen Rajnikanth come out of a gate like this in many movies,” I said to Sundar as I tried to hide my fear.

The armed policeman glared at me and said, “You may not get scared when you visit this prison, but ‘you will’ when you visit the other two.”

I grinned.

While there were many armed police at the main gate, two men in white uniform were ironing clothes in the adjacent area, but within the prison compound.

“They are life convicts. Due to their good conduct, they have been allowed to work in this area,” stated the policeman.

After a thorough scanning conducted by the prison officials, we were finally allowed to enter the prison.

Amidst the policemen who were on duty, there were also men in white uniform carrying files and running errands for the officers.

After discussing with the Jail Superintendent the purpose of our visit, we were led through two more grilled gates that was about 20-feet tall and placed at a distance of about 5-feet.

I wondered if this is what termed as a three-tiered security system.

It was visitors’ time, and few men were waiting anxiously to meet their relatives. “Most of the prison inmates have their family members visiting them regularly. It is only for two of them that we have organized volunteers from charities to meet them and provide soap, oil, etc,” said the Jail Superintendent who accompanied us.

We walked towards the bakery unit. The campus was tidy and the garden was maintained well.

There was an unusual silence. More men in white uniform were walking at ease within the campus, some of them alone.

“Most of them are life convicts. Only



20 percent of the convicts are habitual offenders. The rest have all committed the crime impulsively,” said the Jail Superintendent.

The prison inmates appeared disciplined, and it was obvious that they were regretting for having committed the crime.

*“Training is offered to inmates in batches of six for a period of six months. This is the fifth batch of trainees. They are taught to bake bread and cakes.”*

To break the silence, I said: “The inmates appear to be well-behaved. Do you also have people who are aggressive?”

“The moment the convict regrets for the crime he has committed, he starts behaving well. Although we may feel that they have reformed themselves, as per the law, we need to imprison them for the determined period. Good conduct might grant him an early release from prison.”

“There are only few aggressive convicts, whose movement is restricted in the campus,” explained the Jail Superintendent.

As we entered the bakery, I saw six men



wearing aprons and caps. They were all busy at work. “Where are the trainers,” I asked Sundar instantly.

“Two among them are trainers,” he answered pointing towards Rajini and Magimai Das.

All the four trainees were subtle to interact with and appeared to be below 30 years of age. “We do not differentiate ourselves from the trainees by wearing a different uniform or name badges. We want them to feel comfortable working here,” said Das.

The bakery unit at Puzhal Prison - I was launched in 2009 by Chennai Mission, a charitable organization. Imported machinery worth Rs. 12.5 lakhs was donated to this unit by Mr. M. Mahadevan, Founder, Chennai Mission and Chairman & Managing Director, Oriental Cuisines Pvt. Ltd.

40 bags of maida (each weighing 50 kilograms) are supplied once in 45 days

along with other raw materials that are required for baking, free of cost, by Winners Bakery—another project of Chennai Mission.

“Training is offered to inmates in batches of six for a period of six months. This is the fifth batch of trainees. They are taught to bake bread and cakes. Very soon, they will be provided with a monthly stipend of Rs. 5,000 which will be handed over to their respective families,” explained Sundar who oversees the unit.”

In reality, a prisoner faces a lot of social stigma after he gets released. This is a major reason for him to commit crimes again and return to prison. It is indeed a fact that an earning member is valued in any family. Chennai Mission is addressing this issue by providing the prison inmates with skill training and making him employable.

The State Government of Tamil Nadu has recently sanctioned 45 lakh rupees to expand the bakery unit at Puzhal prison and Chennai Mission has offered to provide training for more prison inmates. The products produced at Puzhal Prison will be made available for sale in the market under the brand name ‘Freedom’.

Sundar showed me the baking and packaging machinery, and offered bread to taste. “It is as good as the one you buy at Hot Breads,” I remarked.

“Of course, it would. This is because we use the same raw materials as Hot Breads,” stated Sundar with pride.

100 loaves of bread are baked every day in this unit and are served as breakfast for the prison inmates along with milk. Further, bread is also supplied to orphanages and homes like The Banyan and Little Drops in Chennai.

“I feel motivated and am happy to learn about baking,” expressed one of trainees.

“I want to see you run a bakery in the city one day, and would be happy to be your customer,” said I.

All the trainees were thrilled on hearing this, and I was happy that I prompted a smile.

It is just a moment of anger that has brought them here and they have a long wait for freedom.

We bid adieu to the trainees and trainers and left the campus after heaving a sigh.

The moulds at this bakery do not only make breads, but better people too. The impression that I had only visited an ‘Anger Management School’ still remains.

—Marie Banu



# “For us, merit is not only based on marks, but also on social criteria.”

Rev. Dr. Boniface Jeyaraj S.J shares with Marie Banu what makes Loyola College unique amongst others.

**L**oyola College is an autonomous Jesuit institution of academic excellence under University of Madras in Chennai. The institution is among the handful of India's most prestigious institutions for degree programmes in commerce, arts, natural sciences and social sciences and has been consistently ranked amongst the top five institutions in India for all of the said streams. The college admits undergraduates and post-graduates and offers degrees in the liberal arts, sciences and commerce.

*In an exclusive interview, Rev. Dr. Boniface Jeyaraj S.J, Principal of Loyola College shares with Marie Banu what makes his college unique amongst others.*

**Loyola College has continued to remain in the list of Top 5 Colleges in India ranked by India Today. What is the secret of your success in achieving this position?**

Our success is mainly because of our unique curriculum—which has a choice based credit system. We have covered two aspects—high quality output syllabus, and a re-structured pattern.

Besides English, languages, core and allied subjects, we feel that our students should also have knowledge on various other aspects like personality development, understanding different religions, analysing Indian society (*critically*), and being environmentally conscious. We give them the tools and these form part of the foundation course which is covered during the first year of the graduation.

Many people think that ‘foundation course’ means an ‘English course’. But, for us ‘foundation’ means ‘Human Development’. We need in our Indian society a person who is morally upright and of good character. We give emphasis and focus towards overall, total, integral formation of each student. In fact the NCERT wanted to adopt our curriculum model for all educational institutions.

In the second year, we give them community

orientation in the form of outreach programmes. We help our students form the right attitude so that they can be happy; know how to understand themselves and the society; and understand the needs of the poor people and have compassion for them.

We give a lot of facilities and offer around 40 percent admission to poor students, first generation learners, orphans, slum students, rural students, children of single parent, and students belonging to the scheduled castes. In addition to the students' academic merit (*marks obtained in the qualifying examination*), the above factors would be taken into account for assessing inter se merit for admission. If they had been given equal opportunities they would have been much better. According to us, they are meritorious students under the socio-economic category.

**What are the challenges that your professors face while handling the affluent students and those who hail from the weaker section of our society? How do you address them?**

You have really brought out a very interesting issue! We have students from

both extremes—affluent students from English medium schools; and students from rural areas, Tamil medium schools, private schools, and government schools. Because of this, there is always some difficulty in the classrooms.

During the initial months, the weaker students find it very difficult to cope. But, we do not give up. Depending on the level of support required, we try to help them out. We offer them with peer support and help them after class hours through an enhancement programme that is managed by our faculty as well as PhD students. For the past two years we have been also offering a 10-day bridge course where English and one more subject are taught.

The strength of our institution is to cater to all sections, especially to give access to people who have been denied access.

Our tri-objectives are access, equity, and excellence. That is why we offer scholarships worth 30 to 40 lakh rupees a year. Besides this, free noon meal is served to around 400 poor students and we spend 2.5 lakh rupees from the management funds every month.

We receive about 15,000 applications out of about 20,000 applications that are sold. We categorize them based on the above stated criteria. The entire admission process is

computerized and selection is purely based on merit.

For us, as stated above, merit is not only based on marks, but also on social criteria. We give priority for the poor students, first generation learners,

orphans, slum students, rural students, children of single parents, and students belonging to the to Dalits, SC, ST, MBC, and BC. We also give preference to differently abled students and have a Resource Centre for Differently Abled Students (RCDA) to give support to the visually challenged and differently abled students. We believe that if we take care of them, God will take care of us. Because, they are all God's children!

**Your alumni include several eminent people. How effective was the World Alumni congress that was organised in 2010?**

The Alumni Congress was first of its kind and we had around 3000 alumni attending the event. About 140 alumni who contributed to the society in various fields were felicitated. We have very strong alumni, some of them being Mr. P. Chidambaram, Mr. N.Ram, Mr. Viswanathan Anand, Mr. Thamarai Kannan IPS, and Mr.K.Narayanan, Governor of West Bengal.

Our students are enthused when they meet such great alumni. We get the support of our alumni, when we send our students for industry interactions. We also invite them to give endowment lectures to our students during the annual alumni meet.

Alumni provide support for constructing buildings and offering scholarships to the poor students. We also invite them to provide training for our non-teaching staff and students.

**As a principal, what is your advice for students who wish to pursue their education in Loyola College?**

My advice is—do well in your studies. If you do not get the course that you had applied for, be flexible. For instance, if we are offering you admission in BBA or Economics instead of B.Com that you had applied for, accept it.

The subject of the course is not important to get jobs. What matters the most are good marks, excellent communication skills and Loyola backing.



**Editorial**

**Latha Suresh  
Marie Banu**