

Conversations

A Chronicle of Social Currents

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Cover Story >> Pg 6
Big Fish, Small Fish
About fisherfolk and their commerce

Photo: AK

From the Editor

Dear Friends,

Life can be complicated, but happiness is simple. Of course, we try our best to make it complicated, but if we look closely, it's really very simple.

My goal is to have you sit down in a quiet place, and to slowly soak up every single page of Conversations. Don't hurry,

just take a deep breath, read each page, and think about what is and what could be if your mind and heart is open to change—both within you and with the world around you.

We all have doubts, fears and disappointments in our life. What we need is doses of inspiration to bring us back to where one should be; to re-direct us to what's really

important in our lives and in society.

The articles and stories featured in this edition could be that source of inspiration! In just a few minutes it can put a smile on your face and in your heart when you need it most.

Happy reading!

P. N. Devarajan

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"I am first a human being, and this controls the writer in me."

An interview with
Writer Sivasankari



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Photo: CS Sathish Anand

Road Traffic Victims

Recently I went to a Home at Orgadam in Chennai where 70 aged destitute men and women besides 60 orphan children live.

While walking around, I noticed a senior gentlemen lying down and crying with pain. He could not raise up. I learnt that he was badly hit by a motorcycle while crossing the road in Chrompet two years ago.

His one leg and one hand are badly damaged and he has been suffering from chronic pain ever since. He has no family support as his three sisters and two brothers have expired.

After the accident, the motorcyclist did not stop to care for him, but instead scooted. It was the public that took him to a nearby hospital and provided him first aid. He says that he is lucky that the Old age Home is taking care of him as he has been left with a permanent injury and he has absolutely no means for livelihood.

Accident victims undergo similar situations most of the time. Think before you drive; Stop when you encounter an accident. Life is precious!

—Narasimhan Rajagopal

**Information
provided by the
Commissioner of
Police, Chennai for
the month of
January 2012**

**Loss of lives due to accidents - 121
No. of accidents reported - 795**

**NUMBER OF CASES BOOKED FOR
TRAFFIC VIOLATION - 304,870**

- Signal violation - 21,181
- Wrong side driving - Nil
- Over speeding - 4,650
- Violation of one way rules - 6770

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**
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So What If We Are DIFFERENT?

“Every morning when I left my house with a handbag, people around would comment that I was going for sex work.”



“Centuries of human existence, but still men and women are not treated as equals in many places. The plight of transgender (TG) is not any better,” comments Jeeva, an alumnus of Centre for Social Initiative and Management.

At the age of eight Jeeva realized that she was different. “Everybody including my parents ostracized me when I was looking forward to someone who can tell me the ‘what and why’ of what I was going through,” she sighs.

After leaving her family at the age of 13, Jeeva came to live in the slums of Pulianthope at Chennai. “It was here that I learnt the perception of common people on transgender,” she laments.

Battling against the Association of Transgender with beggary and sex work was her first step towards educating the community about transgender. “Every morning when I left my house with a hand bag, people around would comment that I was going for sex work. With continued efforts I began to conduct sessions in schools and colleges to educate the students on the history and present day situation of a transgender. Gradually, one student after another recognized me in the locality and their parents started dissociating me from sex work,” explains Jeeva, who is now the President of 84 community based organizations working for MSM (Male having Sex with Males), FSW (Female Sex worker), and TG (Transgender).

Jeeva’s sessions have had a phenomenal impact in creating space to talk about transgender and their specific problems. “This credibility opened roads for me to approach the police department officials and engage in fact finding on TG. All

along I was clear about one thing – sympathy must change to empathy, otherwise the purpose of education is lost,” she says.

Jeeva mentioned about a PhD scholar who once stood up and apologized for her attitude towards transgenders during a journey. In order to avoid seeing the ‘aravani’ she had slept all day. The next morning, that very aravani woke her up to ask if she was fine as she had not got up for breakfast. “No matter who you are, the

“All along I was clear about one thing – sympathy must change to empathy, otherwise the purpose of education is lost.”

basic needs such as hunger, thirst, shelter, love are the same everywhere,” Jeeva points out.

Sessions with the IAS and IPS officers helped her further in expanding her circle of friends. At the end of every such session, the response obtained were the same — ‘we did not know about this’. A counsellor and a social worker in the TG community, Jeeva decided to apply for the PGDSIM course at CSIM. The fact that she had completed only 7th grade did not affect her prospects. “It was with their motivation that I applied for a Bachelor’s Degree in Sociology and completed it,”

she says with pride.

“Talking of CSIM, I must talk of three people – Dr. Sunil who removed my stage fear, Mr. Louis whose games motivated me to decide my future course of action and Mrs. Latha Suresh who imbibed confidence in me. CSIM is the place where I knew what I wanted to become,” exults Jeeva, who has recommended two members from her community to undertake a similar programme at CSIM.

In 2007, Jeeva established the



Transgender Rights Association (TRA) to advocate for the fundamental rights and livelihood of the transgender community. Simultaneously, her sessions in schools grew more popular to the extent that NSS students vowed to respect the TG community. Jeeva is also a member of the Transgender Welfare Board in Tamil Nadu (under the Department of Social Welfare) that had recommended measures to allow transgender to study in colleges. In 2011, the Board had also recommended that the transgender be enumerated in the census.

“Success here was in terms of Government Orders which are not

permanent. Having worked in the field for the last 15 years, I can say that there is a need for a comprehensive legislation to address the needs and problems of this community,” says Jeeva who is also a member of the Tamilnadu State AIDS Control Society (TANSACS).

Attitude seems to affect every strand of life. In case of TG, the attitude of the rest of the community towards them is remarkably different in the northern and southern parts of the country. Human rights and freedom are still a distant dream for them. “The media inclines to project us as allies of political parties, which is hardly the case. We are here to place our demands to the government for the betterment of our community,” says Jeeva.

Jeeva has authored two books in Tamil – “Thirunangaigalin samuga valarchi – Thamizhaga arasin pangu” (Social Development of TG and the Role of TN state government) and “Aravanigalum samuga urimaigalum” (Transgender and their rights).

Social worker, counsellor, teacher– what is next?

“As an individual my growth has been satisfactory and I am very happy about it. But, my community has a long way to go. What more I can do for our community’s welfare is the thought that helps me choose my way. I want to become the first TG lawyer in the country,” smiles Jeeva.

Let’s wish her success in her endeavours!

—Shanmuga Priya. R

If you wish to contact Jeeva, please write to trajeewa@gmail.com

PARDADA PARDADI

Great Grand Father and Great Grand Mother

The India NGO Awards is a unique national competition that celebrates and rewards the best non-governmental organization for best practice and successful resource mobilization. Jointly organized by the Resource Alliance and the Rockefeller Foundation, the competition had over 210 organizations that applied for the award. Pardada Pardadi Educational Society (PPES) is one among the fifteen awardees that won in the regional category (North). PPES is also among the three organizations that won the National Award for 2010.

Sam the Pardada

The great grandfather of this movement is Virendra (Sam) Singh, who migrated in the early 60's post his Engineering degree to work in the US with the world leader DuPont, very few Indians could have dreamt of.

Sam's daughters are settled in US, but he lives and breathes at Anupshahr village where he did his schooling. He has seeded a revolution of empowering the girl children. I had the privilege of reporting to him for five years, and I have seen his corporate success and the western affluence – one who will not drink water, if not bottled. Post retirement as South Asia Head of DuPont, Washington should have been his desired destination, but he chose to root himself in Anupshahr.

Back to the roots

Sam started Pardada Pardadi Education Society (PPES) in this rural setting, 12 years ago to address the issue of gender bias in society and to raise rural girls and their families out of their state of poverty. Pardada Pardadi Girls Vocational School (PPGVS) started with 45 children who were from the poorest families of the area that had more than 1200 girl children, who are emancipated from hunger, some from incest, many from exploitation, greed and early motherhood.

PPGVS plans to expand its mission. With support from Airtel and its CSR wing Satya Bharti Foundation, PPGVS has undertaken to build many primary schools in the villages surrounding Anupshahr to educate boys and girls from kindergarten to fifth standard.

Sustainability by Replicability

'A model is only good if it can be replicated. The school therefore aims to become self-sustainable in the next seven years. The school was intentionally designed to serve as a model to be used in other parts of India and other developing countries on how to address issues of gender bias and poverty. Many corporate, well meaning individuals have helped to enhance sustenance, and plans are on for revenue generation for furtherance of the purpose.

Everything Free - Cycles, books, food, clothes and outstanding teaching

The draw of a free education complete with free textbooks and free meals encourages families who might otherwise not send their daughters to school – either for lack of money or for lack of interest – to allow them to get an education.

The girls are further encouraged to attend school regularly through the school's savings plan. In this, every student has a bank account into which 10 rupees is deposited for each day she attends school.



The account is set up jointly in the names of the girl and her mother, and the money is handed over only when the girl passes class tenth examination or at the time of her wedding (if this is after her 18th birthday) or on her 21st birthday. By the time the girl completes her graduation, she would have saved 30,000 rupees.

Academics are taught in the mornings and the school follows the Uttar Pradesh Board syllabus. In 2004, through a grant from the Public Affairs Office of the US Embassy in Delhi, the school set up a computer lab for girls and computer classes were conducted twice a week. In addition to the regular teaching staff, the school also enlisted volunteers to introduce and implement forward-thinking teaching methods and to assist in teaching English as well as other subjects.

Vocational training

During the afternoons, vocational classes are conducted wherein the girls are trained in hand embroidery or stitching. The girls are able to produce fine hand embroidered linen appliqué work, block printing, table cloths, luncheon sets, bed covers and sheets, curtains, and cushion covers.

This vocational training is key in making the school-model self-sustainable as well as practical as the sale of these products funds the running expenses of the school. The training provides the girls' with a



Sam with the girls at Pardada Pardadi Girls Vocational School



"The draw of a free education complete with free textbooks and free meals encourages families who might otherwise not send their daughters to school – either for lack of money or for lack of interest – to allow them to get an education."

marketable skill they can use to support themselves after graduation. Some of the girls have moved to Bangalore to do advance technical training in NTTF.

Livelihoods Guaranteed

The school continues to support its students even after they have completed their graduation by encouraging them pursue higher studies or by guaranteeing them with an employment in an organization. Some return to PPGVS as teachers, some get married, and many start earning a decent income.

Value-Based education

The school strives to expand its services to its girls by including non-academic, non-vocational elements in its curriculum. The value-based education also includes lessons on leadership and personality development, health and hygiene, legal awareness, and ethics. Some of the girls run a moment called 'I am the Change' wherein they re-enroll girls who have been forced by their parents not to attend school. This peer movement has resulted in tremendous reduction in absenteeism.

Cultural programs that are organized once in a month expose the girls to various aspects of Indian culture and also allow them to exhibit their singing and dancing abilities.

Some of the girls have visited US and many have participated in helping other deprived children in India as well as in other countries.

Rags to Pads- Hygiene Outreach

PPES has expanded its mission of development to include community outreach in various areas. These efforts include educational plays by PPGVS students, a toilet construction programme, and health and cataract camps offered to the community.

In July 2008, PPES launched an initiative called 'Rags to Pads' to produce low-cost menstrual pads for local women. As part of this initiative, the organization also trains PPGVS graduates to operate the production and marketing of this business.

PPES hopes that the availability of low-cost sanitary pads will reduce the incidence of vaginal infections and urinary tract infections. Government of India probably followed this to make the Rags to Pads a national movement has now made this scheme.

Communal Harmony

Communities, religions and economic status converge in Pardada Pardadi to enable the hapless girl children to be empowered. If women are empowered, mother India will be more prosperous, and so will Sam.

—S. Deenadayalan

If you wish to contact Sam, please call 011-29542524 or write to info@pardadapardadi.org

HUMBLE MAN, BUT A GREAT SOUL



Venkatraman stands tall for his selflessness



Mr. V. Venkatraman receiving the The Weekend Leader's 'Person of the Year 2011' award from Mr. G. V. Selvam, Vice President, VITF Chennai

The sky is overcast, a cold wind is blowing, and the met department says a cyclone is expected to cross in a few hours. Nature at its awesome best; not bound by season, cruising freely, now moving, now staying still, setting its own time table, and keeping everyone guessing!

Nothing inspires likes nature. Human beings rarely do. But, men like V. Venkatraman are an exception. These are the 'unsung heroes,' the kind of people who would be moved by the sufferings and hardships of others, and then figure out ways to help them.

Venkatraman is The Weekend Leader's 'Person of the Year 2011'. He lives in Erode, a town that lies about 400 km south west of Chennai and has been running a small eatery in the town since last eight years.

Venkatraman is not a wealthy man and has no other business. Like most of us, he has a family to look after. His wife is a yoga teacher and both his daughters are in college. He has little savings.

One would expect a man like him to constantly think of ways to develop his business and make more money. That's what 'normal' people would have done anyway.

But 49-year-old Venkatraman is a different kind of person. He has no such worries. His only concern is to see how he could continue with the Lunch @ Re 1 scheme at his hotel.

For over four years, Venkatraman has been giving lunch every day for about thirty persons at his hotel for just Re 1. The beneficiaries are mostly attendants of poor in-patients from the nearby Government General Hospital, who pay just Re 1 for a meal that is priced at Rs. 40 for other customers.

Venkatraman may have served at least 40,000 Re 1 meals till date. The prices of food grains, oil, spices, and vegetables have gone up many times in the last four years, but the one rupee lunch has remained unaffected.

"For other customers, the price has been revised. Four years ago, the cost of a lunch at our hotel was Rs.

25; now it is Rs. 40," says Venkatraman, who also gives a 20 percent discount for the disabled.

Though he is facing financial difficulties, Venkatraman receives solace from the 'divine blessings'.

"I have the full support of my family in whatever I am doing. My second daughter scored 1085 marks (out of 1200) in her Plus 2 examination. We were unable to admit her in an engineering college, because we could not afford the fees. But, thanks to a person in Ramakrishna Mutt, she got a seat in a reputed engineering college in Chennai. The management has also given her a fee waiver.

"I have reasons to believe that such good things have happened in my life because of the small acts of service to the poor that I have been doing. It gives me great satisfaction," says Venkatraman.

May the likes of Venkatraman increase in this land!

— PC Vinoj Kumar
theweekendleader.com





Big fish, small fish

Conversations team spends a morning with the fisher folk at Ennore to understand their commerce.



It was a quiet, lazy Sunday morning when we set out to Thailamkuppam, a fishing hamlet near Ennore, 24 kilometers north of Chennai Port. The roads were free, and we cruised. No one looked hurried, worried. Men sipped tea by the roadside, women ambled about in their night gowns. At one place we stopped for directions, a woman stood chatting, a parrot perched on her shoulder.

And then, almost suddenly, the scene changed. We had reached the fish market.

It was around 8:30 am. The fisherwomen were going past us with a great sense of purpose, the baskets on their heads spilling with fish, shrimp, and crabs. They looked straight ahead as they walked, and it was obvious that they all had very little time to cash their catch.

We stood there pondering over whom to

start conversing with. It was then that Anjala caught our eye. She stood tall amidst a group of fisher women, and beside her were about 15 baskets of fish, prawns, and crabs spread out. We were told that she was the auctioneer, some kid of local boss woman. She was about to begin the auction, and we wormed our way through the crowd to get a closer look.

While Anjala waited for more baskets to arrive, a few women grew restless. She raised her shrill voice and controlled all of them instantly. She exuded authority, it came to her naturally. She had presence.

She asked us if we had also come to buy fish. When we explained the purpose of our visit, she gladly offered her support. She was happy to talk – all fisherwomen do, it is a professional skill – but Anjala was camera shy. Each time she saw the camera point at her, she would freeze. We let her be, deciding to catch her unawares later.

She started the auction by pointing towards Kadal Azhagi's basket that had mackerel in it. Her first bid for 100 rupees triggered higher bids from vendors. In less than two minutes the first basket was sold for 300 rupees. She reminded me of a shark. An uncharitable comparison perhaps, but she was certainly the big fish in this market.

Anjala handed over the sale money to Kadal Azhagi and got 10 rupees in return. She was a consummate negotiator, this unlettered woman with fire in her eyes.

"Is that all?" I inquired.

"Well, I have 14 more baskets to sell," she replied politely.

She quickly went on to bid the second basket that had prawns. In the rapid fire auction that lasted less than half hour, Anjala had sold all the 15 baskets.

Each of those who had offered their basket for the auction paid Anjala ten rupees and gifted her with four or five fishes. She now had her basket with an assortment of fishes which I presumed was for her consumption.

I was wrong.

She sold her fish for 30 rupees to a vendor and sat calmly with her empty basket under the shade. She smiled at me and signaled me to come closer to her.

"Why did you give away the fish? What will you cook today?" I asked.

"I need money to buy rice. What could I do with fish alone?" she said truthfully.

She added that her family did not like the ration rice provided by the government, and therefore she needed to purchase rice at 30 rupees per kg.

Anjala, 58, lives at Thailamkuppam with her husband and two sons. She has been engaging in auction for over 30 years now. "To engage in this trade, I don't need an investment. All I need is a loud assertive voice," she said with a smile.

Like Anjala, there were four more women who were engaged in auctioning



at the market place, but had not finished their task for the day as yet.

The hustle and bustle in the market was intoxicating. There were women crushing ice, vendors selling tea and juice, and small shops selling snacks, *puris* and *idlis*.

The fisherwomen were being themselves, least dissuaded by our presence. Desa Thiyaagi approached us along with her friend Malliga and requested us to take their picture. Seating herself on her steel basket, she said: "My husband and my son leave for fishing early in the morning along with three other fishermen. I auction the catch in this market regularly. I could sell the prawns for only 500 rupees today. This money would not be enough to meet the fuel expense as well as to pay for the three other fishermen," she lamented.

"Our day starts as soon as the boats arrive from the sea. At times it is very early in the morning. On such occasions, I have my breakfast in one of the tiffin shops here," added Thiyaagi.

The fisherwomen who had bought the fish at the auction put them in their baskets and immediately bought one or two measures of crushed ice to cover the fish with. They

then settled for some tea before they set off to sell the catch.

Latha, our contact and a NGO worker, gave us a brief background of the fishing community living here.

"There are over 3000 families living across the Ennore coast, and in this market alone there are about 70 fish vendors. The present generation does not venture into fishing as most of them are educated and prefer to work as labour in the neighbouring industries that pay a wage of 200 rupees a day," she quipped.

"Post tsunami, 350 women self-help groups, each consisting of 15 members, was provided financial assistance by the government as well as NGOs. The fisherwomen used their micro-credit loans to invest in fish



vending or small enterprise. Due to depletion in the fish population, the fisherfolk could not repay their loans. This led them to borrow money from private moneylenders at an interest rate of 3 to 5 percent. With the recent Thane cyclone, the catch has further reduced. They continue to struggle to meet their daily needs," she sighed.

After taking a walk around the market place, we entered a building which had stalls for vendors. There were two rows, twelve stalls on either side. Each of the stalls had granite slabs and was neatly laid out. "We need to pay ten rupees to the stall owner every day, no matter whether we have sales or not. The shelf life of the fish is only four to five hours without ice. During summer the crushed

ice costs more, and so I give away the unsold fish to a dry fish

vendor," said Packiam.

Most of the women in the market were well turned out in colourful saris. Samyuktha was seated outside the market with an *aruvamanai* (a traditional Indian cutter) cheerfully attending to her customers who were waiting to have their fish cleaned and cut. She wore torn gloves smeared with blood.

"I do not have enough money to invest in fish. I earn ten rupees for every kilo of fish that I cut and clean. On an average I am able to make 50 to 70 rupees a day. Being single, this is more than enough for me," she said.

A few fish vendors were seen transporting the fish that they had bought at the auction to the nearby market. "We can sell these at a higher price in the city market. Today being a Sunday, our regular customers would visit us," said Kala.

We expressed to Latha our desire to interact with the boatmen, and she led us to the seashore at Nethaji Nagar, a neighbouring hamlet. Steering our way through the boats and catamarans, we noticed Amar and Dharmaraj removing mackerel and sardine from the fishing net. "We just returned from the sea. These

fishes would fetch us only 200 rupees. My wife will take them to the market for sale and would give me 50 rupees in the evening," said a disappointed Amar.

Narayanan, Ramesh, and Masilamani, who had also returned from the sea, joined us in the conversation and complained about their catch as well.

Few children from the neighbourhood were swimming in the sea, and the men were watching over them. "Our community children learn to swim at a very early age and all of them attend school," said Narayanan with pride.

Ten-year-old Kattabomman was found walking a crab at the shore. He had tied it to a thin string and played with it as if it was a toy. We were awe struck by his creativity.

Not wanting to interrupt his play, we quietly moved away from the shore.

—Marie Banu

Photos: AK



SPURRING WOMEN TO Join Agriculture

Women on their way to realize the vision of 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan'

Panchdamia village is on the brink of a paradigm shift in its growth and position, as the village has set the record of establishing the first Women Kisan Club in Bihar. Mamta Mahila Kisan Club has endeavoured to bring women out of the confines in which centuries of traditions had kept them. It is sheer apathy that in a country where a woman is worshipped as deity, she is discouraged from joining agriculture because it is a male dominated area and transgressing it is equal to a sin.

Some 20-odd kms off Hajipur (Bihar) is an indication that they would soon surpass men in male-dominated agro business. The club started with 25 women in 2006 and now 500 women from 12 adjoining villages come under the umbrella of Mamata Mahila Kisan.

When these women picked up the hoe for the first time, all the villagers rebuked them for treading on a man's domain. Many women in the club asserted that initially they dithered about the decision because it was daunting to confront the comments. But, today they are proud of being a part of Mamta Mahila Kisan Club and

this sense of hurt has strengthened them instead of deterring.

Apart from housekeeping, they are doing innovative and modern farming, setting up examples for others to follow. These women have persuaded themselves that it is just what they had intended to do shunning all the obstacles on their way. A substantial number of women are engaged in intensive farming ranging from seedbed preparation, weeding, horticulture and fruit cultivation to a series of post-harvest crop processing activities like cleaning and drying vegetables for domestic and market use.

Women of the club face hurdles when it comes to availing credit facilities, because most of their spouses are migrant labourers. So, the club now wants the government to provide them with credit cards. "With our husbands not around, it is difficult to get money directly from banks if the account is not in our name," said the president of the club, Shashi Bala Devi.

Every woman in the Mamta Mahila Kisan club unanimously said that it was really tough to manage farming and home at the same time, but they decided

to move forward, despite all ordeals, in order to look after their children and to utilize the spare time. A few stated that they were illiterate and after joining the club learnt how to sign. Flanked by their hard work and sincerity they have excelled in skills of farming. The club promotes organic farming that has provided them with a sustainable and economically viable model of agriculture production.

In order to become the spine of their household they thought to come out of their veil, breaking all the boundaries of enormous odds. However, limited rights and access to arable land further limits livelihood options and increases financial strain on women, especially in female-headed households.

The club has collaboration with an NGO Jagriti Kala Kendra which provides training for multi-layer cropping patterns, as well as time and space management. The club unfolds tremendous opportunities for its members as every year it organises Kisan Mela in the month of January, which is almost a spectacle for the villagers. During this time, the club's women farmers render their hard work in

the form of unique products by bringing them to the Kisan Mela. Awards are given by Mamta Mahila Kisan Club, lauding women for their achievements in cultivating extraordinary products.

Although it is a cherished sight to see women farmers working on fields and making a mark in society, they are still fighting for their rights and identity. On one hand the Government is knitting dreams of second green revolution, but on the other hand it is reluctant towards their demands of constructing a market complex and providing a training centre in Panchdamia.

Being a woman at field never struck them as an oddity. At the end of the day they have to deliver, and there are no concessions on that front. If the club is working so relentlessly to increase the participation of women, then it is the prime duty of government to pay heed to its demands because these women are vying with men in a way to realize the vision of 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan'.

—Rupa
Asian College of Journalism



"Although it is a cherished sight to see women farmers working on fields and making a mark in society, they are still fighting for their rights and identity."

My Garbage Is My Responsibility

“The best way for an individual to help the waste issue in their city is to manage their waste at source.”

If you thought that manure and compost were farmers’ terms, irrelevant to apartment-life in the cities, then here is ‘daily dump’ to prove you wrong. Daily Dump is a unique project that was started in Bangalore in 2006, as a culmination of ideas from varied discourses. As a brand, daily dump is involved in developing a range of composting solutions, enabling common people to contribute their part in keeping the earth healthy.

Composting, as a process is inevitable because it is nature’s way of recycling nutrients. So, how is this going to benefit us? “Composting prevents the production of methane – a greenhouse gas produced when organic waste is allowed to decompose in landfills. Also, there is substantial research showing that harmful emissions like methane can be contained by scientifically managing organic

waste and converting them to compost”, explains Navneeth Raghavan, an environment enthusiast, besides being a freelance landscape consultant and teaching at Delhi School of Economics.

Compost increases organic matter in soils, reduces water demands of plants and trees, makes clay soils airy so they drain and gives sandy soils body to hold moisture. On the other hand, composting at our homes reduces the amount of waste that we throw out.

Managing wastes is seen as someone else’s responsibility,” laments Navneeth while acknowledging that the municipal authorities cannot be accused of inaction because they are not able to handle the scale of garbage on a daily basis. “This is where realization of individual responsibility can make a big difference. The best way for an individual to help the waste issue in their city is to manage their waste at source,” he adds.

Daily dump provides a range of outdoor composting products that are convenient to use in any of our homes. And, for those of us who wonder what could be done with the compost so produced, daily dump has an answer to that too—the compost will be purchased by them.

Interestingly, daily dump also offers community composting solutions. Therefore, families living in flats can embrace this collective endeavor towards better waste management. There are two methods prescribed – (1) A number of Leave- Pots are lined up (or distributed among the landscape area) and serve as the community composting facility, wherein you fill one by one and (2) A mix of Leave- Pots and Patta Kambhas, some are lined and some distributed to serve as the community composting facility.

“10 flats at an average can produce around 12 kilograms of compost a month after the first harvest that takes 90 days. It is very simple and the best way to promote it is to explain how easy it is to do,” smiles Navneeth who has sold about 2000 units of compost since 2007. Like they say, every drop in the ocean counts!

Ten minutes a day is all it takes. For those who find it difficult to manage, daily dump offers a service plan where all one has to do is just dump. Daily dump has trodden the path of simplifying things so that the ultimate purpose is met – a cleaner and greener neighbourhood.

The simplicity and usefulness were not enough for the idea to catch up with the people. “Awareness has been the most challenging aspect,” says Navneeth. Comparing Chennai and Bangalore can give us an idea of the role played by awareness. In fact, segregation can reduce the work at landfills which due to lack of proper management can create inconvenience to the people living in the locality. Remember how the dumping ground around Perungudi stinks?

Talking of awareness, Daily dump’s website is informative, user friendly, and allows readers to comprehend the difference every individual can make. The members of daily dump are also clear that daily dump is not the only solution to waste management at our homes and apartments. “Composting can be done in different ways and one can choose the method he or she is comfortable with. Least, one can take the effort to give the segregated waste to someone who will do the composting,” informs Navneeth.

In short, daily dump is about doing your bit. All that matters is what you are willing to do!

—Shanmuga Priya. R



“Ten minutes a day is all it takes. For those who find it difficult to manage, daily dump offers a service plan where all one has to do is just dump.”

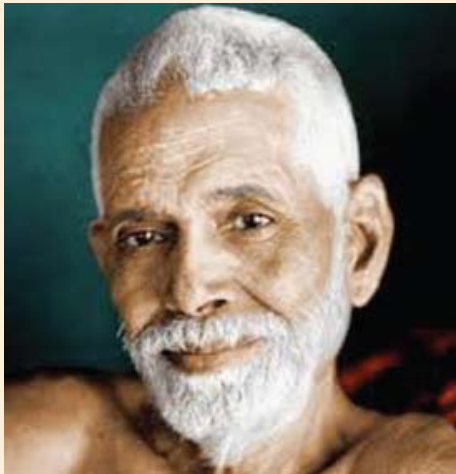


Inspiring Quotes from Ramana Maharishi

Ramana Maharishi was one of India's greatest Spiritual Teachers of the Twentieth Century. At an early age he had a profound experience in which he became acutely aware of the mortality of the body. This led on to a profound insight that He was not the Body, but spirit. After this experience he became absorbed in deep meditations, in which he began to experience his real self, which transcended ego. With a glimpse of this higher consciousness Ramana lost interest in worldly life and travelled to the holy Mountain of Arunachala where he spent many years in meditation and teachings seekers who were attracted by his divine personality and aura of peace.

Ramana Maharshi taught seekers to silence the mind and try to discover the source of their thoughts. He taught the goal was to try and reach beyond their ego bound state and answer the question "Who am I?" In the beginning this is a difficult task but eventually the power of the ego will be diminished by the power of the heart.

Here are a few inspiring quotes:



"The mind is a bundle of thoughts. The thoughts arise because there is the thinker. The thinker is the ego. The ego, if sought, will automatically vanish. The ego and the mind are the same. The ego is the root-thought from which all other thoughts arise."

"The potter's wheel goes on turning even after the potter has ceased to turn it

because the pot is finished. In the same way, an electric fan goes on revolving for some minutes after we switch off the current. The prarabdha - predestined karma - which created the body will make it go through whatever activities it was meant for. But the jnani - the knower - goes through all these activities without the notion that he is the doer of them. It is hard to understand how this is possible. The illustration generally given is that the jnani performs action in some such way as a child that is roused from sleep to eat eats but does not remember next morning that it ate."

"Whatever the means, the destruction of the sense 'I' and 'mine' is the goal, and as these are interdependent, the destruction of either of them causes the destruction of the other; therefore in order to achieve that state of Silence which is beyond thought and word, either the path of knowledge which removes the sense of 'I' or the path of devotion which removes the sense of 'mine', will suffice. So there is no doubt that the end of the paths of devotion and knowledge is one and the same."

"Reality is simply the loss of the ego. Destroy the ego by seeking its identity. It will automatically vanish and reality will shine forth by itself. This is the direct method."

There is no greater mystery than this, that we keep seeking reality though in fact we are reality. We think that there is something hiding reality and that this must be destroyed before reality is gained. How ridiculous! A day will dawn when you will laugh at all your past efforts. That which will be on the day you laugh is also here and now."

"Realization is getting rid of the delusion that you haven't realized."

Only if one knows the truth of love, which is the real nature of Self, will the strong entangled knot of life be untied. Only if one attains the height of love will liberation be attained. Such is the heart of all religions. The experience of Self is only love, which is seeing only love, hearing only love, feeling only love, tasting only love and smelling only love, which is bliss."

—Excerpted from Sri Ramana Maharishi teachings

Gratitude – the purpose in growing social entrepreneurship

What really is the purpose of being a social entrepreneur? When they have to be CEO, manager, assistant, PR, legal, accounts, etc., or all in one most of the times and wear multiple hats how does a budding social entrepreneur understand what exactly should be driving him/her to leave other possibilities and work on benefitting the society? If there is one thing that has always given us the answer to this query, it is as goes in this parable:

It was time for the monsoon rains to begin, and a very old man was digging pits in his garden.

"What are you doing?" His neighbour asked.

"Planting mango trees," was the reply.

"Do you expect to eat mangoes from those trees?"

"No, I won't live long enough for that. But, others will. It occurred to me the other day that all my life I have enjoyed mangoes from trees planted by other people. This is my way of showing them my gratitude."

(Sampath. J.M. story 95 *Discovery*—3rd edition, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998)

When an entrepreneur works on a business idea there is clear clarity on the profits to be gained within the shortest time possible.



But, when the social entrepreneur works on an idea, benefit to posterity assumes prime importance. Everything else falls secondary to it. This is fuelled by farsightedness and a passion to do all that can be done to see a situation that is different from what it is. The thoughts of gain and loss do not come until the goal is reached. It may call for serious levels of efforts and sacrifices from self; yet the journey continues.

None of us in this world are independent in reality. If each of us is alive, enjoying all that the world can offer, it is the efforts of many that go behind it. We are all interdependent. So what do we

offer in return for the world that is going to be? Unless we don't realize this interdependence and experience a deep sense of gratitude within, our efforts at being a social entrepreneur cannot be sustained. While a business thrives on the profits and losses it makes, social entrepreneurship thrives on the feelings of gratitude and a deep felt need to offer back to posterity what one enjoyed, and the dream that one would like to see realized that would benefit the others in times to come.

Just like how we cannot plant a seed and keep digging the ground everyday to see whether the seed has germinated, social

A Series on Growing -Reflections for Deep Change

entrepreneur's efforts too may take long to break the ground and show results. But, the nurturance efforts need to patiently continue. There are some associates who come to tell me within a year or two of working on what they said was their passion at one point of time that they are bored and want to leave to try other grounds. I wonder what the sustaining power of each of these people is who want to approach social entrepreneurship as though it is a favor they are doing to those who take their service. Actually, we should be thankful to those who let us serve them by doing something that will support the posterity. It actually does not just fulfill their lives but fulfills our life.

The sense of gratitude enables us to leave behind something that is beyond our lifetime. It stretches and expands our capacity. It relieves us of the position of being a consumer in life to also be a contributor. While for a human immortality seems very important, it seems to be understood more at a materialistic level of hoarding, accumulation, building businesses, and making a name. It is hardly understood as

giving, sharing, sustaining and building the world tomorrow that would be a place one would dream to live in.

Social entrepreneurship is beyond profession, employment, business. It is a process of fulfillment added to each of these. It requires a deep sense of gratitude and a willingness to share the rich big world and happiness with those yet to come.

Points for Reflection:

- List the blessings you have received in life so far.
- Who is responsible for the tomorrow that I dream?
- What are the resources that I have with me that can be of use to the world that I live in?
- What in me will make me feel I should leave something for tomorrow?
- In what way can I show my gratitude to all the people who have made my life on this earth comfortable?
- What is it that I am leaving behind for the generations to come?

—J.M.Sampath & Kalpana Sampath



Photos: AK

A little whiff of Dastkari craft

Craft fairs and Handloom expos have come of age. They have nearly perfected the art of public relations, media liaison and free advertising in addition to their Banya roots, to such an extent that they manage it seamlessly these days. The fact that they draw crowds isn't too much to write about - not after that much coverage anyway. So when we heard about a little-publicized, arts and crafts exhibition from a well-known society that promotes handicraft, we decided to take a look. Believe us, when we say we were surprised.

Given that it was a warm Saturday afternoon and the Kalakshetra grounds don't really offer too many options to keep you cool, there were a surprisingly high number of visitors to the sixty five stalls. Organized by Dastkar, a society that has been promoting traditional crafts to make sure they aren't lost as well as to help artisans make a living, the exhibition turned out to be a treat on two fronts - visually and economically. From low seating coir-woven Kashmiri *modas* to shawls of all colours and origin, *kurtas* of any weave imaginable to delicate wood carvings that could pass for antiques or toys, they had them all. And their price tags didn't make us flinch in the least, "They won't scare you away,"

explained Sameer, who is a traditional Rajasthani Handloom craftsman.

"All the prices are fixed by the co-operative so that they are competitive, yet leave us enough of a margin to make these (trips) profitable," he adds.

Having set up shop in the institute's leafy campus in

Thiruvananthapuram for close to ten days, most of the craftspeople who double up as salespeople say that they have quite enjoyed their experience with the customers

who have come, "On the first four days, only people who were coming to the institute would stop by and maybe look



though," says Darshana, who was minding a clutch of intricately woven Kashmiri Pashminas, "But once the word spread from there, every weekday evening has been packed." And the weekends? "You can see for yourself," she said, gesturing around at the considerable numbers milling around.

Though the Dastkar society and their co-operative shop are doing steady business in Delhi, handicraft makers from villages across Central and Eastern India strongly stand by the fact that these travelling exhibitions are where they have their best sales. "Back in my village, every house has five or six of these (wooden stools) that we sit on," says Alam, who hails from Behrampore, "But outside Bengal, the demand is so huge and people genuinely like it enough to pay for it. This keeps our faith in the fact that our craft still has some relevance in this world (today)," she concludes philosophically. With the advent of an export license now, most of these craftspeople have gotten a whole new market to expand to, one that's as big as it can possibly get. But export, import or just sales, it's all in a days work, they agree; after all, they're just doing what they know best.

—Ramya

"All the prices are fixed by the co-operative so that they are competitive, yet leave us enough of a margin to make these (trips) profitable."



“I am first a human being, and this controls the writer in me.”

Sivasankari tells Marie Banu what triggered her to write on social problems.



Sivasankari is a popular Tamil writer and activist. She is exceptionally sensitive to issues that confront contemporary society and has carved a niche for herself in the Tamil literary world over the last four decades. Her works include more than 36 novels, 48 short novels, 150 short stories, 15 travelogues, 7 collections of articles, one talking book, 4 volumes of literary research book, 2 volumes of anthologies, and biographies of Smt. Indira Gandhi and Sri. G.D. Naidu.

Her stories and articles have been published in prominent Tamil periodicals and many have been translated into English and other Indian languages. Her novels on Drug Abuse, Alcoholism and Old Age Problem, written after many years of research and authentic spadework, have won a lot of acclaim.

She is the first writer to have narrated her story through video and audiotapes. Her project ‘Knit India through literature’ aimed at substantiating the idea of unity in diversity through literature. This project attracted national attention and was acknowledged by Sahitya Akademi as a ‘benchmark’.

She is a recipient of numerous awards such as Kasturi Srinivasan Award, Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiyar Award, Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad Award and Tamil Annai Award. The Library of Congress has seventy-two titles of her works.

In an exclusive interview, Sivasankari tells Marie Banu what triggered her to write on social problems.

While most of the writers author fiction, what triggered you to write on social problems?

I am first a human being, and this controls the writer in me. Being human, each one of us is indebted to the society.

I believe that one need not be from the government or a non-governmental organization to engage in social work. A person in your family may not be a drug addict, but this issue affects you in some way or the other. If your friend’s son is a drug addict or your next door neighbour is an alcoholic—you cannot be keeping quiet or gossiping about it. You need to do something from your individual level.

It was therefore very natural for me to think and write about social problems, human relations, and interpersonal relationships.

Your novels have brought into limelight issues like drug abuse, alcoholism, and old age. How did you feel when you learnt that your writing has made an impact on people’s lives?

Definitely, the awareness on this issue has tremendously spread and engulfed. Not everybody knows everything at the first instance. We all learn, and once we learn we internalize and practise it.

I myself did not know that alcoholism was a disease. Alcoholism is a problem in almost every alternate household, and people thought that it had something to do with willpower or religious beliefs. But, alcoholism is like diabetes which requires treatment. When this awareness set into me, it was a revelation. I wanted to pass it on and share it with my readers.

At which age did you start writing and what was your first article on?

I was 25 when I penned my first story ‘*avargal pesattum*’. It was about a childless woman.

It is customary to do the *Kaappu* function on the 7th or 9th day after a child is born. On this occasion, certain communities (not sure if this is still practised) ask a childless woman to bathe and dress a grinding stone imagining it to be her child.

When I went through this incident, it hurt me very much. I believed that it emotionally affected the woman even more, and the insensitive attitude angered me. The older generation did have a reason for doing this, but I felt it was barbaric and demeaning.

Other than novels, you have also been writing travelogues. Which of the places did you cherish most?

Every country has something very peculiar and very typical of that country. I don’t think one can compare it with another. Each country has its own beauty, and its pluses and minuses. If you want see only the pluses, it is impossible.

I have done many international travels and I have enjoyed all of my travel – whether it is the Egyptian deserts or alps in Switzerland or fjords in Norway. I am a person who would go with an open mind and accept whatever I see for its face value. I will never tend to compare it as five fingers are not the same in my own hand.

Reading habit amongst the youngsters today has declined due to electronic media. What are your thoughts on this?

I would say that the reading habits have not declined, but instead changed to a different medium. Previously it was physical books, but now people surf the internet. They may not choose fiction reading, but instead knowledge oriented articles.

Thirty years ago people had only books to read as they had no other diversion. But today, we have the television, cell phone, and internet. People are diverted from one to another and this is the price you have to pay for modernization and development.

A lot of youngsters spend hours on the internet, and of course many who waste their time on facebook and others. Anything used properly is good, but if you are going to indulge in it without any time limit, it is a waste!

What has been your learning while interviewing stalwart writers across India while doing the project — Knit India through literature?

First of all, I have traveled crisscross India. I am sure that I am one among the handful of people who have seen India the way I have seen. I have interacted with almost all the intellectual giants of various languages. Knowing about their perception, ideas on how they have succeeded, their values and their challenges, has been a great experience.

I learn from everything that I experience. Over a period of 16 years, I met about 100 senior writers from different language backgrounds and have had intense discussions and interviews with them. I looked into the region of their state through the eyes of the writer — their people; literature, women; youth; problems, etc. It would be difficult for me explain in a couple of sentences about what I have learnt.

Editorial

**Latha Suresh
Marie Banu**