

# Conversations

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Photo: Marie Banu

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**From the Editor**

**Dear Friend,**

Life is not just about acquiring. It is about giving and sharing.

Both the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea receive water from river Jordan, but yet are very different. The saltiness in the Dead sea is ten times more than any ocean, hence there is no life in the

waters. But the Sea of Galilee is pretty, resplendent with rich, colorful marine life. Its been said, River Jordan flows into the Sea of Galilee and flows out which is why the sea is healthy vibrant, and teeming with marine life. The Dead Sea is far below the mean sea level and water flows in from river Jordan, but does not flow out.

We all need to be like the Sea of Galilee. We are fortunate to have wealth, knowledge, love and respect. But, if we never learn to give, we could all end up like the Dead Sea.

The changemakers featured here emulated this idea perfectly.  
Happy Reading!

—PN Subramanian



to learn • to heal • to raise  
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## India's Youngest Patent Holder: Hridayeshwar Singh Bhati

**H**ridayeshwar Singh Bhati, a child genius from Jaipur, is India's youngest patent holder at the age of 9. His invention, a Circular Chess for 2,3,4,6 players also made him world's youngest disabled Patent holder. Hridayeshwar suffers from Duchene Muscular Dystrophy. It is a disorder that stops the brain from sending signals to the muscles, eventually leading to muscle degeneration. But this boy didn't let his disability become his weakness.

Inception of idea, to design a multi-player chess game began in his mind in 2010. He was playing chess with his father Mr. Sarowar Singh Bhati (recipient of the Indira Priyadarshini National Award in mathematics) when a friend came in and asked if he could join in too. As a regular game of chess allows only two players, Hridayeshwar decided to make a chessboard where more than two people could play at a time. This led to two-year research and this young mind came up with 199 ideas for his unique chessboard. "But every plan had one drawback or another. I wanted a design that confirmed the established rules of the game", said Hridayeshwar, a Class IV student. Finally in 2011, the 200th idea designed in six months, satisfied him. His father (a



renowned maths teacher) assisted him in resolving the geometrical complications. Hridayeshwar's chessboard is circular and a metre in diameter, where half-a-dozen players can play in teams of two or three players each. It has 228 playing squares instead of 64 in the traditional two-player board. The colours of the squares are regular, alternate light and dark and the pieces are divided into six

colours, set to move in standard manner. All sets of pieces are separated by non-playing red rectangles between the respective rooks. This enables the board to keep the traditional moves intact. The design was sent to Kolkata based patent controller of Union government in July 2011. The patent certificate was issued on March 23, 2012, triggering celebration in the Bhati household.

Hridayeshwar found his idol in great Stephen Hawkins. "Great Stephen Hawkins has given rare achievement to world, despite hardship," quotes Hridayeshwar. He also aspires to become a scientist like him. Despite his disabilities, he remains happy and loves to keep others happy too. His achievement has been included in case studies of management institutions to motivate and inspire future corporate leaders. He is a strongest contender of many National and International disability awards such as Helen Keller Award, Mphasis Universal Design Award, and Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment disability awards.

Hridayeshwar often quoted as "Wonder Boy" and "Mini Stephen Hawking" is really an inspiration for all of us. He teaches us that troubles and obstacles are part of life, but we should not let them influence the course of our life. We should never lose hope and let the difficulties overpower our mind and soul.

Thinkers bin Team salutes the efforts and courage of this young genius. We wish him a great and successful life. May he achieve all his goals and continue to be an inspiration for all of us.

—Source: thinkersbin.com

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



# “I respect what I do!”

“Among the few physically challenged who got trained, only two of them have taken up the vocation seriously. It is an independent choice. I am happy that I have taught them the skill.”

It is not quite often that we come across a person who has emerged unscathed from all the obstacles that she had to face to realise her respect for self. Dhanalakshmi alias Dhanam is one. At 33 years, she runs a tailoring centre in Vandavasi. And this centre speaks volumes of her perseverance and hard work.

Dhanam was born normal as any kid, but fell prey to polio at the age of 5. “I crawl everywhere like a child,” she remarks quirkily.

With five siblings around her, she thought she was taken good care of in the family. But, the scenes changed soon as she was left with her maternal grandmother. “There are a lot of times that I have felt isolated. Yet, I was helpless,” she says.

Dhanam had always wanted to go to school and study. Her grandmother, her boon of support, carried her every day to school and brought her back home on time, so that she could spend more hours in the evening to study. However, this did not last longer. She had to discontinue school after eighth standard as her grandmother could no longer carry her to school. But, Dhanam was determined not to idle at home sighting disability as a reason. “I wanted to do something,” says a poignant Dhanam.

One of her friends was learning tailoring at a nearby institute and Dhanam decided to join the classes with her friend. With no regard to talent or interest, the only fact that she was crippled made her teachers think that she was ineligible to learn. “I did not see any point in enquiring more such centres, because they were all profuse with more such teachers,” recalls Dhanam, who finally decided to learn from her friend. Every evening, her friend would come to her house right after her classes and teach her all that she taught during the day. This again, had to come to an end with her friend’s marriage. “I was left alone again. This feeling really kills and drains all your positive energy. I was directionless again,” says Dhanam.

One day, as Dhanam passed by a provisional store on her street, a woman named Geetha came by and enquired about her. When Dhanam said that she loved tailoring, yet nobody came forward to teach her, Geetha suggested a place where she can stay and take tailoring lessons, and also promised to buy her a sewing machine.

Soon, Dhanam enrolled for a three-month course and resided at a Home in Thiruvannamalai. The course was extended for another three months, and on completion she worked for three years earning 2000 rupees a month.

Feeling equipped, confident

and independent, Dhanam started looking out for better job options. “Nobody employed me. No one was even ready to test my ability,” says Dhanam recollecting the disappointment she faced when she approached several companies seeking employment.

To her luck, Paroupakar Trust at Vandavasi offered her an opportunity. Dhanam was asked to train young girls in tailoring and for a year and a half she kept herself totally engaged here. “I liked being

*The Social Entrepreneurship programme at CSIM gave me the confidence to establish my own tailoring centre.*

busy,” smiles Dhanam, “It was here that I got to know about CSIM through Ms Ujala Begum. CSIM showed me what it is to plan and achieve. Jothi Sir, Latha Madam, Rosy Madam—these are names I think of when I begin each day,”

remembers Dhanam adding that “The Social Entrepreneurship programme gave me the confidence to establish my own tailoring centre.”

As the adage goes, all good things happen together. The Life Unit from the Home, where Dhanam learnt tailoring, agreed to provide funds to meet the room rent and machinery costs. Thus, she established the tailoring centre in March 2012.

How does she feel now? How is she looked at? “There are certain things that never change. Even now, when I go out, I feel isolated and looked down upon. That moment, I will not feel like

saying anything. Today, my family members approach me only when they need my help. People around you are so opportunistic,” she remarks.

The tailoring centre did not garner success soon after it came into being. Attracting students was a huge task, more so when the teacher is a physically challenged person like Dhanam. From 1 to 5 members initially, the centre now trains 10 members at a time. She did not restrict classes only for the disabled. She welcomed anyone who aspired to learn tailoring, and did not charge the disabled any fee.

Dhanam wanted this chance to be used optimally by them. “Among the few physically challenged who got trained, only two of them have taken up the vocation seriously. It is an independent choice. I am happy that I have taught them the skill,” quips Dhanam.

Dhanam’s future plans are simple. She wants more people to benefit from her tailoring centre, especially the disabled. She opines that few government incentives and benefits that are available does not reach people who are at the bottom of the socio economic ladder. Accessibility and respect are two crucial things to help people like Dhanam lead independent lives. How further we are looking at is a question we all know the answers to.

—Shanmuga Priya.T







It seems to be a widely-shared lament that with the rapid spread of modern education, time-honoured values are quickly disappearing from our personal and collective lives. This may not be a mere coincidence because modern education focuses mainly on the cognitive or intellectual development of children, paying relatively little attention to nurturing their affective or emotional intelligence. VITAL is an initiative that aims at making value education an integral part of a student's life, with an interesting model for teachers to adopt.

Various efforts have been made in the past to promote value education in schools. The results of these have been mixed. Overall, they have not been able to stem the perceived erosion of values in society. Some schools teach 'Moral Science' or 'Life Skills' or 'Civics', packaged as a separate subject, but, in many cases, neither teachers nor students take the subject very seriously. It is often regarded as an extra frill, a 'subsidiary', an add-on, and as simply an unavoidable burden. It languishes at the periphery of the curriculum. Teaching values in this compartmentalised way has been found to be rather ineffective, and sometimes the entire exercise is generally reduced to sanctimonious preaching.

Governmental authorities seem to have woken up to the magnitude and scale of our moral decline, recognizing the role that education can play to help remedy matters in this regard. In October 2012, the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry requested the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) to resume moral and value-based education at the elementary school level. In the same month, the Union Human Resource Development Minister announced plans to focus on moral education in order to promote positive values among the country's youth. In December 2012, provoked by a massive agitation in the wake of a rape of a girl in Delhi, the Prime Minister's Office directed the Human Resource Development Ministry to give greater stress on promoting value education in schools.

Recognising both the lack of effective value education in schools as well as the importance of it, in late 2012 a group of

## Weaving Values Into Teaching: THE VITAL APPROACH

volunteers at Anandashram, a charitable organization based in Kanhangad, Kerala, launched an innovative initiative, called VITAL — which stands for Value-Integrated Teaching and Learning. VITAL seeks to make value education an integral part of the existing school curriculum without requiring it to be treated as a separate subject. Recognizing that the curriculum is already so tightly packed that many schools might not have the time for an additional time-slot for value education, VITAL proposes a simple solution — teachers of various subjects can extrapolate

the more than 80 positive values that the NCERT has suggested be made a core component of school education. The unique feature of the VITAL approach is that it does not require teaching values as a separate subject. Instead, it seeks to integrate value education into the existing curriculum. This it does by identifying one or the other of the 80 values highlighted by the NCERT in each lesson or chapter in school textbooks, which teachers can convey to their students in the form of a value-based message as part of their regular classroom instruction.

This message is to be crafted in such a way that it resonates with the students' own lives and experiences. To make sure that this does not interfere with the main teaching work or distract students from ongoing class instruction, conveying and reflecting on the short value-based message is to be limited to just a minute or two. This may not be sufficient for a detailed discussion with students but it is likely that even a short, crisp message of this sort, sent out in every class, will have an indelible positive impact on the students' minds, attitudes and behaviour. This can go a long way in helping students become more appreciative of their interconnectedness with all beings, animate as well as inanimate, and kindling, in a non-obtrusive and non-invasive manner, their innate humanity. It can also help make the teachers become more aware of the links they can draw between academics and ethics, between their lectures and key moral values, so that their work can contribute to the emotional, in addition to the intellectual, nurturing of their students, rather than remaining simply an academic exercise.

### Identifying Values From Textbooks

Currently, the VITAL team is working on identifying key values and value-based lessons that can be culled out from chapters in textbooks that are recommended by various educational boards. This effort is being supplemented with inputs provided by a number of school teachers and trainee teachers with whom the VITAL team has been interacting over the last several months through discussions and workshops in various places in Karnataka and Kerala.

The VITAL team plans to host the material that it is generating on an Internet portal so that teachers and others across the country can freely access and use it. Of course, the values and value-based messages that the VITAL team has drawn



key positive values from their daily classroom lessons and relay to their students a short value-based message to enable the latter to draw lessons from them that are related to their own lives. In this way, students can be inspired, a VITAL volunteer explains, to move from 'Me to We', to realise and respect the interdependence of all forms of life, including their own.

### Methodology

VITAL sees itself as an experiment in trying to weave into the teaching process

***"The VITAL team has identified a number of values in various chapters in textbooks used at different levels that can be made the subject of a brief value-based message each time a teacher takes a class."***





from chapters in various textbooks are not the only ones that can be extracted from the same material. Teachers may be able to derive other values and value-based messages from the same texts, although they are free to use the ideas developed by the VITAL team if they want.

#### VITAL Methodology: Some Examples

As mentioned above, the VITAL team has identified a number of values in various chapters in textbooks used at different levels that can be made the subject of a brief value-based message each time a teacher takes a class. It may appear that while drawing values from textbooks for the social sciences and humanities is not difficult, this may not be the case with textbooks used for subjects like Mathematics and the 'hard sciences'. But this is not really so. Even in these subjects, it is possible to imaginatively draw out key values and send out positive value-based messages to students.

Below are some examples to illustrate how lessons in textbooks for every subject provide ample scope for values to be identified and for value-based messages to be developed and conveyed to students.

When a Biology textbook talks of the caterpillar's struggle, starting from its being wrapped up in a cocoon until it finally turns into a butterfly, one value that the teacher can extrapolate from this and embody in a value-based message is of the need for determined effort for success in life. In a lesson on plant germination, the teacher can identify 'helpfulness' as a value, asking her students to reflect on the parallels between the sun, water, soil and the air all helping the seed to turn into a plant and the help rendered by different people to an individual to enable him to develop his latent potential. In a chapter on osmosis, which talks about water passing from a region of high-water concentration through a semi-permeable membrane to a region of low-water concentration, the teacher can identify 'empathy' as a value and suggest that the rich can share some of their wealth or other possessions with the poor.

When a Physics book discusses how magnets attract iron filings, the teacher can identify 'attraction' as a positive value in human affairs, and ask her students to reflect on the similarities between a magnet and a person with positive qualities to whom others are instinctively drawn. In a lesson that deals with capacitors that store electric charge and release it when necessary, the teacher can identify 'planning for the future' as a value and say



a few sentences about a new savings' scheme to help parents save for their children's higher education.

When a Chemistry textbook deals with the bonding of chemicals to form a new substance, the teacher could identify 'bonding' or 'cooperation' as the key value and mention in passing how cooperative team-work among human beings is necessary for their collective welfare.

When a Mathematics lesson discusses parallel lines, the teacher can draw out a value-based lesson by remarking that just as two parallel lines never meet but, yet, run smoothly while facing each other, so, too, in life one comes across people who think very differently from oneself, and one can learn to accept them and to live harmoniously with them. In a lesson on circles, the teacher can point out that just as every point on the circumference of a circle is equidistant from the circle's centre, so, too, in a democracy everyone is, at least theoretically, equal. Or, she could mention that just as from the centre of the circle one can get a 360 degree view all around, so, too, when considering doing something important it is helpful to have a complete, or 360 degree, perspective on it by properly weighing all the pros and cons of the matter.

In a chapter in an English grammar textbook that relates the story of a monkey cleverly managing to escape from a crocodile by using his presence of mind,

the teacher could identify 'mindfulness' as a key value and say a few words about how, through mindfulness, one can effectively meet various difficult situations in life. From an essay that describes an army of ants greeting each other by touching each other's feelers, the teacher could identify 'courtesy' and 'friendliness' as important values and mention how important it is to acknowledge and greet others, including strangers, even if with just a smile. A story about birds spending much of the day foraging for food can be used as an opportunity by the teacher to raise the importance of perseverance as a value. From a story about a camel trudging through the desert the teacher can raise 'bravery' and 'courage' as key values and reflect on how it is that in challenging situations that we are forced to be brave and bring out the best in us. The desert could also be seen as signifying a positive value, just as the camel can. Deserts, the teacher can say, have their own purpose in Nature's plan and are beautiful as well as useful in their own way. Likewise, the teacher can add, a manual worker is to be respected in the same way as anyone else, for he, too, plays an important role in society.

Ideally, every lesson in textbooks used for every subject and at every level should be able to generate values and value-based

messages such as these. All that needs to be done is for the teacher to identify just one such value from every lesson and construct and send out a single such value-based message in every class she takes. In this way, students will receive a positive value-based message in every period that they attend, throughout the academic year.

#### Reaching Out

The VITAL team has been closely interacting with a number of schools and teachers' training colleges in Kerala and Karnataka to develop and further refine its methodology as well as to popularize its approach to value education. For this approach to be actually put into practice in the classroom on a large scale, relevant government ministries, educational boards, the management of educational institutions and the media need to be convinced of its usefulness and efficacy.

The VITAL approach can be freely used and developed by anyone concerned about value education in schools. It does not belong to the VITAL team alone, and so if found useful by others, the VITAL team would be glad if they adopt it.

**For more information about VITAL, contact vital4education@gmail.com**

—Yoginder Sikand

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

*I am overwhelmed by the support Conversations has extended to me, the world at large and particularly the woman entrepreneurs.*

*It is indeed very satisfying and has pleased all of us and those associated with me, Vinnyasa and our art world.*

*Thank you very much and thanks to your team, including the publisher.*

Best regards,  
Viji Nageshwaran

Dear Editor,

*Thank you for sharing Conversations. I find it very interesting to read about the entrepreneurs and what they are up to.*

*My best wishes to you and your team.*

Regards,  
Gouthami, TAI

# Editorial

Latha Suresh  
Marie Banu



# PATHFINDER

“When I would say Kataka-Mukha-Mudhra, they would do it. Once they had the repertoire of movements, it was easy to teach. It took time as I had to give individual attention to each of the eight children who were selected for the dance programme.”

As I walked into Dr. Ambika Kameshwar's home in Chennai, I felt even the silence rhythmic. Her maid led me to the traditional living room and in a while she appeared with a beaming smile.

We spontaneously engaged in a conversation, as if we were childhood friends. Exchanging pleasantries, we sipped our evening tea and traveled back in time.

“I started singing at the age of five and dancing at the age of six. There was something beautiful about singing and dancing. It was such a presence,” said Ambika.

Her expressive eyes, and her natural hand gestures caught my eye. I told myself: “She is a dancer though.”

Reminiscing her childhood days, she added saying, “Children are normally persuaded by their parents to learn music and dance and it was the same for me as well. I enjoyed the attention that I received, and I had much joy in song and dance.”

Ambika Kameshwar grew up in Delhi. Her mother, Smt. Sulochana Natarajan, a singer, was her first Guru. Sharing her musical journey she said: “As a child, I used to come to Chennai to visit my relatives often. I learnt music from Shri. Ramanathan and Smt. Rukmani Rajagopal. After marriage, I shifted base to Chennai, and I learnt from Smt. D.K. Pattammal who was a musical legend. It was such a beautiful experience.”

“When did you start teaching dance for the disabled,” I queried.

“I worked with renowned dancers Shri. Narendra Sharma at Delhi and Kumari Meenakshi in Bangalore. There was this little inner voice inside which kept telling me that I should do something beyond dancing and singing on stage. But, I could not define what it meant.”

“My father, a devotee of Shri Ramana Maharishi, was running Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning at Bangalore. His friend Mr. Srinivasan, also a devotee of Shri Ramana Maharishi, was managing an academy that provided vocational training for the visually challenged. He approached my father and asked him, “Can your daughters teach the visually challenged children music and dance for

our annual day programme?” My sister and I instantly agreed and that was the day I realized my vision,” she answered.

“Was it easy to teach the visually challenged dance,” I asked.

“Although my sister and I had experience teaching children music and dance, it was a challenge to teach the visually challenged. Singing was not an issue, as they would beat me at singing. But, dance being a visual art, it was a challenge to teach. I had to demonstrate dance to the children by sense of touch. They would feel the *mudhra* to learn it. And, once they learnt it, there was no need for me to teach again. Their sixth sense was amazing and their attention was complete.”

“When I would say *Kataka-Mukha-Mudhra*, they would do it. Once they had the repertoire of movements, it was easy to teach. It took time as I had to give individual attention to each of the eight children who were selected for the dance programme. The Lord guided me to give the right inputs and the children were very receptive. I was only 18 years old, but felt very grown up then,” she said smilingly.

“How did they perform at the annual

day program,” I probed.

“Too good! I still remember the program vividly. I had told a visually challenged girl to come running to the stage and stop with her hand up. It was an entry movement. As I had to operate the cassette recorder, I was standing below the stage. I was worried if the girl would stop at the right position, as she would fall off the stage otherwise. But, she stopped exactly where she was supposed to,” said Ambika wiping a tear.

Hiding my goose bumps, I told her, “It must have been an enriching moment for you.”

“Yes, it was. I decided that this is what I wanted to do, and even after 32 years, I still get

emotional when I think about it,” she said.

When her engagement to Kameshwar brought her to Chennai, Ambika requested her co-sister Mrs. Poonam Natrajan, founder of Spastic Society of India, to allow her teach dance for the special children, and she happily agreed.

“I started teaching dance to children with neurological impairment or multiple difficulties. When I see a child, I see him capable of many things rather than not being able to do certain things. I have never seen disability. I have seen only their ability. Each child was beautiful; each child was different; and each child gave me thoughts to take home. They told me what to do and what not to do by being themselves. I started structuring my dance and music classes to help them achieve developmental goals,” she explained.

Ambika used to be a freelance writer and wrote articles for Junior Quest magazine. She once interviewed Babli, a child with Down's syndrome. When she returned home, she expressed to her father that she wanted to render more service for children with disabilities. Thus was born RASA—Ramana Sunritya Aalaya—in 1989. “My father guided me to register RASA as an NGO in 1989. I trained teachers to handle special children and also got trained in Indian theatre. I took Natya as an elective in MA as well as MPhil; did my PhD in ‘Communication through Indian theatre’; and my Post Doctoral Fellowship on the application of Indian Theatre Arts for Holistic Development.”

“Dance, drama, music and story-telling are the tools of Indian theatre and each has its own qualities. An amalgamation of all this is what life is all about. To teach life through theatre is enjoyable and reaches very fast,” she said.

As Ambika empowered herself in Indian theatre, she simultaneously did courses to understand children with special needs. She called it THD - Theatre Holistic Development and formatted this methodology. In 1994, she inaugurated a Post Graduate Diploma Program for trainers to empower themselves.

—Marie Banu





# Asking the right questions

*“A coach however, is somebody who engages with someone on the same platform. His job is to ask questions, not just speak from experience.”*

There's a fine line it seems, between the terms 'mentoring', 'training', 'consulting', and 'coaching'. However, according to Bhaskar Natarajan, President of Hyderabad-based International Coach Federation (ICF), there's a clear-cut difference. “A mentor is somebody who teaches from expertise, while a trainer focuses on bridging a skill gap. Even a consultant derives his relevance from being an expert,” says Bhaskar, as he tries to throw some light on these differences. “A coach however, is somebody who engages with someone on the same platform. His job is to ask questions, not just speak from experience.” Interestingly, this approach is reflective of the Socratic approach to teaching, wherein the philosopher once said: “I cannot teach anyone anything. But, I know how to ask the right questions”. Bhaskar endorses this approach, as far as coaching is also concerned. “It's all about tapping potential, and getting the best out of a person,” he says, of coaching.

From a social perspective, the role of coaches and the process of coaching, both assume a great deal of significance. “This is because a leader in the context of a social enterprise, assumes a great deal of importance,” says Bhaskar. “The role of the leader of a social enterprise to ask questions like ‘how’, engage in open-minded discussions, bring about qualitative changes and make these changes for the better. Hence, there's an awful lot of potential for coaches and coaching, in social enterprise.” For nearly four years now, Bhaskar's not-for-profit venture, International Coach Federation (Hyderabad Chapter), has dedicated itself to promoting coaching and the need for coaches in several walks of life. “There are several coaches that play important roles across the industry: life coaches, sales coaches, and leadership coaches to name a few,” says Bhaskar.

Corporate enterprises and NGOs are those organizations, according to Bhaskar who are most in need of coaches. “These sectors have also shown significant interest in hiring coaches to streamline processes that take place within their walls,” he says. “There are several coaching programmes. Some last for six



months, while others are a week or ten days,” continues Bhaskar. “Through these modules, the primary aim of coaching is to bring about self-awareness — the ability to hold a mirror to yourself and see what needs to be tweaked in that which already exists.” A typical example, according to Bhaskar is a recent case of a corporate enterprise that realised, not long ago, that its team meetings were becoming increasingly unproductive. “On employment of coaching methods, it was learnt that the managers spent an awfully long time in meetings that brought about no results. It was then proposed that meetings which were usually eight hours long per week be restricted to not more than two or three hours a week,” he says. “This way, the company began making decisions in a short while, even as it began enjoying more time, which lent more productivity, which meant more money. By investing in a coach, the company realised a return on that investment in a relatively short span of time.” According to Bhaskar, some companies have even realised a whopping 700-fold return on investment. “Every rupee invested in coaching has brought back nearly 700 rupees and this in a situation where only 25 percent of an outcome has been credited to the role played by a coach.”

*“The term ‘grow’, Bhaskar says, is an acronym for ‘goals’, ‘reality’, ‘options’ and ‘way forward’.”*

The term ‘grow’, Bhaskar says, is an acronym for ‘goals’, ‘reality’, ‘options’ and ‘way forward’. “From that perspective, the focus is significantly placed on growth, as far as coaching is concerned,” says Bhaskar. “Goals have also been of extreme significance as far as coaching is concerned. Coaching also helps achieve other objectives: how do I avoid procrastination? How do I deal with a tough colleague? How do I help my company cut costs? How do I propose a breakthrough idea?”

From a team-strength of merely five, when the organisation began in 2009, ICF has grown by leaps and bounds. “There are nearly 200 trained and certified ICF members across the country today,” says Bhaskar. The organisation also has a strong presence on Facebook, and in keeping with its edge as far as social networks go, the organisation also conducts monthly learning events, online. However, by his own admission, there were challenges when Bhaskar started out. “People, even in family, didn't quite know the

difference between a coach and trainer,” he says. “Gradually, after much explanation, people have begun to understand. Coaching has today, begun to supplement classroom training to a significant extent.”

The future could see ICF partner with several high-profile organizations in the near future. “At present, non-profit companies are the ones which are yet to explore coaching avenues, while MNCs have good knowledge about the importance of coaching,” says Bhaskar. “Family-based companies have taken steps in this regard, but somehow seem to have coaching, consulting and training, all bundled up into one package.” He continues, “Private and public companies have roped in coaches in the past, but a lot needs to be done with regard to these enterprises as well.” No doubt, the road to the future seems to have its hands full with potential. However, with organizations like ICF, dedicated to the cause of promoting coaching, the future also looks tremendously promising.



# “SELF-RESPECT IS THE FIRST STEP TO WOMEN’S LIBERATION”

With the support of more than 3,000 women, STEPS led by Sharifa Khanam has embarked on the herculean task of building a mosque exclusively for women, in the district of Pudukottai.

One of our former leaders had opined that one can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women. Does that really apply to India is a question we all have to ponder with. STEPS, an organization registered under the Tamil Nadu Societies Act of 1975, based in Pudukottai will help us answer this question.

In a country known for its heterogeneity, the context of subjugation varies with communities. And the group that has had very little opportunities to speak for itself is the Muslim women. Sadly, they themselves do not realize this most of the time. This brings us to the birth of STEPS. Its founder Ms Daud Sharifa Khanam attended the third National Conference on Women’s Movements in Patna, as a translator at the age of 22. “That stage told me stories of abuse, violence, rebuke, hurt, and humiliation on one hand; and courage, resistance on the other,” she recalls. Soon after, like minded men and women came forward to do something against gender discrimination.

Thus, STEPS was born as an informal setting in 1989 and was later registered in 1991. From training young girls in self-defense, organising poster exhibition against gender violence and discrimination, STEPS soon got into the good books of functionaries. STEPS collaborated with the District Administration in the implementation of non-formal education in the district. Its good work was noted and the District Administrator provided land for the construction of a women’s centre near Pudukottai bus stand that could be used by women in distress. Over the years, STEPS’ activities began to echo its tag line—“Self-respect is the first step to women’s liberation.”

Working with women is quite a complicated and challenging field because the issues to be addressed are multifaceted at all levels. “STEPS chose to work for social and gender justice, and help women raise voice against violence meted out to them,” explains Sharifa. Interventions by STEPS at multiple levels have led to better articulation of women’s rights. Notable among these activities are organisation of women, especially dalit women to obtain ownership rights on the sand mines and joint ownership of land by women. From individual attention through case work and counseling to provision of basic facilities to more than 100 villages and



providing training to 1,000 women in karate, STEPS has left no stone unturned in building self confidence among women. “You taste real success when all your efforts are acknowledged. STEPS is more excited about being invited as Chief Guest by local colleges and women’s groups while celebrating International Women’s day. It is heartening and encouraging,” she smiles.

STEPS has become synonymous with women’s rights, especially Muslim women. So true! Ever since 1998, STEPS has been organizing Muslim women into groups and training them on specific vocations. More than 450 groups are formed in 10 districts in Tamil Nadu. The increased presence of STEPS led to the emergence of Muslim Women’s Federation, which is a platform for them to voice their views for or against matters that concern them, unlike the Jamaat (group of clerics) which adjudicates in their matters without hearing their part of the story.

Working for this federation did not come easy. The women who actively participated in the process had to face life threats too. The women together are coming over all these hurdles to earn their

rightful place in the society. STEPS has also taken initiatives to strengthen the capacities of the Jamaat members by facilitating training and discussion on the religious tenets that affect women and were interpreted to the advantage of men. Sharifa has also had religious text concerning women’s rights translated from Arabic to Tamil distributed in the villages of Tamil Nadu.

“Naturally, we are all subject to abuse and character assassination. Our commitment to the cause is taking us forward. There are always three things that one needs to thrive in the development sector—commitment, behavior, and talent,” briefs Sharifa.

The Jamaat Committee once deliberated on the issue of low literacy levels among Muslim girls. Consequently, STEPS started a Home for these girls at Annavasal, Pudukottai in Tamil Nadu. The Home presently plays host to 25 girls between 8 and 15 years of age, who are dreaming of a better future only because they can now go to school without any hindrance.

STEPS is increasingly concerned about the health status of the Muslim women. In some of the villages where toilets are not available, women attend to nature calls only in the morning and in the evening, as they are not allowed to come out during the day. Worse is the case in Kailpattinam village of Thuthukudi district where women defecate inside the house and then throw it into the sea. The implications of this practice are multiple, but how we are going to help women has to be seriously thought over. STEPS is deliberating on this with all its stake holders.

With the support of more than 3000 women, STEPS led by Sharifa has embarked on the herculean task of building a mosque exclusively for women, in the district of Pudukottai. With the land donated by a neighbouring village, the team is working on full swing to raise required funds to complete this task. “Why should women be discriminated in offering *namaaz*? They will do it in their mosque, complete with a woman priest,” she asserts.

Despite pressure from the religious patriarchs and other groups, Sharifa has stood by the decision, along with the Jamaat Committee. What will ensue will be a surprise for both the team and its observers.

—Shanmuga Priya.T



rightful place in the society.

In 2004, Tamil Nadu Muslim Women Jamaat Committee, first of its kind, was formed at the state level comprising of two Muslim women from the 10 districts were STEPS works. It works like a Community Tribunal hearing cases concerning women and their children. “What is most frustrating is that, our complaints are not taken up by the police. They in turn refer it to the Jamaat, where women are not allowed to go,” she says



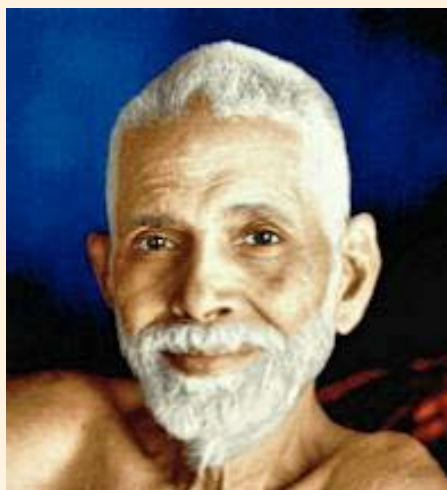
## Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi

There was some reference to the heart. Sri Bhagavan said: The yoga sastras speak of 72,000 *nadis*, of 101 *nadis*, etc. A reconciliation is effected by others that 101 are the main *nadis*, which subdivide into 72,000. These *nadis* are supposed by some to spread out from the brain, by others from the Heart and by some others from the coccyx. They speak of a *paranadi* which is said to rise up from the coccyx through the *Sushumna* to the brain and descends to the heart. Others say that the *Sushumna* ends in Para.

A few advise seeking realisation in the head (*Sahasrara*); a few between the eyebrows; a few in the heart; others in the solar plexus. If realisation amounts to gaining the *Paranadi*, one might enter it from the Heart. But, the yogi is engaged in cleansing the *nadis*; then *Kundalini* is awakened which is said to rise up from the coccyx to the head. The yogi is later advised to come down to the Heart as the final step.

The Vedas say: "The Heart is like a lotus turned down, or a plantain bud."

There is a bright spot atom-like, like the end of a grain of paddy.



That spot is like a flame and in its centre, transcendental Brahman is seated." Which is that Heart? Is it the heart of the physiologists? If so, the physiologists know best.

The Heart of the Upanishads is construed as *Hridayam*, meaning: This (is) the centre. That is, it is where the mind rises and subsides. That is the seat of Realisation.

When I say that it is the Self the people imagine that it is within the body. When I ask where the Self remains in one's sleep they seem to think that it is within the body, but unaware of the body and its surroundings like a man confined in a dark room. To such people it is necessary to say that the seat of Realisation is somewhere within the body. The name of the centre is the Heart; but it is confounded with the heart organ.

When a man dreams, he creates himself (i.e., the *ahamkar*, the seer) and the surroundings. All of them are later withdrawn into himself. The one became many, along with the seer. Similarly also, the one becomes many in the waking state. The objective world is really subjective. An astronomer discovers a new star at immeasurable distance and announces that its light takes thousands of light years to reach the earth. Well, where is the star in fact? Is it not in the observer? But people wonder how a huge globe, larger than the Sun, at such a distance can be contained in the brain-cells of a man. The space, the magnitudes and the paradox are all in the mind only. How do they exist there? In as

much as you become aware of them, you must admit a light which illumines them. These thoughts are absent in sleep, but rise up on waking. So this light is transient, having an origin and an end. The consciousness of 'I' is permanent and continuous. So this cannot be the aforesaid light. It is different but has no independent existence. Therefore, it must be *abhasa* (reflected light). The light in the brain is thus reflected knowledge (*abhasa samvit*) or reflected being (*abhasa sat*). The true knowledge (*Samvit*) or Being (*Sat*) is in the centre called Heart (*Hridaya*). When one wakes up from sleep it is reflected in the head, and so the head is no longer lying prone but rises up. From there the consciousness spreads all over the body and so the superimposed 'I' functions as the wakeful entity.

The pure light in the brain is *suddha manas* (the pure mind) which later becomes contaminated and is *malina manas*, the one ordinarily found.

All these are however contained in the Self. The body and its counterparts are in the Self. The Self is not confined in the body, as is commonly supposed.

—Excerpted from  
Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi

## Value for Contribution – the hidden dimension

No one really says 'please value all that I do' as they expect to be valued for all that they do and contribute! When

they feel valued the impact on belongingness is highly significant; but when they don't, it calls for true self-directedness and conviction in character driven by passion to have a feeling of belongingness. Right from the word 'contribution' there are several questions that arise. How to tap contributions and what is the deciding factor as to which is a contribution? Who decides – the CEO or the members or the recipients? Is it financial or human?

I was once a part of the conversation with two other consultants who were sharing their contributions to the organisations they worked for. One said that he was earning the revenue that the organisation requires to pay for its employees currently; while the other said that he was working on a tool for the past 12 months that will open up a new wing in the organisation and therefore a new revenue stream! So, can both be contribution or is only one considered as contribution and other as part of the job? Someone may be just handling human issues and ensuring team work in the organization which may be behind the scenes. Another may be ensuring that technology is updated and organisation is visible and connected globally.

Any legitimate work or innovation that is made to maintain and run the organisation is different from something that furthers the progress of the organization and accelerates its movement towards realization of the



vision. The actions may or may not come within the purview of the job expectations, but it may be a stretch at multiple levels and that can be considered a contribution.

In a social organization it becomes even more challenging to decide individual contributions since most part of the work requires teams. The job descriptions may be loosely set and people may play multiple roles. Determining contribution is a challenge and further, what to value—the individual or the contribution by itself becomes tough. The contributions could

be of various kinds:

- tangible like funding and revenue for projects
- intangible like connections and network
- short term like getting permissions and events
- long term like community faith and acceptance
- addressing current issues and support
- futuristic in terms of opening doors or design for continuation of work
- technical support
- human cohesion and team building
- individual conviction
- mustering of team strength
- a one time achievement
- repeatable process formations and so on

There is a subtle yet significant difference between reward, recognition, and value for contribution. In the field studies on belongingness, people remembered their contribution being valued with higher emotional connect than the financial reward

or medal recognition they had received. Many times a timely pat on the back or visible vocal mode of appreciation goes a long way.

The flip side to this is the danger of every act being valued and this being expressed is in:

- falling into ritualistic ways and losing its true value
- appreciating even those that are part of the regular job
- building large expectations that work happens only if the value is expressed
- the valuing determines the extent of work and therefore begins to control actions
- valuing becomes the stimulant or determinant of motivation or lack of it
- can totally suck the self-directedness and team effort instilling a sense of dependency on the positive strokes

Further, when the individuals and teams expect appreciation from the founder or senior, it contradicts with our earlier discussions on ownership and self-directedness we have had. In most social organizations where the journey is tough, any small error or mistake is handled seriously. But, at the same time contributions are not given due importance. They become taken for granted. Also when some contributions are valued but others are not, then they become blocks to feeling of belongingness. Therefore, with regard to this dimension the absence of value for contribution works faster as a detriment to feeling of belongingness than the presence of the same. Hence this dimension has to be watched with awareness.

Though this is an important dimension of belongingness, this can be handled very well if the shared vision, ownership and emotional satisfaction are strong. When the entire group is focused towards working for a vision, there

would be contributions as a natural part of the team surging forward. Also when ownership is high, the hierarchical barriers do not play significant role and therefore no one is waiting for any senior to keep patting their back. The team will have to work with purpose larger than self, which means, the contribution to the purpose is highly valued and it is not who has contributed. Each of them are not counting what each one did but if there is a progress in the vision and therefore the purpose is getting fulfilled. Individuals who are a part of the process are valued with respect, but the contributions in whatever term becomes important. In the great Indian epic the Ramayana, even the contribution of the squirrel is valued while building the bridge to Lanka.

Deepest level of humility enables highest level of appreciation to every little contribution others make. For people who emerge from a deep level of gratitude, valuing the contribution wherever it comes from becomes an easy and natural process. Every leader needs to have humility and gratitude as the core bearing and serve the vision rather than the vision serving them.

### Reflections:

1. To what extent does the culture enable true appreciation and gratitude?
2. What enabling environment has been created within the organization for members to contribute?
3. What kinds of contributions have furthered the vision of the organization in the past one year?
4. What instances of purpose larger than self amongst the members have been seen in the organization in the past one year?

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath, PhD



## PANEL DISCUSSION - Role of Youth in Bringing About Social Change



**C**entre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) organized a panel discussion titled 'Role of Youth in Bringing About Social Change' on 19th February at Asha Nivas, Chennai.

The discussion topics were: Prevention of abuse and violence against women; and Role of Individuals, community, and government in preventing abuse.

Smt. Sudha Ramalingam, Dr Kalpana Karunakaran, Dr. Shanmugavelayutham, Dr.M.V.Sudhakaran, Prof. Thenpandian, and Ms. Sharifa Khanam were the panelists.

The event was inaugurated by Shri S K Dogra, IPS, Director/ADGP – Vigilance and Anti-corruption. Speaking on the occasion, he said: "The law may have allowances for hanging and punishing criminals, but this will not change the situation. Even those who unabashedly commit violations of law are scared of becoming a butt of public ridicule. They might not feel ashamed of killing thousands by manufacturing spurious drugs, but they would be scared of wearing a sari and dancing for five minutes at Marina Beach on a crowded evening. This indicates that social control is sometimes more effective than fear of the laws. Therefore, we should build systems that enhance social control."

"Change for the sake of change should not be our motto. Direction of change is very important too. While adopting the good qualities of the West, we should not let go of the good features of our own culture. The positive action of every individual counts. We may think that we, as a single individual, cannot do much to

change the system. But, the effective role of our individual action is certain, even when not always perceptible. So, we must have faith in our action and persist in the path to general good," he added.

Human rights lawyer Sudha Ramalingam spoke about the shoddy treatment that cases of sexual violence get from people in power. Narrating an incident from a few years ago, she said, "I was informed about a 12-year-old rape

me that she had also inserted a Copper-T device in the girl's uterus without her knowledge, as she blamed the child for getting pregnant."

Dr Kalpana Karunakaran, professor of humanities, gender and social studies at IIT-Madras spoke about how instead of anger, victims of rape and sexual harassment feel fear, humiliation and shame. Women are told that, unless they play by society's rules; unless they dress

harassment, and 'ignore' the perpetrators," said Kalpana Karunakaran.

Dr. Sudhakar expressed that there are many incidents related to abuse, but the Delhi incident was projected more by the media because the student community was involved. What we need is an evolution and not revolution.

Ms. Sharifa Khanam stated that institutions should be blamed and women have lost their identity due to gender



victim who had undergone an abortion at a government hospital in Chennai. Nobody took the initiative to inform the police; not even the senior doctors attending to the case. When I questioned the dean, she said that she had so many such cases of pregnant minors and rape victims on her hands that she could not be bothered with filling out police paperwork for each case. I was shocked when the lady doctor told

and act a certain way, bad things will happen to them.

"Our society considers street sexual harassment and domestic violence 'normal'. When young boys whistle at a girl on the streets, or comment on her clothes or her body, society brushes it off as 'boys being boys'. Eve teasing is considered an expression of masculinity and we teach girls to get used to everyday

stereotyping.

Thenpandian said that every individual should be socially responsible. He urged students to fight for their rights and not to encourage social discrimination.

Over 200 college students participated in the discussion and pledged to sensitise their fellow peers on abuse prevention.

—Marie Banu



Kalpana Karunakaran



Shanmugavelayutham



Thenpandian



Sudha Ramalingam



Sharifa Khanam



M.V. Sudhakaran



# “I feel that two things are very important for success—hard work and determination.”

**TN Venkatesh IAS**  
shares with  
**Marie Banu**  
the education  
initiatives of Chennai  
Corporation.

**S**hri T.N. Venkatesh IAS, is the Joint Commissioner (Education), Corporation of Chennai. He joined the Indian Administrative Service in 2001 and served as Joint Commissioner, Commercial Taxes and as District Collector of Karur. During his tenure in 2007, Karur was adjudged the Best District for working towards the rehabilitation of the Differently Aabled.

Shri. Venkatesh is a fan of Carnatic music and attends concerts regularly.

*In an exclusive interview, Shri TN Venkatesh IAS shares with Marie Banu the education initiatives of Chennai Corporation.*

**Who has been your inspiration? Was it tough for you to clear the Civil Services Examination?**

My uncle Mr. Santhanam, an IAS officer himself, has been my inspiration. I made up my mind when I was around ten years old that I would become an IAS officer. Early seeds were sown into my thoughts regarding joining Civil Services.

I cleared the Civil Services Examination in 2001. The competition was very tough as only 53 were selected for IAS compared to 180 in recent years. One has to score very high in order to get a posting in their own home state. I stood 18th at the All India level.

**What is your advice for youth who aspire to join the civil services?**

One should have a clear vision without any ambiguity as to what they want to become in life. If you have an ambition to become an IAS officer, you will have to start preparing early in life.

I feel that two things are very important for success—hard work and determination. There is no recipe for success without these two. The youth need to be clear that there are no short cuts to reach Civil Services. Ever since I joined the Civil Services and until today, I work really hard with the commitment and determination that I should make some difference in the department that I work for. Systematic planning and perseverance will take you nearer to your goal.



Photo: Marie Banu

**Can you share your achievements as the District Collector of Karur?**

As the Collector of Karur, I won the ‘Best District Award’ in 2007 for working for the welfare of differently abled persons. It was a National Award given by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to District Collectors.

A District Collector will have to work with different departments, each of them having specific schemes for the differently abled, but all working in isolation. Through an integrated approach, I ensured that the family which had a differently abled member received maximum help from every department.

Today, I am very happy to say that around 250 families in Karur district are having their own livelihoods. Some have started their own restaurants, small scale units, and one visually challenged couple even started an orchestra.

**What are the schemes launched by the Chennai Corporation to encourage education, especially among girl children?**

We ensure that the children who enroll in our Chennai schools are offered the best in terms of quality education. One aspect that is missed out often when you talk about schooling or children is that people focus only on academic pursuits. But, we also focus on the non-academic pursuits like drawing, music, dance, public speaking, and spoken English classes. The Chennai Corporation has launched a lot of initiatives in the recent past, especially keeping the

extra-curricular activities in mind.

We have also introduced more English medium sections. This is because there is a great parental aspiration for children to speak in English. Last year, we started separate English Medium sections in 30 schools.

With regard to girl children, we provide sanitary napkins for those studying in the middle and higher secondary schools. Also, gynaecologists visit our schools twice or thrice a month to conduct regular health check-ups.

We have also tied up with NGOs like Ashraya, Ekam Foundation, and Eco Kitchen (a project of YRG Care). These organisations provide counseling for adolescent girls on health, their overall well-being, goal setting, aspirations, and self-esteem.

We have started music rooms in 30 of our Chennai schools and have appointed 30 part-time music teachers who conduct classes thrice a week. Specialized music training is offered to children who are studying in 6th to 8th standard.

I would like to make a mention about ‘Aanma Jothi’, an organization that is keen in spreading awareness about our classical music and dance amongst the Chennai school students. Normally, children in private schools have constant exposure in the form of field visits or celebrity talks. But, the Chennai school children miss out on this. Organisations like Nalandaway and Samudhaaya Foundation have in the recent past done a lot of programmes for our children to bridge this gap. We are also regularly sending our students to

Dakshin Chitra to participate in traditional festivals and know about the rich heritage of South India.

**There are a lot of challenges that our teacher’s face today. What are your views about the change in teacher-student relationship?**

Absolutely! The role of the teacher has changed a lot, especially due to technology. The teacher’s role when you or I were a student was totally different. We relied entirely on her or him for information.

Now, there are many other ways the children can get information from. Therefore, if you are going to be just passing on information, you may not be able to connect. You need to walk that extra mile to strike a chord with your students.

I really feel that the teachers of today should be good mentors, and need to set examples themselves. They should make their mark by their good conduct, attire, and attitude towards work. They need to take the effort to nurture the potential that lies in each child.

I am happy that our teachers pay special attention towards the slow learners. When you compare the government and private schools, the proportion of slow learners are much higher in Chennai schools. Most of the children studying in Chennai schools are first generation learners. So, there are a lot of challenges for our teachers as there is minimal parental support.

**How can NGOs help the government in addressing the issue of quality of education in Chennai schools?**

I would like to mention about an organization called ‘Teach for India’ who have partnered with seven of our Chennai schools. Young Teach for India Fellows handle English Medium sections in these schools and teach children subjects of English, science, mathematics, and social studies.

They have built up the confidence of the children and have brought a visible change in these classrooms. Classroom is a very important place where the child spends a lot of time, especially at the primary level. So, the kind of influence that the teacher has during the school hours makes a lot of difference.

Our ultimate aim is to encourage a child to come to school and enjoy the learning process. The challenge is to not only make the classrooms attractive physically, but also engage the children in joyful learning.

I would like to encourage NGOs to partner with us and make our classrooms brighter, lively, meaningful, and effective. There is a lot of synergy by doing this work together. Ultimately, we need to come together to make a difference.