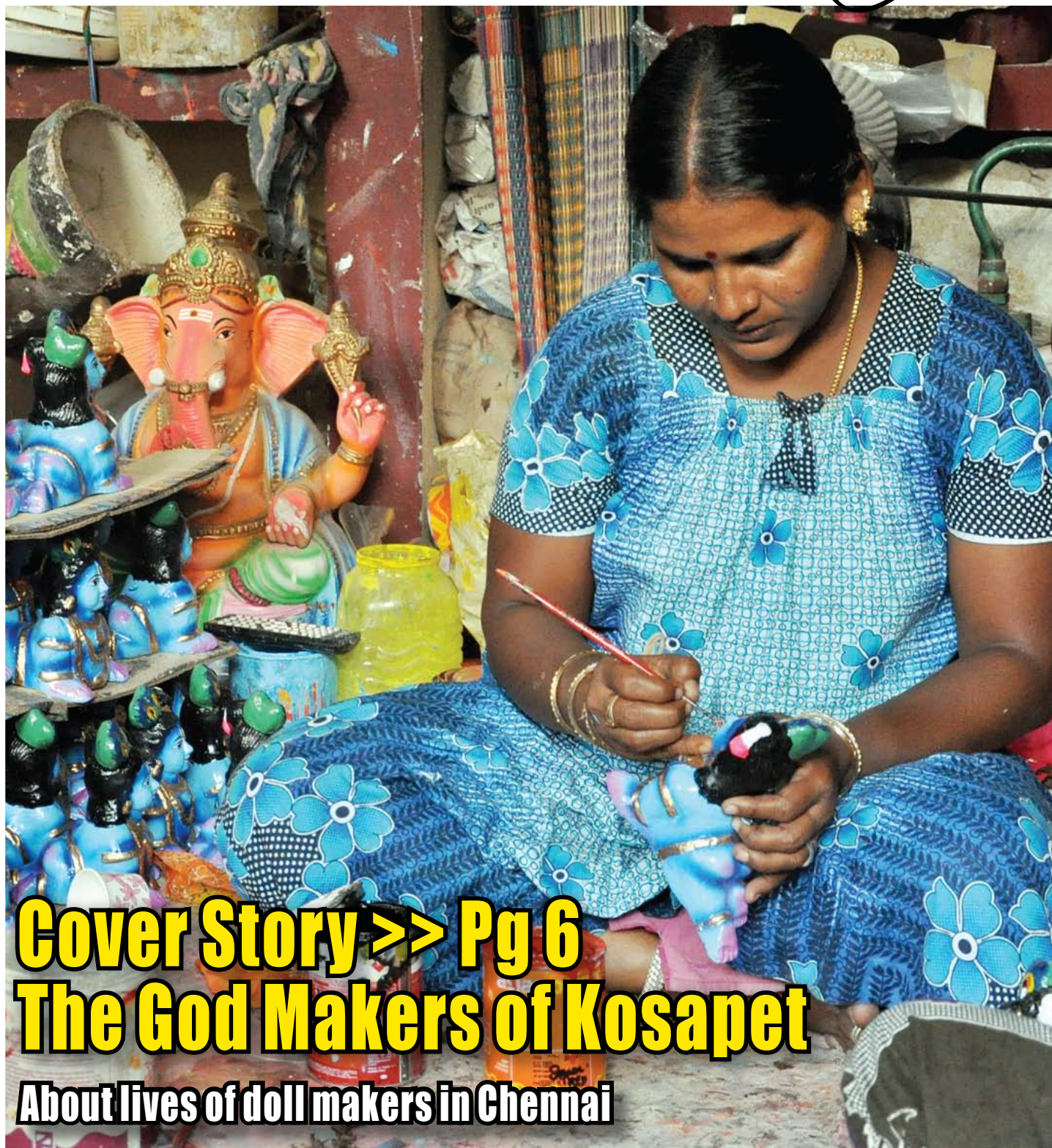


Conversations

A Chronicle of Social Currents

Volume 3 | Issue 5 | May 2012 | For Free Circulation Only | A CSIM Product



Cover Story >> Pg 6 The God Makers of Kosapet

About lives of doll makers in Chennai

Photo:AK

From the Editor

Dear Friend,

All of us are alike in many ways. However, one little difference always makes a big difference. The little difference is 'attitude'. It has been said that people can alter their lives by altering their attitude. This is indeed true! What most people fail to realize is that your attitude not only impacts your happiness and your success, but can also impact the happiness and success of the people

around you as well—your family, friends, and colleagues. Attitude is truly contagious, and from time to time we need to ask ourselves, "Is mine worth catching?"

The first step for us would be to develop an attitude of gratitude right away. Gratitude is an energizing emotion that motivates our thoughts and actions in a positive direction. It helps us to appreciate the life we already have and to

appreciate others. It also aids us to live the life of our dreams and to make a positive difference in the lives of others.

I am grateful that I have been given this opportunity to share my thoughts with you. Enjoy reading our stories of real heroes with a great attitude! Do share them with all whom you meet and spread the goodness!

P.N. Devarajan

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Ujala Begum's efforts to empower women



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"If you help an old lady cross the street, that is social work."

An interview with
Dr. Balaram Biswakumar



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Phone: 42805365
Website: www.csim.in

Traffic News



INFORMATION PROVIDED
BY THE COMMISSIONER OF
POLICE, CHENNAI FOR THE
MONTH OF APRIL 2012

Loss of lives due to accidents	No. of accidents reported
126	823

NUMBER OF CASES BOOKED FOR:

- Signal violation - 22,697
- Wrong side driving - Nil
- Over speeding - 6,945
- Violation of one way rule - 12,097

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**



“CSIM gave me ample exposure to funding agencies and modalities. I found the course really useful in bettering the activities at Paropakar Amaippu.”

Never SAY DIE!

Ujala Begum lost her parents during her childhood and was raised by her grandmother. Coming from a conservative family in Vandavasi (Wandiwash), she may have continued to live within the confines of her home, following the rigidities put in place by her immediate surroundings, had it not been for a major illness that drastically changed her way of life and in the process, her world view.

“A few years ago I was diagnosed with a mild form of leprosy that rendered me temporarily immobile. I was hospitalized for almost three months,” she says, recollecting the days that signaled the ending of a rather uncomfortable arrangement of living with her grandmother. “This illness triggered some unexpected conflicts with my grandmother, who was no longer willing to keep me at home. In time though, I did recover from being completely immobile to being fairly independent, and then I moved out to live on my own,” says Ujala.

Once Ujala decided to live on her own, she could see that her home town of Vandavasi was not in the least welcoming of her decision. “I was subjected to enormous ridicule as I was living on my own without a family. This town is still very conservative. Women here have to abide by rules put in by a hardcore chauvinistic society. Until a few years ago, it was rather difficult to see a working woman here. It used to be considered as a shame to a man if his wife was sent to work. In such a rigid society, I wanted to see some changes in the attitudes of the people. And unless women realized their own freedom, there was no other way out for them from this oppression,” says a defiant Ujala.

In 2004 she started the *Paropakar*



Amaippu, a welfare establishment that helps women become self-reliant through engaging them in various vocational training and educational activities. It presently has a tailoring centre, four night-school centres and one self-help group. Over 450 women have become certified tailors through this centre, four girls have been sent for nursing training through a collaboration with the Ramakrishna Mission at Mylapore, several needy patients have been granted free and successful surgeries through a collaboration with the Maruvathoor Welfare Hospital, and several more have started attending the night schools to complete their basic schooling.

Right before she started *Paropakar Amaippu*, she used to work with the Kaveripakkam Comprehensive Rural Development Society (KCRDS), an NGO in Wallajah Block. The secretary of

KCRDS, Mr. Abu Bakker, is Ujala Begum’s mentor of sorts. “He was the first person who listened patiently to my worries. He gave me courage and had immense confidence in me,” says Ujala, adding that, “The founder of KCRDS, Mr. R.S. Mani who has worked with Mahatma Gandhi in the olden days, reassured me by saying: “You were born to live.” I have taken these words as my talisman and have ever since remained positive and hopeful at all times.”

At KCRDS Ujala earned Rs. 100, then her income grew upto Rs. 300 as she undertook vocational training and self-help group training. Immediately after her training, she helped start 7 self-help groups. From there on, she started her tailoring centre. Growing step-by-step through her efforts, she helped mobilize funds for the heart operation of two needy individuals, totaling to an amount of Rs. 75,000. Today, 100 to 150 students are gifted with uniforms, dictionaries, and books every year. “I want underprivileged children to have the education that I could never have in my time,” says Ujala who has helped a disabled student successfully complete B.Com.

The *Paropakar Amaippu* has come as a breath of fresh air to Vandavasi, encouraging women to get out of the four walls of their homes and training them to be independent. Ujala Begum is on a

relentless hunt to infuse positivity into girls who come to her centers. “Earlier I used to sink in self-pity, but today I realize that we are all born to help each other. Women should help other women. In my tailoring centre or night schools, I sometimes find girls crying silently. I walk up to them and hear them out. Whenever the girls show a sign of hopelessness, I reassure them with real stories, such as mine, and ask them to move on. It works!” says a passionate Ujala.

Ujala’s association with CSIM goes back to the early days of *Paropakar Amaippu*. She enrolled in the Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Programme in 2007. “CSIM gave me ample exposure to funding agencies and modalities. I found the course really useful in bettering the activities at *Paropakar Amaippu*,” says Ujala. Funds for *Paropakar Amaippu* mainly come from corporate donors. She has ever since referred several people to also enlist for training at CSIM.

In these last eight years of running the *Paropakar Amaippu*, Ujala has added several feathers to her cap. She has been awarded a fellowship by former President of India Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, and her efforts have been featured in leading Tamil media. Thanks to *Paropakar Amaippu*, Vandavasi today offers better exposure to women who would like to work outside their homes. The rigidity and the taboos have been gradually reducing and the proof of it is in the increasing numbers of women enrolling in college. As Ujala Begum continues her quest to transform people’s lives for the better, her family has started recognizing her for her exemplary qualities. “Those relatives who shunned me and shut their doors on me once, are now praising me,” says Ujala with a giggle.

It is often said, that perseverance moves mountains. Ujala’s perseverance has indeed proven the saying to be true.

—Archanaa R.

If you wish to support Paropakar Amaippu, please contact Ujala Begum at 9841730877

RUHSA- An Integrated Model for Health and Development Program

The Rural Unit for Health and Social Affairs (RUHSA), a community health care and development program of the Christian Medical College and Hospital, Vellore, is serving over 120,000 people of the K. V. Kupam Block in the Vellore district for more than three decades. Its intervention has changed thousands of lives in 97 villages of the block.

Since its inception RUHSA's intervention is guided by three principles: health and development should not be separated; any program is based on community participation; and voluntary approach.

At present RUHSA is focusing on: health care, education, social development, Training, CERT (consultancy, evaluation, research and training), animal husbandry, agriculture, income generation and socio-economic project.

It has a community college project, a six-month program; a one-year post graduate diploma course on Health Management at CMC; three-year course on B.Sc. Medical Sociology under MGR University, and a Ph.D. programme.

RUHSA also conducts workshops for colleges and it has a placement program for nurses. Besides, it has a waste management program coordinated by a 14-member self-help group, who collect tree leaves and domestic waste. At a later stage the group plans to go to villages and teach waste management techniques.

RUHSA was started as an inter-sectoral Primary Health Care Programme of Christian Medical College and Hospital, Vellore, in 1977. The target community for its health services were children and their mothers', and for its development services it were the poor, youth, and women. Among children the focus was on those who were below two years of age.

The primary purpose of RUHSA was to provide health and development services in a defined area (a block covering approximately 100,000 people).



According to RUHSA officials, during the initial stage they used to provide door to door primary health care services for the people living in the target area. Then a CMC doctor came forward and started a project called 'RUHSA', an integrated primary health care model.

S. Sekar, training Officer of RUHSA, says, "At present 300 to 500 out patients receive basic health care services at RUHSA Base Health Centre everyday. Doctors from CMC also come here to treat patients every week. The Centre has a dental clinic, a diabetes clinic, and an ophthalmic clinic. All the clinics charge only Rs. 10 for services."

At a briefing during our visit Mr. Muniraj, Rural Training Coordinator of RUHSA, explains to ACJ students the activities coordinated here.

Apart from centre-based service RUHSA has 18 sub-centres called Peripheral Service Unit (PSU) to cover the entire block. Each PSU serves around 5000 to 7000

population. They maintain a data-base of their patients and two mobile teams visit the villages with doctors and nurses and provide door-to-door basic health care services every day. Cases that require greater medical attention are referred to the base hospital- CMC, Vellore.

How It works:

At the village level, RUHSA has Rural Community Officers (RCO) who are full-time staffs. RCO coordinates all the volunteers who are responsible for organizing various groups like woman self-help group, youth group, farmers' group, economically weakened section group, etc. They also organize various co-operative societies like: milk co-operative society, weaver's co-operative society, ship-builder's co-operative society, poultry grower's association etc. Apart from these, RCO helps sub-centre (PSU) volunteers implement other programs.

At each sub-centre level, there is one

health aid for 200 families or 1000 population, and 5 to 7 family care volunteers (FCVs). Family care volunteers implement all the health care related programs at the village level. Everyday, they visit 10 to 15 households and make 2 to 3 visits to each family in a month. FCVs identify pregnant mothers and children who are below two years of age. They also motivate parents to come to the mobile clinic with their children and provide them with health education. The family care volunteers also collect all the vital information on villagers.

Besides, each sub-centre has a village agricultural guide who looks after all the agricultural programs and each sub centre has a village veterinary guide.

For successful implementations of its projects RUHSA ensures community participation and local government help.

—Hashim
Asian College of Journalism

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Thank you so much for sending us your article in *Conversations*. The kids will be going home today for summer holidays and those in the photograph are happy and proud that they can carry this issue with themselves in it home!

Warm regards,
Hanne

Dear Editor,

It was fascinating to read about a workshop where visually impaired people are working together. It is only by reading more such examples that our own mindset changes.

With Regards
Gouthami

Dear Editor,

I look forward to reading *Conversations* every month. The way stories are being told is simple to read, and I encourage my children to read as well.

My best wishes to your team.

Regards,
Rajeswari

Dear Editor,

I enjoy reading the stories on backward communities that are being featured every month in *Conversations*.

My appreciation to the your team for bringing these communities to light.

Best wishes,
Narasimhan

A New Lease of Life



The story of Kalpana Gore, who rolled bidis for 20 years, is synonymous with the many women in Ahmednagar and their struggle to make ends meet. Nidhi Adlakha has her story.

She was married at the age of 17 and started rolling beedis a year later. A task Kalpana learnt from her mother and taught her siblings, rolling beedis was an integral part of her daily routine for 20 years. "I picked up the trade from my family members and it was a great pastime after school hours. As a kid, I noticed most women were forced into the trade due to lack of other avenues of employment and it was easy money," says Kalpana.

With her father's death when she was just 2 months old, education never took priority. She studied only till the fourth grade and was married early. "Post my marriage, I had to continue rolling beedis as it supplemented our household income. I used to be from 5 am to 11 pm and slept with the thread of my sons cradle tied to

my toe," she says. Kalpana earned a meager Rs 9 for every 1,000 beedis she rolled and continued working until the night her second child was born. Recalling the incident, Kalpana says, "I still remember the day my daughter, Rani, was born. I had rolled the last set of *beedis* for the day and slept around 12 am. She was born a few hours later."

Kalpana's husband, a gardener, deserted the family for three years and Kalpana had no option but to continue the trade and fend for her children. "It was a tough time but I had to keep myself engaged and earn money," she recalls.

The *beedi* industry in Maharashtra is huge and private companies that exploit labourers such as Kalpana thrive in districts such as Solapur, Sangamnagar, and Ahmednagar. The company that Kalpana worked for back then, paid for the delivery of her children a sum of Rs 240.

Provided with the tendu leaves, tobacco and thread, the medical expenses of those

employed were taken care of. Considering the deteriorating health conditions of the women employed in the trade, medical expenses form a major chunk of their household expenditure. "The 20 years I rolled beedis I suffered from constant joint pains and severe backaches. I developed gaps in my spinal cord that led to Spondylitis and I suffer from backaches even today," says Kalpana, who discontinued the trade five years ago.

"My son, Devendra, developed asthma due to the constant exposure to tobacco. He used to have severe attacks and the consequences of rolling beedis took a huge toll on our lives." It is unfortunate that most women do not live long enough to avail their pension. "Companies pay you a pension if you work till the age of 58, but most women fall sick and don't live to collect the money," she says.

Ask her why she quit, Kalpana says, "Although, today, they pay Rs 100 for every 1,000 beedis you roll, the task is physically straining and I chose to quit. I

work as a cook and my husband has a steady job as well. The children are educated and I plan on concentrating on settling their lives."

Pointing out the irregularities and exploitation of workers, Kalpana says that even though they were provided with the yearly Diwali bonus, rent allowance, many workers, including her were cheated as there were a number of middlemen involved in the settling of accounts. "The provident fund that I was entitled too was not paid entirely. Middlemen get us to sign papers in the name of bonus and at the time of payment we receive only half the amount. Most women are uneducated and thus exploited," she adds.

— Nidhi Adlakha

Nidhi Adlakha is a media fellow at the National Foundation for India (NFI) researching on the links between Poverty and Tobacco, and is a Correspondent at the Times of India, Chennai



Jayanthi

Conversations team spends an evening with the doll makers in Chennai



Meena and Govindasamy

The God Makers of Kosapet

Winding through the narrow lanes at Kosapet, a shantytown in central Chennai, we reach the cluster of 20 families which are engaged in making gods and other figurines out of clay. These families belong to the Kuyavar community and had been engaged in pottery for over three generations.

As the city expanded, these families found it difficult to continue their occupation due to lack of space. They shifted their occupation from pottery to making of clay dolls.

Jagadeesh, our NGO contact, led us to Jayanthi's home. A 100-square feet space, which is supposed to have been the drawing room, doubles as a cottage industry. The room was piled with hundreds of clay gods of different sizes and colours. The strong odor of paint did not seem to bother the women. Jayanthi, 33, was seated in the middle of the room, painting one of the idols of Krishna, while Koushalya and Indira were applying the base paint for the rest.

"I am an ordinary person. What is it that you want me to say?" Jayanthi replied when I asked her to tell me her story.

Jayanthi paused for a while, delegated work to her employees, and started the conversation. I stood gingerly in a corner of the room, careful not to step on any of the gods while my friend AK got busy with his camera.

"I am engaged in doll-making since the age of five. My father Perumal was managing this unit and I used to mould about 300 dolls a day for which I was paid five rupees. I spent two to three hours a day and worked even on Sunday," she said.

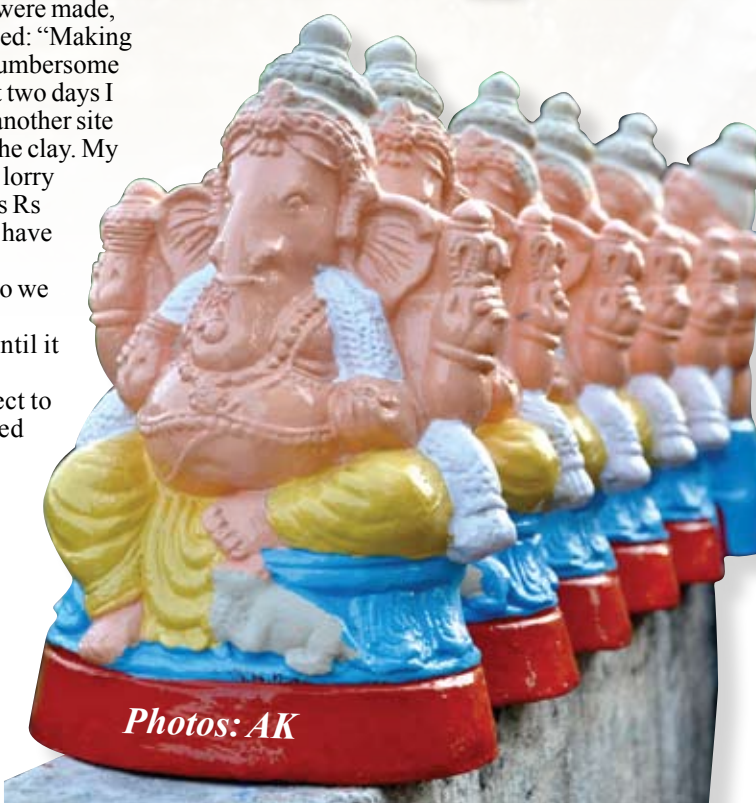
"As I was allowed to spend the money that I earned on chocolates and ice cream, I was more than willing to work here. In those days, five rupees a day was quite a substantial amount to spend on snacks though."

Speaking of her education, she said, "I studied up to the eighth standard in a corporation school. As my father could not afford to educate me further, I started to work full-time. Now, I manage this doll-making unit as my father has grown old. He is 62."

For a moment I got distracted when I saw a coconut shell half-filled with gold paint. I looked around the room and noticed that there were many such shells

filled with different colors. Sensing my curiosity to know how these dolls were made, Jayanthi explained: "Making these idols is a cumbersome process. The last two days I was working at another site where we store the clay. My feet ache now. A lorry load of clay costs Rs 2000. We do not have any machines to soften the clay, so we need to keep stamping on it until it turns soft. The neighbours object to the fumes emitted while firing the clay, so we choose a different site to work on this."

"The dolls are then brought home. We apply patti to adjust any defects in the figurine, and then



Photos: AK

paint layer after layer. While my employees work on the base coat, I draw the features and add glitter for each of the idols," she said.

Jayanthi has two children Latha, 14, and Kumar, 12, who study in a private school. "I want to educate them as much as I can. My daughter wants to become a computer engineer. I should get her a computer when she goes to the tenth standard," she sighed.

Hundreds of Krishna and Ganesha idols were lined up to get dried. Jayanthi began giving finishing touches to a baby Krishna.

"A mould costs between Rs 500 to Rs 10,000. The Krishna mould costs Rs 500 and I can make only 1,000 dolls from one mould. The wholesale dealers procure about 15,000 to 20,000 idols from us every year at a price of Rs 20 per piece and sell it for Rs 30. These idols have a lot of demand during the navarathiri season. It is only during the month of September and October that we have sales happening. Until then, we stock these idols in our own homes."

I asked how she managed her monthly family expenses until then.

"I borrow around 25,000 rupees a month from private moneylenders on a five percent interest. I need this money to manage my family as well as to meet the doll-making unit expenses. When I need to pay my children's school fees or when I need to meet a medical expense, I borrow an extra 10,000 rupees," Jayanthi explained.

I asked her how she earned from this doll-making.

"I earn an annual income of around five lakh rupees, most of which is used to repay the loan. The moneylender offers me a fresh loan only after I have cleared my dues. Therefore, I have hardly any money



Lakshmi and Kumar

left to invest for my next season. This cycle continues."

Perumal, her father, joined our conversation and said, "The cost of paint has increased three times in the last four years due to the rise in diesel price. Likewise, the cost of other products has also increased."

Jayanthi is a leader of a self-help group (SHG) that offers a micro credit of Rs 3,750 to each member. "The micro credit offered by the SHG would hardly fetch me 15 tins of paint, which is a drop in the ocean of expenses that I have," she said. "Banks do not offer loans either, so I have to depend on private moneylenders. I had borrowed 6 lakh rupees three years ago to construct this home, and am yet to repay it," she complained.

"Then, why do you want to work in this trade if you can't earn enough?" I asked.

"Well, I don't know any other trade. If I work in an export company, I would earn only around Rs 2,000 to Rs 3,000. This would not suffice to maintain my family. The solace I have is that I can work from home, my children are studying, and we have enough food to eat," she concluded.

As the evening neared, we went around

the neighbourhood to interact with the other doll-makers, dodging the many kittens and stray dogs that lay scattered in the narrow byways.

I was led to the home of Kumar and Lakshmi. The couple spoke casually about their lives as doll-makers and when I asked if working together and staying under one roof all the time led to any misunderstanding, Kumar remarked: "Misunderstanding happens only when the husband is away from the wife and a third person barges into our lives. We don't allow this to happen and so we are very happy."

I continued visiting more houses in the vicinity. While most of them were winding up their day's work, I found a senior couple still working. Govindasamy, 66, was moulding dolls along with his wife Meena, 55.

"We are paid three rupees for each doll that is moulded. The mould and clay is provided by our owner. On an average we are able to earn Rs 150 a day and this is enough to meet our living expenses," said Meena. "I used to sell vegetables, but after getting all my three daughters married, I joined my husband in moulding dolls. We



live with one of our daughters and we don't want to be a burden on her."

We bid adieu to the couple and walked towards our car. On the way, we saw an old house where women were busy making bigger gods in bright purple and yellow. Outside their home, a man and his wife were stamping on clay on the roadside. Life was just about beginning for the next set of dolls which some day would sit pretty in homes across the city.

—Marie Banu

Remember when you were a child and you believed that life was magical? Well, the magic of life is real, and it's far more exciting and awe-inspiring than you ever imagined as a child. You can live your dreams, you can have anything you want, and your life can touch the stars! In 'The Magic', a great mystery from a sacred text is revealed and with this life-changing knowledge Rhonda Byrne takes you on an unforgettable journey for 28 days. Step-by-step, day-by-day, secret teachings, revelations, and scientific law are brought together into one breathtaking book—a book that will lead you to a life and a level of happiness beyond your wildest dreams.

Rhonda Byrne is the lady responsible for the popular film and bestselling book, 'The Secret' and her sequel book 'The Power'. Her experiences in life led her to discover the Law of Attraction which then turned her life around. Her amazing ability to see the best in everything, to feel love for everyone and everything, and to help many people across the world has given her a wonderful insight into how we can all change our lives for the better. Rhonda opens her book with a stunning revelation. After explaining how the Law of Attraction works, and revealing how 'like attracts like', her

The Magic

BY RHONDA BYRNE

amazing revelation is that the key to a truly abundant and happy life lies in the practice of gratitude.

This might not sound like much of a revelation to start with, but evidence shows that the more we practice gratitude and give thanks on a daily basis, the more abundance will begin to flow to us. As well as the well known metaphysical facts about energy, she bases her opinion on the evidence of her own life and many others who have transformed theirs since discovering the Law of Attraction.

Rhonda's book features a course of exercises, helping us to practice gratitude so that we can improve every area of our lives and dissolve the problems or negative situations we experience. Many of us believe that we are already grateful, but as Rhonda points out, she thought this was true of herself until she discovered the real power of gratitude, and by practicing daily gratitude in every part of our lives what a difference this can make.

Every exercise is designed to help us appreciate and enhance a different area in our lives, from health and

wealth to work and relationships.

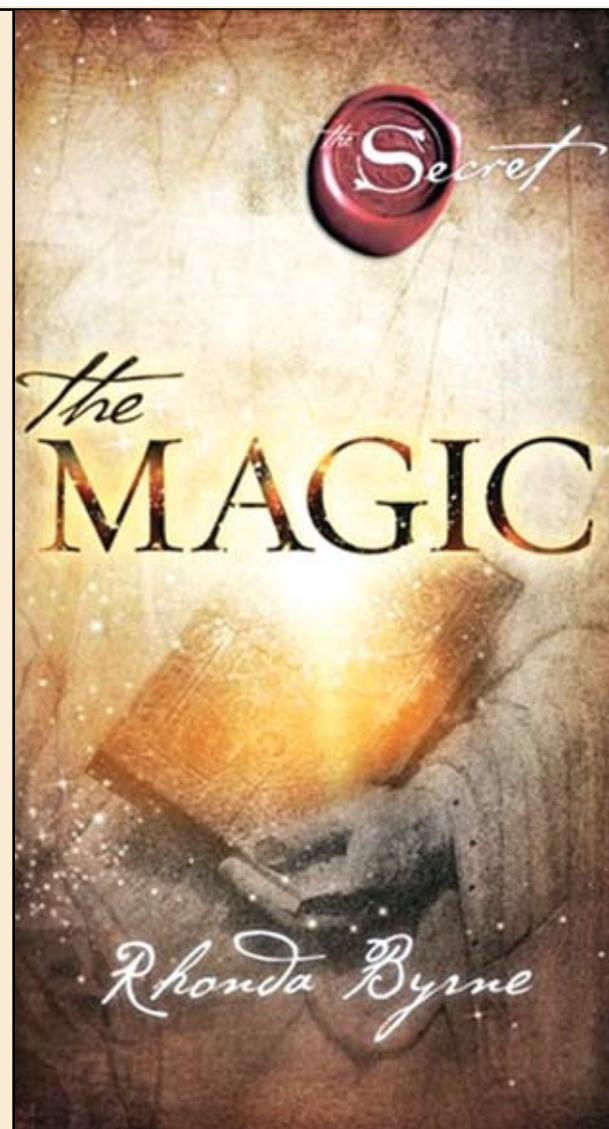
Have we got relationships in our lives that perhaps aren't what they should be? At work, how often do we harbour bad feelings about how things are? What about our finances and how we feel about money? Any fears, doubts, or worries that we carry around with us will be producing more of the same.

Following the exercises in the Magic will change this situation by helping us to monitor our thoughts easily, and so by building up gradually over the 28 days new ways of thinking become part of everyday life, allowing us to see the things we normally take for granted in a totally different light.

Rhonda helps us to really appreciate what we have, even if it is not what we are ultimately aiming for and just by the simple act of practicing gratitude regularly, we start to attract more and more of the good stuff into our lives every day!

Read 'The Magic' and bring magic into your lives!

—Latha Suresh



Young saviours pull out rickshaw pullers from the abyss

At first glance, 43-year-old Jamun looks like any other rickshaw puller in Delhi - a lean body and a face with distinct cheekbones and unkempt graying stubs. As he pulls his rickshaw closer, his face glows like that of a child showing off his new, prized possession.

Jamun's new acquisition is a customized cycle rickshaw. With padded seats, a bottle-holder, the day's newspaper, dust bin, a fixed tariff, advertisement space, and an extended roof that covers the rider and not just the passenger - it's a modern-day rickshaw.

But it is not the looks of the brand-new vehicle that makes Jamun upbeat. That he 'owns' it - thanks to a socially-engineered project - is the fact that he finds overwhelming. "In my 13 years of work, I had not even dared to dream of having my own rickshaw," says Jamun, who is not alone in basking in the new-found freedom from usurious clutches of 'contractors'.

Liberating rickshaw pullers and offering them a hope in life is in fact the dream of an enterprising group of students from Sri Ram College of Commerce (SRCC). The good-hearted students, along with an international non-profit organization, Students In Free Enterprise (SIFE), are doing something more than their academic pursuits.

Get, Set, Go! Rickshaw pullers can now



chase their dreams.

"The project helps rickshaw pullers to take a loan and buy their own customized rickshaws, setting off a secured system of savings for themselves and their family," sums up Radhika Goel, President, SRCC SIFE.

Of the 2,500 rickshaws plying on the streets, 95 percent are not owned by pullers. They hire the rickshaws from local contractors, without giving any

deposit, often on the guarantee of a fellow rickshaw puller. It's a simple process of lending, but it triggers an exploitative system of mortgage.

While the contractor merely lends his rickshaw, in exchange for an exorbitant rental of Rs 40 a day, the rickshaw puller also pledges his dignity, his very existence and that of his family!

"The rickshaws are not well-maintained. If it breaks down, we have to

repair it at our own cost. Let alone demanding fair play from the contractors, we are often beaten up, and abused in public," says Girija Shankar, another rickshaw puller helped by SRCC SIFE.

The students help them to not just procure loan from Punjab National Bank, but also buy customized rickshaws. The daily repayment of Rs 40 to the contractor is now navigated to the bank, which is only a one-year window repayment towards the eventual ownership of the rickshaw. In addition, they have the advantage of accidental insurance premium and revenue from advertisements, which is shared between the rickshaw puller, and SRCC SIFE fund. So, in one year, a rickshaw puller can manage to save Rs 20,000 to 25,000.

"As an extension of our moral duty, we have recently entered into a tie-up with Max HealthCare, providing health benefits to the rickshaw pullers and their families," says Ashima Gupta, another SRCC SIFE volunteer.

The current team of SRCC SIFE graduates next year. But before they leave the campus, they will pass the baton on to their juniors. So the dream lives on to illuminate more faces like that of Jamun.

—Roohi Saluja Sehgal
the weekendleader.com

With little **help**, they can

“Very few understand the difference between mental retardation and mental illness. For those who are mentally retarded, training can be given to control their behaviour while for the latter, treatment is available.”



From mental illness to mental health, we have come a long way. Subjective well being has come into focus and the mentally challenged individuals are viewed as a whole. Yet, the reach of awareness on the different forms of mental illness and their symptoms is still not appreciable.

Mental illnesses can be functional or organic. While the former can be treated, the latter has limited scope for betterment. Depending upon the level of damage, the severity of symptoms varies. Lack of awareness makes it impractical for the families to cope with the affected persons' illness and take care of them.

This is where, community efforts come in, making life more comfortable for the mentally challenged. Given the multiple discriminations prevailing in our society, being mentally challenged and a woman is certainly a cause for concern as they are easily abandoned by their families.

Friends for the Needy in Thirumullavoyal, Chennai is an effort to treat and rehabilitate such women. It was established in 1997 as Public Charitable Trust, in a temporary shelter. Within a year, a small house was purchased in Puzhal through a bank loan. “Regular funds remained a challenge then, and continue to be one today also,” says Sr. Geetha Mathews, Founder, Friends for the Needy.

Soon, they could move to their own home. “Hard work will always be paid. We were noticed. A textile owner (Lalchand Mangaram) gifted this land for us,” mentions Sr. Geetha. Although the case of illegal occupants is still on, she is hopeful that it will all be resolved. “It is the purpose that matters,” she smiles.



Presently the home houses 35 patients. “We cannot take in more patients as individual attention would become impractical,” she explains. Although most of the inmates here have been referred by Schizophrenia Research Foundation of India (SCARF), based in Chennai, some also come from contacts made on the helpline.

During every intake, the woman's case history is thoroughly analysed, which includes details about the family background, childhood trauma, and the like.

“The most difficult of all tasks is to get their family members believe that these illnesses can be treated,” laments Sr. Geetha. Most of the women here are abandoned, divorced, or separated. Some have parents to support while others are totally rejected by their near and dear ones.

Mentioning about Schizophrenia, she expounds that it is one of the most terrible sicknesses that is often mistaken for depression. It's very diagnosis is tricky. The patients experience auditory

hallucinations, develop their own words with changing meanings (neologism), and ask repeated questions (echolalia). “With suicidal tendency being very high, we cannot risk leaving them to themselves. A recent incident where a man in Royapuram burnt himself to death, for no reason at sight, is a case in point.”

The behaviour of these patients is highly unpredictable. Sr. Geetha illustrates a case where the patient defecated and began to consume her own excreta. Their poor socialising makes it a herculean task to help them connect their thoughts and associated people.

With its own team of dedicated doctors, Friends for the Needy provides regular counselling services for the inmates and their care givers. So far, 250 women have been re-united with their families after recovery. “The role of the family and society is a very important factor in patient's recovery. Every family who has a mentally challenged member needs a lot of support and education to deal with the patient.”

The challenge in rehabilitating mentally ill patients is the high probability of relapse. Despite all guidance and support given, the relapse phase once again brings to light the lacuna in awareness. “Very few understand the difference between mental retardation and mental illness. For those who are mentally retarded, training can be given to control their behavior, while for the latter, treatment is available.”

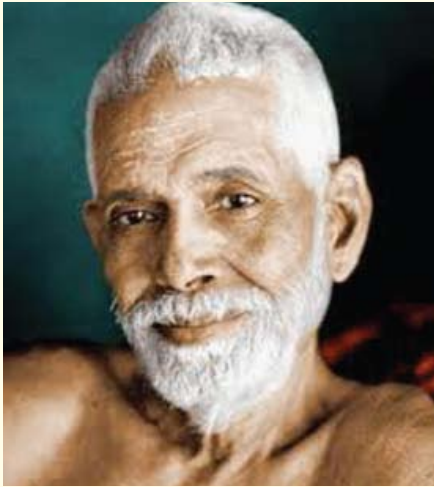
In our country, even today, patients are taken to temples to drive away the evil spirits. Promoting awareness on mental illness is a huge task that calls for sensibility, patience and perseverance. “Wanting to do something and being able to do something are two different things.” Inadequate funds and staff have not allowed Friends for the Needy to make a dent in the awareness of the communities.

What lies ahead is a thought Sr. Geetha would not pay heed to. “When everyday sustenance is in itself a challenge, I cannot think of the future,” says she, who was interrupted twice during the conversation to interact with her sponsors. As a message for our readers, she concludes, “All I would want to communicate is that, with little help patients of mental illness can lead better and comfortable lives. Friends for the needy is just one such effort. Kindly support us in whichever way you can.”

—Shanmuga Priya. R

If you wish to support Friends for the Needy, please contact Sr. Geetha at 044-26376755

Attitude



Various are the attitudes with which one may approach a saint. Sceptics and agnostics, theists and atheists, seekers of miracles, and hunters of psychic phenomena—all used to go to the Maharshi. Each would naturally put questions that came uppermost to his or her mind; and the nature of the questions would depend on the attitude and interests of the person concerned. The glory of the

Master lay in removing the attitudes and interests that were base and making the devotee long for realizing the supreme truth.

A few inspiring conversations on Attitude...

D.: In the quest of I, the seeker is at a certain stage directed to keep the mind in a negative attitude for Grace to enter. How can a negative yield positive result?

M.: The Self is always there - not to be newly got.

D.: I mean to ask, what has been done in the negative attitude to deserve the Grace?

M.: Are you asking this question without Grace? Grace is in the beginning, middle and end. Grace is the Self. Because of the false identification of the Self with the body the Guru is considered to be with body. But from the Guru's outlook the Guru is only the Self. The Self is one only. He tells that the Self alone is. Is not then the Self your Guru? Where else will Grace come from? It is from the Self alone. Manifestation of the Self is a manifestation of Grace and vice versa. All these doubts arise because of the wrong outlook and consequent expectation of things external to oneself. Nothing is external to the Self.

D.: All our questions are from our standpoint and Sri Bhagavan's replies are from his standpoint. The questions are not only answered, but are also undermined.

M.: The ego is the root of all diseases. Give it up. There will be no disease.

D.: If all renounce will there be a practical world? Who will plough? Who will harvest?

M.: Realise first and then see. The help through Realisation transcends all the help through words, thoughts and deeds, etc. If you understand your own reality then that of the *rishis* and masters will be clear to you. There is only one master and that is the Self.

D.: Why do masters insist on silence and receptivity?

M.: What is silence? It is eternal eloquence.

D.: What is receptive attitude of mind?

M.: Not to be distracted in mind.

D.: Is there use in bringing America and India closer by bringing the intelligentsia of the two countries together, say, by exchange of professors, etc.?

M.: Such events will take place

automatically. There is a Power guiding the destinies of nations. These questions arise only when you have lost touch with Reality. Is America apart from you, or India apart? Get hold of it and see.

D.: Sri Ramakrishna prepared Vivekananda. What is the power behind?

M.: The power is only one in all.

D.: What is the nature of that force?

M.: Just like iron filings drawn towards a magnet, the force is inside and not outside. Ramakrishna was in Vivekananda. If you think Vivekananda to be a body, Ramakrishna also is a body. But, they are not bodies. Vivekananda could not go into Samadhi had not Ramakrishna been within him.

D.: Why should one suffer when stung by a scorpion?

M.: What is the cause of the appearance of the body and of the world?

D.: It is part of the cosmic mind.

M.: Let the cosmic mind worry about such happenings. If the individual wants to know let him discover his Self.

—Excerpted from Sri Ramana Maharishi teachings

Organizational Climate - CORDS

A Series on 'Belongingness...nurturing people connect.'

To understand the extent of belongingness it is essential to tap into identifying the elements that are prevalent in the culture and climate of the organization. The organizational culture simply put, is the way of life in the organization. What one experiences when we interact with the organization which includes the systems, processes, symbols, expressions, and openness, and so on gives the understanding of the kind of culture that is nurtured by the members of the organization.

Research has shown that along with organizational culture, organizational climate plays a very important role in the growth and evolution of the organization. The internal environment is called 'organizational climate' and refers to the human environment within which members work. It may refer to the environment within a workgroup, a department, a strategic business unit, or the entire organization.

Organizational climate has been defined as: "the relatively enduring quality of the internal environment of an organization that is experienced by its members; influences their behavior; and can be described in terms of the values of a particular set of characteristics (or attitudes) of the organization." (Taguiri and Litwin, 1968, p.27). The climate cannot be seen or touched, but it is like the air in a room; it continuously influences members of the organization. In turn, the climate is affected by everything that occurs in an organization (Pattanayak and Mishra, 1999).

An organization nurtured around social entrepreneurship has deeper challenges and issues with regard to organizational climate.

The size of the organization is not as important as what connects each of the members to the organization. For the organization to experience a high level of belongingness, "CORDS" has to be nurtured and present in the organizational climate.

CORDS refers to:

C = Convergence and Connectivity

The main connecting factor is the purpose and vision of the organization. This has to be a shared vision. In a social entrepreneurship organization members may vary from permanent full-day commitment to total voluntary no-payment dynamic, flexible

commitment. Resources are usually limited and there is a need for high convergence in all decisions and resource utilization. The connectivity between people needs to be high and the communication structure has to be simple and straight. There may be several ideas and approaches to reach

out to the community but, there has to be a convergence of all efforts. The sun's rays are very useful by themselves but when they are focused through a magnifying glass they get the power to create fire, an additional energy force. There is power in convergence.

O = Openness to new ideas / innovation

A social entrepreneurship organization has to 'learn to learn'. Learning cannot happen without openness. The speed of change dictates the growth potential of an organization. When the reach out work is huge, the climate needs to foster and stimulate new ideas and innovation continuously. Many a time conviction being

high can limit the openness where 'knowing stops them from knowing more'. There can be seniority only for administration purpose but for development and growth the chronological age or years of experience need not dictate.

R = Relationship and recognition

Social entrepreneurship is a thankless, serious, tough journey. Living on edge and uncertainty will be the way of life. Hence, members require high emotional connect built on trusting relationships. When things are good, it is usually taken for granted, and when things go wrong it is taken up seriously. This heavily compromises the recognition of the contribution factor. Ability to appreciate and give feedback on an ongoing basis is possible if the organizational climate is built on trust and love.

D = Development

The organization based on social entrepreneurship is mostly people intensive. The development and growth of the organization is limited to the extent of maturity levels of the leadership of the organization. Learning has to be seen as an ongoing process and it has to be evolutionary in nature. 'If we always think what we have thought and do what we have done, the outcome will be what we have always got.' To get something new, we need to shift our locations, understand self and continuously update knowledge and gain new insights.

S = Sensitivity and Sustainability

Social entrepreneurs are usually a highly sensitive lot. It is their sensitivity which is their strength. Passion and dedication towards the purpose for which the core team

is connected may turn out to be a boon or bane depending on their sensitivity to others in the organization. When an organization begins to grow and numbers expand, admin issues come into existence, the lowering layers of sensitivity may disturb them leading to frustration and irritation. The organizational processes have to be formed keeping the sensitivity of the people and processes. High levels of sensitivity will also sustain the energy, vision, speed and connectivity within the organization. The sustainability of the organization and its primary vision depends to a large extent on the retention of the members with the organization. Members stay when they feel a high level of belongingness. They are willing to face several odds to ensure sustenance of the organization.

CORDS create a climate that is conducive and will stimulate the feeling of belongingness amongst the members of the organization. Serious attention has to be paid on an ongoing basis to measure the climate and ensure there is fine tuning of the processes. Like how a garden is to be maintained, the climate also requires to be nurtured on an everyday basis with all appropriateness.

Reflections:

- What are the dimensions experienced in my organization's climate?
- In a scale of 1 to 10 to what extent does each dimension of CORDS exist in my organization?
- At a personal level how much do I contribute to the CORDS dimension while working in organization?

—Kalpana Sampath, PhD



“Our success lies in the fact that people have started to value education and so do their children.”



Me and my DROPS

“Education is the chief defense of a nation,” said Burke. Little did he know of the multiple forms of discrimination that would make its accomplishment an onerous task. Obstacles are aplenty, especially in our country. “Enrollments are not the figures to go by,” says Jayanthi Raghavan, Founder, Adi Parasakthi Kuzhandaikalvi Arakkattalai, an NGO in Madipakkam, Chennai.

With increasing facilities and programmes to make elementary education universal, the obstacles have also grown manifold and complicated. “Whatever be the reasons, there are children out there who need care, who need to be taught clean habits, who need a place to acquire basic skills”.

This institution is one such place. Registered as a trust in 1986, it has managed to make a mark in the lives of several underprivileged children. With just twelve children to begin with, they never imagined the responsibility to stand at the present proportion.

“We began with the children in Tirusulam, engaged in land mines. Our team found it very hard to convince the parents of these children that education was necessary for their kids to lead better lives. Socio economic conditions compelled these parents to prefer their children to work than study. Going door-to-door was the only option that seemed workable. Leaving no stone unturned, we managed to garner attention in the locality,” recalls Jayanthi.

Primarily, the children were taught basic hygiene practices—use of soap, comb, oil. Provision of noon meals was

an added incentive. Over the years, Arakkattalai’s presence in the region was acknowledged and their work got noticed. Today, Arakkattalai houses 85 children who go to government schools. “Our success lies in the fact that people have started to value education and so do their children. One of our boys is an engineer today and he inspires the other children to take up professional courses,” states Jayanthi with pride.

Having begun this institution as a President of the Rotary Club, Jayanthi has received immense support from Ms. Sakunthala Chidambaram (the school’s Principal) and Ms. Parvadavardhini (the

“Whatever be the reasons, there are children out there who need care, who need to be taught clean habits, who need a place to acquire basic skills.”

Coordinator). The children are taught English, Tamil, Hindi and basic arithmetic. With this foundation, they are admitted in government schools in the neighbourhood. “Private schools are here to stay, but not for the underprivileged,” she laments.

Recently, another house has been taken up for rent at Uzhaipali Nagar to accommodate the children whose

parents and care givers cannot afford to get them educated. As they work during the day, the children learn their basics here. “It is important to sow the seeds of learning in the formative years of life,” says Jayanthi.

Jayanthi narrates the story of three children who were sent out of school for not paying their fees. On meeting Jayanthi at a function, the kids approached her for support. After completing classes V and VI at Arakkattalai, these children were admitted to a Government High School. “One of them, Yamuna, has stood first in class from seventh to twelfth standard. What more do you need,” exclaims Jayanthi.

These children come to meet their teachers at Arakkattalai as often as they can. “You have given us our lives,” are the words echoing in all their minds and hearts. “One of the boys, a first generation learner, is now earning seven thousand rupees a month. He donates five hundred rupees every month to Arakkattalai. It is important to give back,” says Jayanthi.

With the education programme making its mark, Jayanthi and team felt the need to help the abandoned elderly. Jayanthi stays with them and takes care of their schedule, specifically, their food. “When they approached us, we could not say no,” says Jayanthi, who has also performed the final rights to the deceased. Apparently, the institution is bogged by inadequacy of funds, so much so that they cannot afford to recruit many care takers.

The challenge of funds persisting, the

team continues to attend to the needs of its inmates. As for the children between 5 to 15 years of age, who do not wish to continue their studies, vocational training in carpentry, tailoring are organized and vocations are stabilized through loans from the Rotary Club. “Since parents are disinterested and preoccupied with making both ends meet, it becomes very difficult to motivate these children. Yet, we emphasise our students to complete tenth standard,” she says.

Talking about future plans, Jayanthi shrugs. The debates on institutionalization do not seem to bother her. “This work will go on forever. I don’t have big plans and just want to continue what I could do,” says Jayanthi who misses her friends at the home even if she is out for one day. One of them, Saraswathi, says: “I have been here for one month. My son is abroad and I do not wish to stay with my relatives. I got to know about ‘mami’ through a friend and decided to come here. I really feel at home.”

Jayanthi is all smiles to see her care and concern for the needy evolving constructively. “All I want is to see this institution become a landmark to this locality in the future,” she concludes.

—Shanmuga Priya .R

If you wish to support Adi Parasakthi Kuzhandaikalvi Arakkattalai, please contact Jayanthi at 9941835393

“If you help an old lady cross the street, that is social work.”

Dr. Balaram Biswakumar shares with **Marie Banu** and **Latha Suresh** his experience in the army and his passion for social causes

Capt. Prof. Dr. Balaram Biswakumar, served the Indian Army as an Emergency Commissioned Officer in the Army Medical Corps from 1963 to 1967 and was honourably discharged with the rank of Captain. He saw active service in Jammu and Kashmir and the Indo-Pakistan War, in recognition of which he was awarded the J & K Service Medal as well as the 1965 War Medal.

In 2010, he was awarded the Degree of D.Sc. (Doctor of Science Honoris Causa) at the 20th annual convocation of the Tamil Nadu Dr. M. G. R. Medical University in 2010. D.Sc. (Honoris Causa) is awarded in recognition of the scientific, academic, and social contributions of an eminent person and is the highest Degree conferred by the University.

Dr. Biswakumar is an active member in many professional bodies like the Indian Medical Association and Neurological Society of India. He is the Grand Master of the Freemasons of India and has been the first doctor to get this post. He also served as President for Rotary Club of Madras in 1995-1996.

Dr. Biswakumar has received many awards for his service and has been organizing many free health care camps for children and senior citizens in and around Chennai.

In an interview, Dr. Balaram Biswakumar shares with Marie Banu and Latha Suresh his experience in the army and his passion for social causes.

Can you share your experience in the Indian Army?

My career in the army started after I passed my MBBS in December 1962. It was the time when Chinese invaded the Indian Territory and we were totally overpowered in all sectors. One of the Generals came to our college and addressed us. He said that the army needed a lot of people, especially doctors. I had just passed my MBBS and had not even finished my internship. I felt that I had to do something, and so I joined the Indian Army in May 1963.

I was one of the early people who joined the emergency commission and was inducted as an Emergency Commissioned Officer. For one year, I served as a Peace-time Medical Officer in Military Hospital, Pathankot, which was the last railway station before Jammu and Kashmir. It was here I completed my internship. After that, I was sent to one of the artillery regiments to serve as a Regimental Medical Officer. My regiment was an artillery unit where they worked with 25 pounder guns that can shoot at a long

range into the enemy territory. I had to look after the health of the *jawans* and the officers here.

It was a very rewarding experience in the sense that it makes you a disciplined person. One gets to learn manpower management, leadership qualities, and many things about administration. You are the confidante of the Commanding Officer and treated at the level ‘of a couple of steps below God’ by the *jawans*! That situation taught a lot of things to me, more importantly humbling me and to develop endearing qualities despite a fierce-looking moustache!

I had the opportunity to serve in the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war in which my regiment took place. Those of us who were in the fore-front were given the Army Medal, and that is how I got that.

When you were honorably discharged from the army, were you willing to come back?

Yes, even though it is a very satisfying life for a young unmarried man to be exploring, climbing mountains, and doing only preventive doctoring. There was very little doctoring to do except treating the Kashmiri civilians which was not satisfying for me.

As a student I had never failed in any subject, hence I wanted to come back and do my post-graduation. The army did not relieve me after three and a half years, and so I remained for one more year.

How did the passion to engage in social service set in? Was it because you were in the army?

The idea of becoming a doctor set in when I was 6. My family doctor was my role model. I would compare him to the doctor in Cronin’s novel ‘The Citadel’,

who was compassion personified. He was always for service to the people and cared little for money. I wanted to be someone like him and this naturally kindled in me to do something for the people.

Going up in the social ladder, life gave me plenty of opportunities to join organizations. It is very difficult to do charity by yourself. You need likeminded people to carry your ideas forward and execute them, and an organization can do a lot more. That is how I was moulded into doing things and my innate desire got fructified when I got associated with the Rotary and Freemasons.

Other than health, which other issues are you passionate about?

In the more recent times, in the last one year particularly, I have come to witness the abject poverty of people in our country and the miserable state of living they are in. I had the opportunity to visit the tribal areas all over the country. A dream came to me that I must do something for the people living in these areas, and I named that dream ‘Jyotirgamaya’—meaning leading from darkness to light. We planned to electrify these villages using solar lights. To our horror, we found in certain hamlets that people have not seen an electric bulb.

They were managing the entire family with just one kerosene chimney. We, the Freemasons of this country, have provided lights in their homes through solar power and have literally led them from darkness to light.

The satisfaction it gave me to light up their homes is something that cannot be measured.

You have been the personal doctor for Kanchi Paramacharya. Can you share your learning?

Looking at him bless people and listening to the advice that he gave to those who came to him with various problems naturally gave me a lot of wisdom. Wisdom you absorb; when you don’t even talk to him. Just looking at him was enough and that was an experience in my life which has moulded me in a very big way. I learnt what compassion and wisdom was. When people were longing to get a glimpse of him I had the unique privilege to touch and feel the God who walked the earth.

Can you tell us the charities you are associated with?

I am Chairman for five Trusts. I have instituted one Trust in memory of my late wife called Dr (Mrs.) Indira Biswakumar Memorial Charitable Trust through which we support the needy people—oppressed women, destitute women and children, and visually impaired persons.

I am also the Chairman of Sri Kanchi Paramaguru Medical Trust. Paramacharya ordered me to look after the health of the old people who were residing at the old age homes in Kalavai and Srikalahasti. For the past 25 years, I am regularly taking a team of doctors and volunteers and attending to the health needs of those living in the old age homes here. This project was initially started by my good friend Late Dr.N. Mathrubootham.

Who do you think is a social worker?

For me, someone who doesn’t want to be called a social worker, but instead thinks that he is repaying to the society what he has drawn from them in a big way—is a social worker. When you grow higher in status—whether they are titles or monetary position, or influence in the society—the more you have to give back to the society, because that is where it all came from.

In fact, everyone should be a social worker. If you help an old lady cross the street, that is social work; If you lend your shoulder to a person who is in distress to cry, that is charity.

Photo: Marie Banu

Editorial

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu