

Conversations

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**"The life of a Police Officer
is difficult. But, it is an
excellent opportunity to
help people."**

An exclusive interview with
Shri. S. George, IPS

From the Editor

Dear Friend,

Come November, we usher in the festival of lights. In this modern world, festivals are the only way to keep our culture and traditions alive. In Indian villages, Diwali is more a celebration of the end of the harvest and many months of hard work.

Popularly known as the Festival of Lights, people across the country exchange sweets and have large family gatherings in their homes. It is an occasion to share joy and happiness.

The changemakers featured in this issue are always in the pursuit of lighting up the lives of the disadvantaged. The festival of

lights adds splendor to their work and infinite cheer to the lives they touch.

Let us all reach out to the un-reached and try to light their lives through our small deeds of goodness during this festive season!

Happy Diwali!

P. N. Subramanian



Published by:

Mr. P. N. Subramanian
on behalf of
**Centre for Social Initiative and
Management**

391/1, Venkatachalapathi Nagar,
Alapakkam, Chennai -600 116.

Phone: 044-42805365
Website: www.csim.in

Cultivating new life in an alien land

“When the elephants fight, it’s the grass that’s trampled,” says Retna Raja Singham; Program Co-ordinator, Nallayan Research center for sustainable development. The center, known to the locals of Navalloor village in Kancheepuram as Ceylon farm, is home to 20 Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka. Miles away from home and longing to return to their motherland, these men and women, victims of the civil war, toil on the 10 acres of farmland from sunrise to sunset.

Apart from the cultivation of rice and mushroom; cattle and fowl are also bred. This reporter recalls with gratitude how the inhabitants treated him to a lunch time feast of rice, eggs and chicken. The trade mark culture, however, is Spirulina, (*Arthro spira platensis*) a blue-green algae that thrives at temperatures between 25 and 35 degrees centigrade. Rich in protein and requiring bare little beyond the initial investment, the food supplement is packaged here and distributed across the 115 Sri Lankan refugee camps in Tamil Nadu.

Retna Raja Singham, said the idea of cultivating Spirulina arose when officials

from the UN’s Food and Agricultural organization (FAO) identified nutrient deficiency to be rampant among the refugees. The first batch received their training in Spirulina cultivation from Madurai and the project was implemented in the Ceylon farm, run by Organisation for Eelam Refugees Rehabilitation (OfERR), in 2002.

Recently, OfERR has also begun to distribute spirulina to the tsunami refugee camps in Kadaloor, Nagapattinam, and Kanyakumari. “This is our way of showing gratitude, to our brothers and sisters of Tamil Nadu who have offered us shelter in times of war,” says one of the refugees.

The algae is cultivated in 15 large tanks, of which three are permanent concrete ones.

The temporary tanks are made of tarpaulin and wooden frames, and can hold 3,600 litres of water. The permanent tanks that breeds the mother culture and can hold an additional 400 litres.

The water needs to be maintained at a height of 23 cm during summer and 20 cm during winter. Each tank yields in a day 3 kilograms of algae. The spirulina is



harvested around 5 AM, wrapped in muslin cloth, pressed in order to drain the excess water, and sun dried before being sent for testing to Pondicherry. The spirulina powder is then packaged and distributed.

Spirulina can be consumed by mixing

with water. Breeding of spirulina demands meticulous attention as the culture needs to be agitated once every hour, and the temperature and height of the water needs to be maintained at a constant level.

Vijaykant, who arrived in India in 1990 as a child and a graduate in micro-biology from Bharatidasan University, supervises the spirulina cultivation at the farm. “It involves a lot of hard work and requires constant attention. Yet, we are glad that we have a means of livelihood far away from our motherland,” he says.

One kilogram of dry spirulina costs 1,250 rupees in the market and the farm has a turn over of Rs. 60,000 a month, of which around Rs. 30,000 is profit.

Chatting with the inhabitants of the farm, one confronts the distress that someone else’s war has affected the lives of ordinary civilians. They are the grass that has been trampled upon. But, they refuse to give up despite being caught in the fight of the mammoth elephants. At least for the moment they have passed the crucial test called - ‘Survival’.

—Pramod Mathew
Asian college of Journalism

ADD SPARKLE TO THE SEASON WITH A
TOUCH OF THE ORIENT AT **China Town**
A SIP OF SCINTILLATING SPAIN AT **Zara**
A TINGE OF EXOTIC THAILAND AT **Benjarong**
A MESMERISING SENSE OF NORTH INDIA
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Rewriting Destinies

“When organizations like CSIM are at your arms reach, the least you can do is to turn and take a good look at them and be aware of their existence. If many more did this, we would be a much better society.”

This is the story of a boy who has lived in the streets, faced the hardships of poverty, survived bullying, battled disability, and is now redeeming the self-esteem of children who go through similar experiences in their lives. Vidyapathi is a life-skills trainer at the Ma Foi Foundation. A former Kabaddi champion, he hurt his knees during a match that left permanent damage rendering him bedridden for almost six months. He did recover from that and was able to walk again, but his knees have since lost the ability to withstand the strain of long walks and running.

Of his early days, says Vidyapathi, “I was initially raised in Aruppukkottai at Virudhunagar District by my Uncle, while my parents worked in Andhra, paying off debts using the little money that they earned. I studied in a government school until my parents came to Chennai to set up a roadside idly-shop. I moved in with them and joined a private school here. My parents and I survived each day by eating the leftovers from the day’s business. Between helping my father by selling idly and poori on the road side, and by doing other odd jobs, I managed to maintain a decent score at school. When I finished my schooling, a donor agreed to sponsor my college education. I joined a Nadar community college at Thirunelveli. Although I did belong to the same community, I was not aware of the fragmentations and hierarchy that was hidden within the community. I was bullied by teachers and students alike, mostly for being caste-ignorant and a city-bred boy. I quit college in 2006, losing all my certificates in the bargain, and started working in an aluminium fabrication company in Chennai.”

Vidyapathi’s interest in sports was nurtured even as a kid. From the time he moved to Chennai, he was a part of the local Police Boys’ Club, where he regularly played Kabaddi at the local matches. It was during one of those matches that he severely injured his knee.

“For the first time, I was able to empathise with a disabled person. I didn’t just comprehend their difficulties, but understood all the complexities it brought along with it. I now knew what it was to be unable to do one’s own daily chores; to be unable to work. It was around this time, I was introduced to CSIM. I thought: ‘if I cannot go for work, I might as well get into social service.’ This thought, I realize in reflection, was more due to a state of hopelessness. However, as I learned more about social work, I got more attracted towards it, making me take it up like my life’s calling,” recalls Vidyapathi.

When talking about his association with CSIM, he gets passionate and emotional



even. He considers Mrs. Eva Rosalin as his guide and mentor. “When I thought I could never get back to studying a graduate degree, it was Mrs. Eva Rosalin who helped me in retrieving some xerox copies of my certificates. I have now enrolled in a Bachelor degree in Sociology through correspondence.”

“At CSIM, my class contained a mixed group of students. Among them, were widows, single women, women living with HIV/Aids, tribals, and even transgenders. I would have ridiculed some of these very people due to my ignorance earlier, but at CSIM, I learnt about them and I felt proud to be associated with them. We all have faced troubles and sadness in one form or another and had come together to overcome this. We were a very charged group,” says he.

At CSIM, Vidyapathi learnt to come up

“At CSIM I learnt most of the skills that help me in my profession today. I may not have a degree yet, but I can comfortably operate a computer, speak English, work on Tally software and much more.”

with long-term sustainable solutions to every problem. “Mrs. Eva Rosalin and Mrs. Latha Suresh motivated me to explore opportunities. I learned budgeting from Mrs. Marie Banu, who like the other two mentors, helped me to find myself. These three ladies were so different from my own mother, who was a typical servile housewife. Meeting them has changed my perspective on how I view women. Needless to say, nowadays I give a lot of respect to the strong influence a wife and mother can have in her family as well as in the society,” he says.

“At CSIM I learnt most of the skills that help me in my profession today. I may not have a degree yet, but I can comfortably operate a computer, speak English, work on Tally software and much more. Even in my friends-circle, I am considered to be more knowledgeable. Prior to CSIM, if I

saw a stone on the path, I would merely remove it and move on. Now, I would ensure that the stone never comes in the way” adds he.

After visiting several NGO’s who were working on varied issues, and after briefly exploring maternal-child health issues, Vidyapathi zeroed in on being a career guidance counsellor and life-skills trainer at Ma Foi Foundation in Chennai.

The Ma Foi Foundation offers anywhere between 1500 to 2500 scholarships a year to deserving candidates who are children of single parents, and those who are orphaned but live with their guardian. Vidyapathi, in the capacity of a field officer, has taken under his wing 16 Boys’ Clubs out of a total of 95 that have been reached out to. He ensures that he maintains a brotherly relationship with the kids so that they may not hesitate to talk to him about their problems. Not just kids, but parents too have taken a liking for him.

“Last evening a mother called me up and requested me to talk to her son. Her husband was creating trouble at home and the boy was suffering from abuse and was getting withdrawn. I am happy to be of help in their time of need,” says Vidyapathi.

He accords the credit to his being outgoing and bold to Mr. Jayaseelan and Mr. Vasantabala of Ma Foi Foundation. “They gave me the opportunity to speak to an audience of hundreds of people at a time when I was very uncomfortable doing so. In my very first class, I blabbered. However, their constant encouragement and grooming helped me go a long way.” he says.

Vidyapathi says with great humility, “I always remember my roots, and my roots are the streets. The people that changed my life along the way always tell me that they and I are equal. I can never forget them. When organizations like CSIM are at your arms reach, the least you can do is to turn and take a good look at them and be aware of their existence. If many more did this, we would be a much better society.”

About his training experiences and future plans, Vidyapathi says, “I am going to dedicate myself to the children who need a push. These children, in their years of growing up require just a handy tip or two along the way. Their education should be scientific, not moralistic. However, some simple values, such as treating your parents and wife well, should be inculcated by way of example and not as mere words of advice. After all, children are like diamonds. It is up to people like us to polish them well so that they may shine brightest.”

Indeed!

—Archanaa R.



A delicious way to contribute to a cause

Battle of the Buffet 2012



The city's top five-star hotels hosted the Battle of the Buffet event in Chennai on 6th October, 2012 at Chennai Trade Centre, Nandambakkam.

Jointly organised by Chennai Mission and CSIM, as part of the Joy of Giving Week celebrations, this event has established itself as a fundraising brand for social work organizations.

Around 2,500 people participated in the event and a total of Rs 2.14 crores was raised to support the cause of over 60 NGOs in and around Chennai.

"This is a unique opportunity for NGOs to raise money through a completely sponsored event. It will be an evening of the finest cuisines by all the participating five-star hotels coming together under one roof. We would like to celebrate giving in the 'Joy of Giving Week' in this manner and honour the good work that many NGOs in the city are engaged in," says Mr. Mahadevan, Chairman and MD of Oriental Cuisines, and Founder of Chennai Mission.

The event also had an auction, featuring Jimmy Choo, Gucci and Louis Vuitton handbags donated by actors such as Trisha Krishnan, Radhika Sarathkumar, Lizzie Priyadarshan and Suhasini Mani Ratnam. Auctioned at a starting price of one-tenth of their original price, the bags raised a total of Rs. 69,500. The auction also featured Aishwarya Rai Bachchan's sari, which went for Rs. 40,000 and a Thota Tharrani that sold for Rs. 2,80,000.

Then, as people gathered for dinner, Singer Srinivas and his team performed live.

—Marie Banu





Ensuring Accountability in Service

SAN, India facilitated Shriram City Union Finance Ltd.(SCUF), to draft their social accounts based on the Social Accounting and Audit framework of SAN,UK. The social audit took place on June 30th at their Chennai Office.

The social audit report was formally released by Hon'ble Union Finance Minister Shri. P. Chidambaram at Hotel Le Meridien, New Delhi on 23rd October, 2012.

He lauded the efforts taken by Shriram group to publish their social report and added saying, "India's poor are more prompt in repaying loans and deserve access to more financial services. The poor in India are ethical and not bad borrowers. Banks and financial institutions should make extra efforts to lend more to those in the bottom of the pyramid. While big corporate houses can easily get loans of Rs 1,000 crore or more with little effort, the poor face multiple challenges in availing small loans. In fact, a large business house can easily raise Rs 1,000 crore and can even not repay the loans. But, it is not so for the poor borrower. There is no margin of error for him. The small borrower has to borrow small amounts, pay what may appear to be a higher rate of interest, make money, repay the loan in time, as otherwise he will not be able to get the second loan," he said.

Emphasising that the poor must get loan, Shri. Chidambaram said that he himself has witnessed on many occasions Self-help Groups (SHGs) or

education loan borrowers repaying their loan promptly.

"So I think it is important to remember that the poor in this country deserve to be helped," he added.

He also commented that majority of the people in our country do not have access to any kind of financial services, including bank account and hence the Government had encouraged non-banking finance companies and micro-finance institutions to help achieve

financial inclusion. He was happy to note that SCUF's mission of financial inclusion was in line with the government's mandate and appreciated the founder, Mr Thiagarajan's vision in providing small loans for small entrepreneurs and businesses.

The Finance Minister also emphasized on the need to bring the entire population under the ambit of formal financial coverage.

Highlighting the plight of borrowers

who take funds from money lenders at a high rate of interest, the Union Finance Minister said that the government has taken steps to bring the deprived section into the formal banking network fold.

Mr. K. R. Kamath, Chairman and Managing Director, Punjab National Bank, and Mr Vijay Mahajan, Founder, BASIX were also present during the event.

— Latha Suresh



Impact of SCUF

Shriram City was in line with its mission to cater to the financial needs of self-employed individuals who run small and medium enterprises and catered predominantly to customers in urban and semi urban areas of India

95.2% of Shriram City's customers are self-employed individuals; 2.3% are farmers; and 2.5% are institutions. Of these 82% of customers availed small loans of less than Rs.50,000 for developing their small business. 64% of the customers were below 40 years of age, thereby enabling the most productive workforce in India, which lies in the 30 to 40 age group.

93% of customers were able to scale their business, and 79% had increased their assets and reduced their liabilities. 80% got better social recognition and 89% had bettered their lifestyle by availing loans from Shriram City.

“The moment my community members land in Malaysia, they start earning money by selling bead chains. One-third of the population in Malaysia being Tamilians, we have good business here. Most of my them travel on a three-month visa, while some are lucky and get a multiple entry visa for a period of one year.”

The Way We Live Now



About Narikuravas

The word ‘Narikurava’ is a combination of the Tamil words ‘Nari’ and ‘Kurava’ meaning ‘jackal or fox people’. This name has been bestowed upon them due to their adeptness in hunting and trapping jackals.

The Narikuravas speak an Indo-Aryan language called Vagriboli, which is a western Indian language of the Indo-Aryan family. Due to this, they are also known as Vagris or Vagrivalas. Almost all Narikuravas are well-versed in Tamil.

The Narikurava community hail from Tamil Nadu, India. They originally belong to the indigenous tribes, and their main occupation is hunting. But, as they were prohibited entry into the forests, they were forced to take up other alternatives such as selling beaded ornaments to survive. Thus, they started migrating from place to place to find a market for their beads.

On a lazy Sunday morning, I set out to document the lives of Narikuravas who live in Chennai. The traffic was smooth, and in less than 30 minutes I reached my destination—Kottur. I parked the car at a distance and walked towards the market, where my contact Vijaya resides. Half-way through, I called her to get for directions to reach her place. “Where are you? I shall send my son Udayakumar to lead you home. He is wearing a blue T-shirt and a beige coloured bermuda,” said Vijaya. I waited around the corner until Jayakumar arrived and we walked through the narrow market lanes that was slushy due to the recent rains. The smell of fish was strong, and I was careful not to slip. Jaykumar stopped abruptly and pointed to a two-storied house and said with pride: “We live here.” I thanked him for leading the way and entered the premise. In the verandah, there were three men making bead chains and in the centre was a portable DVD player screening a recent Tamil movie. While they were engrossed in the movie as well as in their work, I slowly went inside Vijaya’s home. Vijaya was seated at the floor busy making a bead chain that is worn usually by the devotees of Lord Ayyappa. She welcomed me with her warm smile and offered me a chair to sit on. But, I chose to sit beside her.

To put her at ease, I initiated the conversation by saying, “I feel bad for disturbing you while at work. You can speak to me and continue to make the chain.”

“No. I can do this later,” she replied. “Well, you need a lot of concentration for doing this as it involves a lot of beads and knots,” I said.

“No. In fact, I can watch television and make the bead chain at the same time,” she replied with confidence.

“So, what is your favourite television channel?” I probed.

“I like only action movies and watch the

‘Movies Now’ channel. My favourite hero is Arnold Schwarzenegger,” she replied.

I tried my best to hide my surprise, and did succeed on that.

Vijaya’s husband Babu was on travel to Trichy. She has two sons—Udayakumar and Ashwin. Udayakumar has studied up to the 10th standard and is married, while Ashwin is studying in 8th standard at Evans matriculation school in Taramani.

“It is nice to know that you son is going to a matriculation school,” I appreciated.

“We have been through a lot of struggle. I don’t want my children to experience any difficulty. That is why we have educated them well,” she said.

“You must have really put in a lot of effort to reach this position. Can you share with us your life journey,” I politely asked.

“My husband and I moved to Chennai after we got married in 1989. There has been days when we did not get even a single meal. We depended on the leftover food that was given away by the sailors when the ship landed at Chennai port,” she said holding back her tears.

“One of our friends suggested that we travel abroad to sell beads. We borrowed money from money lenders to apply for a passport, but got deceived many times by the agents. It was then I decided to start my own passport agency and help my community people to travel abroad and earn a better living,” she said.

“Was it easy for you to get passports for your community members? Did they all have ration cards?” I questioned.

“Yes, all my community members have ration cards. Now, they have Election ID cards and PAN cards as well,” she instantly responded.

“My husband got his passport in the year 2000 and traveled to Singapore. He kept sending me money every month and on seeing how my life has changed, my community members requested me to send them abroad as well. I charged Rs. 1000 per application and also lent funds, about 3000 Malaysian dollars to each person traveling abroad as they will have to declare this as ‘sure money’ at the time of immigration,” she explained.



Photos: Marie Banu



Vijaya has traveled to Singapore and Malaysia several times. “The moment my community members land in Malaysia, they start earning money by selling bead chains. One-third of the population in Malaysia being Tamilians, we have good business here. Most of my them travel on a three-month visa, while some are lucky and get a multiple entry visa for a period of one year,” she added.

We paused for a moment as her younger son Ashwin arrived. He demanded our attention and asked me to click his picture. I asked Vijaya if I could take her picture as well.

She hesitantly requested: “Can you please give me time to change into a saree?”

I stepped out allowing her to get ready for the photo shoot, and chatted with the men who were seated at the

verandah. In less than ten minutes, Vijaya appeared in a bright blue saree and I was awe-struck.

I took more than two dozen pictures of her alone, as I did not want to disappoint her. The men and children insisted that I click their pictures as well, and I readily obliged.

“There are 200 Narikurava families living in this locality. I have ten houses in this lane which I have let out for rent. Now, I have enough money to meet my needs,” concluded Vijaya with contentment.

Bidding adieu to the bead makers, I traced my path back home reminiscing each moment I spent with this colorful community.

—Marie Banu

Speak Up, Rural India

For a democracy to function effectively, a two-way conversation between the people and the government is important. Gram Vaani provides a platform to enable this interaction.

Gram Vaani, as the name suggests, aims to give voice to rural India through technology-based solutions. A social venture, it began as a technology company to provide radios to community radio stations at highly competitive rates. Today, it offers a range of services to enable rural communities to voice their opinions and report on development-related activities. Its team profile has changed from just technical staff to include journalists and people with experience of having worked with non-governmental organisations.

Mayank Shivam, one of the three founders of this New Delhi-based company incubated at Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi, was working with McKinsey & Company but had always dreamed of becoming an entrepreneur. During a stint in Amsterdam in 2008, his friend Dr. Aditeshwar Seth called him to discuss his research. He was working on a product that would be relevant for social development in India and wanted a business plan. Based on the business plan Shivam designed, the duo managed to raise seed funding from the US-based fund, Knight Foundation. This was used to set up the office and kick start the venture.

Community empowerment

Gram Vaani was started with GRINS – Gramin Radio Inter-Networking System, a radio automation system for community radios. Currently, the interaction between the government and the people is one-way. The government announces schemes that various agencies are supposed to implement. But, there is no feedback from the people as to whether it is relevant and if it is being implemented as planned.

Community radio service is a vision of the government to enable two-way communication. Operators like Gram Vaani provide solutions to enable this communication. The government had a target to establish 4,000 community radio stations by 2012. This gave Gram Vaani a huge market to capitalise on.

The company priced its assembled product competitively so that community centres could afford the equipment. “There are branded products in the market. But the rural centres and the urban poor cannot afford them. We felt their need,” Shivam points out. However, the reality is that there are only 120 community centres as of now. And so Gram Vaani found its market severely restricted. Simultaneously, it also realised that merely providing hardware was not enough. The need of the hour was to educate masses and more importantly,



Gram Vaani needed to set up media centres.

Crowd sourcing for news

As the media centres were set up in the main office, the nature of the team also underwent a shift to include journalists and those with NGO experience. The news service is localised, covering a radius of 20 kilometres of a village. Locals can call the agency and report any event or news which would then be verified and broadcast.

“The news here is very different from that in the mass media. These reports are typically those about corruption, leakages and human rights violations. In the first 40 days of our launch in August 2011, there were 60,000 calls, showing the need for such a service,” points out Shivam.

The other service started by Gram Vaani is Mericity.in, which is a monitoring system for garbage cleaning in the city of New Delhi. The local contractor reports to the Municipal Corporation through the website on whether the garbage has been cleared from a particular locality. The people in the neighbourhood can login to the site and verify this, or raise a complaint if the work is not to their satisfaction. “We wish to expand these services to other cities too. In this, the

other players are mostly NGOs or social ventures and they are more like collaborators than competitors,” he explains.

Future vision

Enabling every Indian to voice his or her view and interact with the local elected representative for transparency in spending money for local development – that is the objective Gram Vaani works towards. The company sees itself more as a platform player now, rather than a technology player. And through these two platforms, the company aims to reach out to a million people.

Gram Vaani’s growth focus is going to be in mobile news and by taking Mericity.in to other geographies. In the short to medium term, Mericity.in will be deployed as a customised application for civic agencies such as the Municipal Corporation for a fee. In the long term, it will be developed as a citizen engagement platform with registered users. The user base will then be leveraged for targeted advertising.

In case of News (mobile news), advertising, market research for companies targeting the rural consumer, who is tough to reach through traditional media, and licensing content to

mainstream media are some of the sources of its revenue.

With expansion in mind, the current team of 10 will be increased conservatively. “We plan to double the technology team and take in three to four more people with project management and a journalistic profile,” says Shivam. The company will also partner with local NGOs for localising its services and providing domain expertise in various aspects related to the developmental issues of the country.

As for GRINS, the market expansion plans include exploring international markets. Currently, the organisation has a presence in Africa. Resellers who provide technology and sales support in east-Asian countries and the Middle East will be developed.

With a host of initiatives, the company has grown from seeing no returns in its initial two years to currently registering a 100 per cent growth. It first saw this growth trend in 2011 and intends to sustain the same for the next four years. In fact, the funds from Knight Foundation are still available for further growth. But shortly after this time frame, the organisation will seek more investment.

Learning from experience

For the founders of Gram Vaani, this journey has helped them grow as individuals. One of the greatest lessons for Gram Vaani was that of market understanding. Considering the promised potential of the community radio stations and the reality on the ground, there was a clear message that one cannot always predict external circumstances. Additionally, the team learnt that technology was just one of the means to resolve the social development issues of India. The problems that rural India faces are more complex in nature and addressing them requires changing the existing mindset.

Shivam voices this view as he says that democracy can be effective only if there is citizen participation. His dream is to enable this by providing the people with the necessary platform to be able to voice their views. He has also found that entrepreneurship itself is a different ball game from being an employee – and the accountability is that much higher. Social entrepreneurship especially requires the entrepreneur to stretch himself to the maximum. And he is ready to take this commitment, head on.

—S. Meera

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

Show Me The Way

“Our services were free of cost. We even started a medical centre where we cared for and treated nearly 4,500 people.”

A twist of fate was pretty much the one deciding factor that led to the formation of what is today, one of the better-known homes for children in the city. Dr A D S N Prasad's story of how he went about forming Pathways is as inspiring as it is touching...

With a private practice at Gandhi Nagar, Adyar in 1975 — at just 21 he was perhaps the only audiologist and speech pathologist in the city — Dr A D S N Prasad could have well told life what he wanted out of it. The only problem: life didn't give him that option. “In fact, I was viewing my practice in Chennai as a transitory phase in my life,” he says, “I wanted to move to Indiana and settle there. The paperwork was in place too.” Dr Prasad's practice in Chennai was quite successful and the fact that he charged his patients ensured that he had sufficient money to live a good life. He was indeed as successful as he could possibly be. One day, however, his life changed.

“I was seeing around seven patients that day,” he says, “One of them was a child with an acute case of Microcephaly (a medical condition where the circumference of the head is abnormally small). The child had only one relative and she was his aunt.” Dr Prasad began treating the child and caring for him. “After one of our sessions one day, the aunt never turned up to pick the child up,” he says, “When I sent my cook to call on her, we discovered that she had expired.” Almost overnight, the doctor was faced with a decision that he had to make. He could have handed over the child to a social service organization. “But I decided to keep him,” he says, “He was very unwell. But I felt myself loving and caring for him a great deal. I was just 21 and the money I earned was more than sufficient to feed someone apart from myself.” That was of course, until he began caring just a little while later, for a child with Down's syndrome. What then began were his baby steps towards something bigger. Before he knew it, he felt a need to care for lesser-fortunate children who needed to be looked after and treated for several medical conditions. In three months, he had 28 children under his care.

In a sense, that was how Pathways began — by accident. “I never imagined I'd do this when I began practice here in the city,” says Prasad. Quite naturally, caring for these children needed money. “I approached the Department of Social



Welfare to ask the authorities there if there were any grants of sorts that I could make use of. I was turned down,” he says, “They obviously hadn't heard of someone who was doing the work that I was doing, back then.” However, his salary from the three hospitals he worked at, and his private practice ensured that Dr Prasad had just enough to care for the 110 children who were now under his care. “I had to sell my car and bike in order to raise more money,” he says, “I did just that.” Understandably, his dream of going abroad died a natural death.

In 1983, Dr Prasad married. He would now have a family to take care of, apart

Nagar where we were staying on rent,” says Dr Prasad. By this time, friends from the United States also pitched in, hearing of the tremendous social work that Pathways was doing. One of them was Judge Williams Sheffield, who continues to be a beacon of support to the organization. “Our services were free of cost. We even started a medical centre where we cared for and treated nearly 4,500 people,” says Dr Prasad. By this time, the group had also extended care to nearly 125 children from the adjoining slums. Although hard to come by, whatever money Pathways received, came from several one-time grants from

an Agro Farm for Children. Prasad thanks generous donors from the US, Pamela Martinez who helped Pathways to establish this state of art facility to help hundreds of ‘Normal’ orphan and semi orphan children. In the same Farm a large facility to help more than 250 disabled children and adults have been constructed with the Help of Gary Sabin, Chairman. Sabin Children Foundation, San Diego. He also thanks William Benac a top financial expert and a supporter of Pathway for his constant support.

Having helped over 23,000 children (an average of around 600 children a month) since its inception in 1975, there's no denying that Pathways has indeed come a long way. “In fact, it's interesting that we named our NGO Pathways,” says Prasad, “The words ‘path’ and ‘way’ mean pretty much the same thing. But together, the word ‘Pathway’ has a greater sense of direction, which we wanted to give the children.” With over 112 employees, care of the sick is definitely in good hands. But the battle, according to Dr Prasad is far from won. “The objective is to keep taking care of children long after our time,” he says, “Needless to say, expenses keep rising as time goes by.” However, that has not deterred quality away from Pathway's homes. With good facilities, including swimming pools, the children are taken care of to the best possible extent”. Prasad also acknowledges the wonderful support rendered by Sudha Subramaniam.

“We are looking for the right business model to sustain the work that we do,” concludes Dr Prasad, “We have volunteers from the US coming down on social assignments. All we care about is for the children and that they will be taken care of, for a long time to come.”

—Daniel Almeida

Having helped over 23,000 children (an average of around 600 children a month) since its inception in 1975, there's no denying that Pathways has indeed come a long way.

from the 100-odd children that he already cared for. “My wife (Chandra) sold her jewellery to raise enough money to sustain our little home,” he says, recalling the immense support that he received from his spouse, who has been a major part of his crusade, “Nobody else would have been so very understanding.” By this time, Prasad began writing letters to H Y Sharada Prasad — one of Indira Gandhi's most noteworthy media advisors. “He was a distant relative of mine,” says Dr Prasad, “I requested him for help and he asked me to come on over to New Delhi. We left for the capital. With his help, we secured a Rs60,000 annual grant, which in those days was a huge sum of money.”

With the financial aid that it received, Pathways then began treading the warpath. “We built a home at Thiruvannmiyur over 10,000 sq ft, which helped us move the children from Gandhi

establishments that ranged from well-known NGOs like Miserior to the Japanese Government. In fact, the funding from Miserior helped Pathways construct a centre for adults at Mahabalipuram in 1990. “These children began growing up into adults. We definitely needed to care for some of them,” says Prasad.

“We planned on taking Pathways to other States,” says Prasad, “Judge Sheffield and I sat down to discuss this one day. However, we realized that procuring land was bound to be a problem since not many were forthcoming about donating land for our cause.” It was then that the organization expanded within Tamil Nadu itself, to Agili, Maduranthakam Taluk, Kancheepuram district. “We began an orphanage for normal children, there.” A large tract of agricultural land was purchased to build

GURU, AVATARA, YOGA, JAPA, SEVA

Q: How can Vedanta be realised?

A: By "hearing, reflection, and meditation." Hearing must take place from a Sad-guru. Even if one is not a regular disciple, but is a fit aspirant and hears the Sad-guru's words, he is liberated.

Q: Who is a Sad-guru?

A: A Sad-guru is one on whom the spiritual power has descended by Guru-paramparā, or an unbroken chain of discipleship.

To play the role of a spiritual teacher is a very difficult thing. One has to take on oneself the sins of others. There is every chance of a fall in less advanced men. If merely physical pain ensues, then he should consider himself fortunate.

Q: Cannot the spiritual teacher make the aspirant fit?

A: An Avatāra can. Not an ordinary Guru.



Q: Is there no easy way to liberation?

A: There is no royal road to Geometry—

except for those who have been fortunate enough to come in contact with an Avatara. Paramahansa Deva used to say, "One who is having his last birth shall somehow or other see me."

Q: Is not Yoga an easy path to that?

A: (Jokingly) You have said well, I see!—Yoga an easy path! If your mind be not pure and you try to follow Yoga, you will perhaps attain some supernatural power, but that will be a hindrance. Therefore purity of mind is the first thing necessary.

Q: How can this be attained?

A: By good work. Good work is of two kinds, positive and negative. "Do not steal"—that is a negative mandate, and "Do good to others"—is a positive one.

Q: Should not doing good to others be performed in a higher stage, for if

performed in a lower stage, it may bind one to the world?

A: It should be performed in the first stage. One who has any desire at first gets deluded and becomes bound, but not others. Gradually it will become very natural.

Q: Sir, last night you said, "In you is everything." Now, if I want to be like Vishnu, shall I have to meditate on the form also, or only on the idea?

A: According to capacity one may follow either way.

Q: What is the means of realisation?

A: The Guru is the means of realisation. "There is no knowledge without a teacher."

—Source: *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*

Ownership – the powerful internal connect

The word 'ownership' is related to 'belongingness', since 'to belong' includes the meaning as 'to be owned' and 'to be related'. The dictionary meaning of 'own' adjectively means 'belong to oneself or itself'. It can be noticed that 'feeling of owning' is critical to belonging. In the traditional industries the owning was very evident with the guild system since the artisans and apprentice lived together. They learnt the trade as well as met all the living needs which gave a sense of ownership to the place and people where they belong. With the advent of giant industries with large workforce, some processes like the job security systems, pension schemes and host of welfare systems and participatory management practices were those that tried to give a sense of ownership to the employee. But, in the present day knowledge industry, mobility is high, the organizations are scattered across the globe for its operations, and therefore many of the earlier instituted schemes do not have much relevance. Therefore, monetary benefits, ESOPs are offered during their stay in the organization.

However, the sense of ownership is not merely a tangible aspect, but it is in the behaviour of the knowledge worker. The sense of ownership as is understood by the organizations of today is instilled by processes which are geared towards: transparency of information, participatory style of operations, flatter organization structure, approachability and accessibility of top management across the organization, the focus on responsibility and accountability for the deliverables, frequent and good amount of vertical communication. The 'ownership' dimension is measured through the employee's sense of commitment, responsibility and accountability, trust, pride, participation in organizational



decisions, and level of transparency in organizational communication.

In one of the attitude survey (<http://www.ownershipassociates.com/psychology.shtm>) people rated the importance of the five common meanings of ownership:

- Getting the maximum financial payoff from ownership
- Having a say over decisions that affect my daily work
- Employees having real influence in how the company is run overall
- A sense of community, that "we're all in this together"
- Being treated fairly

Financial payout is not the primary thing most people say they're looking for with an ESOP is the sense of ownership. One good way to harness that power is to emphasize themes of fairness and respect for individuals. These themes should not be just in communications and training programs, but in the way managers and

employees interact. When people feel that the company treats them with fairness and respect, when it shows that it values them and their contribution, it gives employee-owners a reason to care about the company.

In a social organization run by the social entrepreneur where the existence has relationship and passion as the foundation, ownership becomes a double edged sword. The members of the organization will identify themselves with varied things right from the societal problem they are identifying to the financial compensation that is helping them lead their lives. The ownership is not so much to the physical infrastructure of the organization but to the regions, clients and groups with which they work. The intensity of ownership can be facilitative for the organization to grow as well as become restrictive for the organization. The varied ownership pegs lead to varied expectations and these are expressed by the behaviour of the people. The cost consciousness, number of hours of work, extending beyond the work given, foresight, looking at alternatives, not being stuck by job and role boundaries, language and presentation about the project, networking and sourcing, resource utilization and so on indicate the level of ownership.

A person who comes to work in an organization is a whole person where not only the work dimension has to be accepted but also his/her entire person. It is the western concept that say leave the personal life out and bring only the work dimension. But, when the work demands high level passion, involvement, alignment of vision and values, the whole person has to be taken into consideration since anything that affects the person in one dimension impacts the existence in another dimension - both facilitative as well as restrictive.

The social entrepreneur needs to ensure

fair practice and participation in the governance of the organization in order to instil a sense of ownership. This is a tall order since there is a subjective element to every decision. The efforts put to objectively absorb all data and to arrive at decisions with a win-win perspective is to be learnt and practised by the leader. When the members experience that their point of view is valued and listened to, and they feel that they 'belong', instils a sense of ownership. The social entrepreneur's need to possess and own the idea, processes, space and outcome can itself become a major block to initiative sense of ownership in others. To avoid this, the social entrepreneur has to continually learn and nurture the capacity to let go. It is paradoxical that when the social entrepreneur can live a life of detachment with utmost intensity and alignment to vision of the organization, the members who work with the organization feel empowered to make decisions and experience a sense of ownership.

Reflections:

1. What kind of ownership behaviour do I experience in the members of my organization?
2. What is extent to which the organization members are willing to stretch and support in organizational functioning?
3. To what extent do the processes in my organization depict fairness, transparency and participation?
4. What are immediate actions that I need to take to enhance the sense of ownership in the organization?

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath, PhD

Traffic News



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

Loss of lives due
to accidents

108

No. of accidents
reported

781

**NUMBER OF CASES BOOKED FOR
TRAFFIC VIOLATION: 258,590**

- Signal violation - 21,178
- Wrong side driving - 80
- Over speeding - 5,390
- Violation of one way rule - 22,573

Men in Disguise **A real life incident**

It was 1:00 AM when I heard my door bell ring. My security was standing at my entrance asking me to open the door.

The 2003 dacoity incident that I had encountered flashed before my eyes for a moment.

He said that there were some police personnel who have come searching for a suspect, who as per their information, is hiding in one of the apartments in the second floor.

Just then, I received my tenant's call. She sounded tense and told me that there were few men standing in front of her house threatening to break in. She even mentioned that they had closed the door eye view with their hand.

I rushed to her apartment and found four men banging her door loudly. They were not in uniform and I asked them from which police station they belonged to. They all paused for a moment, looked at each other, and one of them answered, "We are a special team from the Suburban Police. We have come to nab a criminal who is hiding in this apartment. Two of us are Sub-Inspectors of Police."

I asked one of them to show their ID cards, and he did. It was a plain ID card that was contained in a laminated pouch.

I called my tenant over phone and asked her to open the door. She opened reluctantly, and I was surprised to find her husband along. (I had thought that he was on travel.) Both were trembling with fear and complained about the men threatening them. They added saying that the men had closed the door eye view with their hand, which made them even more afraid.

When I asked the men why they had blocked the door eye view, one of them said that his jacket had covered the view by mistake. I allowed them to conduct the enquiry with the tenant and once they were convinced that the suspect was not inside their home, I requested them to leave the premise.

I advised my tenant to close the door and remain inside until I returned.

While going downstairs, I spoke to the men and asked them about the criminal they were looking out for. One of them said, "We are looking out for a man about 5.5 feet tall with dark complexion, who has a son aged 10 years. He is living with a woman who is not his wife and is involved in house breaking. It is not safe for any of you



living here, if he is around."

I said that one such person did live in the third floor apartment, and that I found him suspicious. I informed them that I do not own three out of the six apartments in the premise, and said that I shall pass on the co-owner's details in the morning.

They finally left the premise asking me to be cautious of such criminals and said that they would come again in the morning to collect the particulars of the co-owner.

I found something fishy. I rushed to the balcony to note down their vehicle number, but I saw a tempo traveller that sped away. I asked my security if he had noted down the vehicle number, but he regretted.

I doubted that the four men were police personnel. For the benefit of doubt, I alerted my security not to allow anyone inside without informing me ahead over phone.

I called the police control room - 100 - to complain about the incident. The cop who attended my call passed on the suburban police station number, and told me to complain here.

When I called the suburban police station, a cop told me: "Why do you disturb me around midnight and ask if the people who visited your premise were from my police station? Why did you not call when they were around? You should have asked them for their station phone number instead of calling here. How would I know?"

I mentioned that if I had done so, and if they were not

genuinely from the police station, then I would have been at risk. I said that I will inform the Commissioner's office about his response for which he responded saying: "Please do so," and hung up.

I called my tenant, gave her the Thirumangalam police station number, and asked her to inform them about the incident. Within ten minutes the cops arrived in a jeep. There were all in uniform and conducted a thorough enquiry for over 30 minutes. The Sub Inspector stated that it is possible that the men were genuine cops as they brought the watchman along to enquire at the tenant's place and they had caused no harm to anyone. But, I was not convinced though.

I said that it is better to be cautious, and asked him to show his ID card as I wanted to affirm if the cards that were shown by the men were similar. But, it was different.

I asked the co-owner to file a formal complaint at the police station to prevent such instances in future.

Till date, the four men have not returned asking for details of the co-owner and the Thirumangalam police state that they are unable to trace as to which police station had sent their special team.

Safety Tips

- **Maintain cordial relationship with your neighbours.**
- **Ensure that your house has strong doors and windows.**
- **Do not open the door unless you are convinced.**
- **Refrain from keeping valuables at home.**
- **Have a thorough check of your tenants before you rent your premise.**
- **File a copy of the tenant's details in the prescribed format at your local police station.**
- **Inform the police in the event of suspicious movement of persons.**
- **In case you experience a similar incident, file a FIR at your local police station.**

—Marie Banu

“The life of a Police Officer is difficult. But, it is an excellent opportunity to help people.”

Shri. S. George, IPS
shares with
Marie Banu
his views on
conflict situations.

Shri. S. George, IPS is presently the Commissioner of Police, Chennai. A native of Thiruvananthapuram, he is a post graduate in Engineering. He did his M.Tech from IIT, Delhi, and his MBA and M.Phil. in Management from University of New York, USA.

He has served in various positions, including ADGP, Law & Order; Inspector General of Police (North Zone) and Inspector General of Police (Central Zone). He has also worked as Joint Commissioner of Police, Deputy Commissioner of Police and Assistant Commissioner of Police in Chennai. He is the recipient of the President's Police Medal in 2010 and Chief Minister's Medal for Excellence in Public Service for his work in the conduct of Mahamaham festival in Kumbakonam in 2004.

In an exclusive interview Shri. S. George, IPS, shares with Marie Banu his views on conflict situations.

You have played a crucial role during conflict situations like the anti-nuclear plant stir at Koodankulam and Mullaiperiyar dam protest. What have been your learnings from these situations?

These have been unusual situations. The issue at Mullaiperiyar evoked spontaneous support from the public, and the local police had to deal with crowds ranging from 10,000 to 15,000 people. These people were not against any establishment, but were passionate about the issue. We addressed the situation keeping in mind the sentiments of the crowd and the cause for which they were fighting. At the same time, we did not allow them to go out of control. Police acted with great restraint. Since we understood their emotional state and the issues involved, we handled the

crowd differently when they marched towards the Kerala border.

As regards Koodankulam, the issue was about the sentiments of residents of one village, whose views were entirely different from that of the Government. We depended on collection of information from the local community and the co-operation of the religious groups. Here again, we acted with great restraint. We did not want to convert the situation into a communal or religious issue and therefore did not do anything that would be of advantage to the protestors.

In 2011, we saw a rapid increase in vehicle population with 2.22 lakh new two-wheelers and over 52,000 new cars hitting Chennai roads. What measures can be brought to restrict the vehicle population in our city? Can you share your thoughts about the traffic discipline in India and abroad?

It is a policy decision to bring about

measures to curb vehicle population.

I have lived in the United States for five years where it is rare to find any traffic violation. There are a limited number of police officers on the road to supervise the traffic. Generally, people do not deviate from the traffic signals and traffic signs. They wait for the signal even if there is no traffic ahead of them.

Community Policing – Can this be introduced as part of the school curriculum? Can you please share your views on this?

In some States, they have Students Police Cadets (SPC). It is always good to train school students to be responsible and socially committed individuals who are willing and able to selflessly serve their community. Such ideas have a positive impact.

We can educate children on hardships faced by the police; and tell them as to how to use information to assist the police during crisis and law and order situations. Role modeling is

a good concept that brings about attitudinal change. Role modeling by children with the police will make them aware of the consequences that they have to face, if they do not abide by the laws in our society.

Your advice for IPS aspirants?

The life of a Police Officer is difficult. But, it is an excellent opportunity to help people, particularly the weaker sections of our society. It involves a lot of hard work. One will have to work within a system and these systems are not static.



Photo: Marie Banu

Editorial
Latha Suresh
Marie Banu