

# Conversations

*A Chronicle of Social Currents*

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## Cover Story >> Pg 6 The Parrot Fortune Teller

About lives of fortune tellers in Chennai

Photo: Marie Banu

### From the Editor

Dear Friend,

October has now become synonymous with 'Giving' in India, as the 'Joy of Giving week' is celebrated during this month. Even the smallest act of caring for another person is like a drop of water; it will make ripples throughout the entire pond. If we all

value this thought, giving would become an attitude, and then a culture. It will also become a wonderful and collective way of seeing the world.

Giving of any kind—from a simple smile, volunteering time, donating money, etc—begins the process of change, and moves us to remember that we are part of a much greater universe.

Join the 'giving revolution' and make a difference in the lives of the needy. For it has been aptly said, "What we spend, we lose. What we keep will be left for others. What we give away will be ours forever."

Happy Reading!

P. N. Devarajan

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An exclusive interview with  
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Dean of Students, IIT Madras.



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**Mr. P. N. Devarajan** on  
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391/1, Venkatachalapathi Nagar,  
Alapakkam, Chennai - 600 116.

Phone: 42805365  
Website: [www.csim.in](http://www.csim.in)



## Traffic News



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

Loss of lives due  
to accidents

**108**

No. of accidents  
reported

**862**

NUMBER OF CASES  
BOOKED FOR TRAFFIC  
VIOLATION: 2,62,007

- Signal violation - 24,775
- Wrong side driving - 80
- Over speeding - 7,061
- Violation of one way rule - 15,393

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**



“Having lived in Chennai city for long, I found a vast difference in the upbringing of children in villages. The kind of exposure that urban children have is simply lacking in rural areas.”

# The Path to AWAKENING



Sahila is a busy woman. Donning several hats, she is, among other things, the Managing Trustee of Prince of Peace Charitable Trust, an NGO that works towards the upliftment of backward communities in four districts in the state of Tamil Nadu. Starting off as a tuition teacher in Nerkundram, Sahila strongly felt the need to reach out to as many children as possible, to encourage them to study well.

“Having lived in Chennai city for long, I found a vast difference in the upbringing of children in villages. The kind of exposure that urban children have is simply lacking in rural areas. I observed that there was a stark difference in the way the learning process was adopted in rural schools and the teaching standards were very low. I also found that children’s basic understanding of concepts to be very poor,” says Sahila.

Sahila started taking tuition classes for children at her home in Nerkundram so that they can internalize the lessons that were taught at school. This set off in her, a deep-rooted passion to bring about social change.

She joined the Prince of Peace Charitable Trust, a church-based organization that was launched by Pastor Mohan Raj in 2002. The Trust initially focussed on improving educational facilities for school children in five villages in and around Thandavankulam village at Sirkali Taluk in Chidambaram District. The aim of the programme was to root out backwardness in education in rural areas.

While speaking of her experience working with communities Sahila says: “In those days, our only focus was upon children, as we could mould them without much difficulty. As days passed, our

interactions with these children went past the classrooms and took us right into their homes. We spoke to their parents and immediate families. As months went by, our interactions became more widened and we discovered that there were some issues that needs to be tackled at the societal level.”

“For instance, in backward communities, girls are discouraged from going to school after they complete eighth standard. Caste problems were rampant, and often led to social conflicts. We were working with both the farming and the fishing communities. Each of them had issues of their own, which we decided to work upon. Our activities steadily diversified as did our geographic reach,” adds Sahila.

Today, the Prince of Peace Charitable Trust with its headquarters in Chidambaram works in Chennai, Nagapattinam and Kadalur districts. The Trust runs a tuition centre in Nerkundram, an orphanage at Nagapattinam that houses 25 tsunami affected children; a tailoring centre; and a computer centre.

Besides this, Sahila and her team of 50 members also focus on spreading awareness on legal issues such as widow pension, domestic abuse, as governmental policies.

“Working closely in the service field, I was able to note how many complications can arise while rendering social service. Working with people with different needs was a revelation. With career growth in this organization, I also faced challenges in handling staff, raising funds, and communicating to donors. It was difficult to deal with these issues without affecting the overall developmental work that my Trust was engaging in,” says Sahila.

Speaking about her education at CSIM,



**“I enrolled myself for the Post Graduate Diploma in Social Initiative and Management at CSIM in 2010. My education here turned my world around.”**

Sahila says with excitement: “Latha Suresh, Director, CSIM is a friend of one of our sponsors. When the sponsor saw me struggle with issues at work, he gave me a timely introduction to her. I enrolled myself for the Post Graduate Diploma in Social Initiative and Management at CSIM in 2010. My education here turned my world around. I learnt how to create and present a good funding proposal, how to effectively deal with issues at work, counselling, staff management, and also gained some knowledge of law.”

Armed with her newly gained

knowledge, Sahila has set out to fulfil her passion at full throttle. “I believe in equality. People should be able to flourish wherever they are, irrespective of how remote their home may be. Although we do have an orphanage, I am working towards a future where no child is found abandoned. I wish every child to experience life in a family setting with loving parents and relatives,” she says.

Prince of Peace Charitable Trust plans to serve as an adoption agency so that they can place the orphaned children in secure families.

“My next target is women. Till date, over 150 women have undergone training in our tailoring centre and I take great pride in saying that each one of them are putting their training to use. Some have set up their own tailoring business, while some work from their homes; either way they have become financially independent. Women need self-motivation to come out of oppression,” she says.

The computer centre run by the Trust offers digital literacy programme, practically providing technology at people’s doorstep. “We are trying to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas in terms of access to latest technology in education,” says an unstoppable Sahila.

“There is a strong yearning to do some more every single day. There is so much left to be done. We are presently managing on funds that are allocated to us by our Church. We need to become more self-reliant in our finances and this needs the support of people, not just in terms of funding, but volunteers, advisors, and moral support,” concluded Sahila with a sigh.

—Archanaa R.



# The Virtual Library

**“Lack of proper book reading facilities, distance of public library services, rising cost of books and a service oriented business option were some of the reasons that prompted me to start this online library venture.”**

In India and in the west, books and e-commerce have always had a special relationship. Taking this one step further, we're witnessing the advent of online libraries.

Books take readers to an alternate world where realities change from page to page, story to story. Today, the art of reading has made a comeback as more people are rediscovering the joys of it. Libraries thrive on helping people live this joy as many find libraries a sensible alternative to accessing books, due to constraints of purchasing cost and storage space.

Unfortunately, as one gets stuck in the mundanity of daily life, library visits often get forgotten. For those in smaller cities, another challenge that presents itself is the availability of certain titles. Gunjan Veda, CEO, IndiaReads explains, “While in larger cities, the time to reach a library or a book store is an impediment, in smaller towns—even in non-metro capital cities in the country, many books reach only after months of being launched.”

This former Planning Commission employee, who worked with women and children across the country, realised there was a crying need for an online library that one can borrow books from anywhere in the country. Thus, was born Indiareads.com in December 2009 in New Delhi.

“Considering the growth in the literate population, the growing hunger for education and the growth in the publishing industry, it was obvious that there is an unmet demand. We did four weeks of ground level market research and confirmed this,” explains Kaber Vasuki, marketing manager of Chennai-based Iloveread.in.

Smart Library Network runs Thelibrary.in to cater to the National Capital Region (except Noida and Faridabad) for a similar purpose. “Lack of proper book reading facilities, distance of public library services, rising cost of books and a service oriented business option were some of the reasons that prompted me to start this online library venture,” says Shishir Miglani, its founder.

## Books at the doorstep

One of the greatest advantages these libraries provide is that they deliver and pick up books from homes at no extra cost, making it convenient for the readers to visit the online library, sign up for a membership and select books from the catalogue available online. On placing an order, the libraries then set the motion of delivering the books in place. If a book is not available, these libraries purchase and stock them. “More than 50 per cent of books we buy are on member requests. Even if it is an obscure, unheard of book,



we buy it if a member asks for it. Which is why we are probably the only library in the country to stock books on Japanese gardening and tailoring quilts,” says Vasuki.

As Miglani points out, that is the very essence of having a library—to make books accessible. And so if a book is not available on its network, efforts are taken to source it. Apart from bookstores, sourcing from other online book stores has also made the process more convenient.

Veda adds that IndiaReads has counsellors who help the readers select a book based on their interests. “In addition to listening to our customers, we also provide consultation, especially to students, on good books they can read,” she adds.

Importantly, the fact that no corner of the country is out of bounds despite delivery challenges has won its clients' loyalty. The company has also started an online book store in 2010 and has both the library and bookstore operational on its site. As a result, the team in many libraries is there not just to pick up and drop books, but also to source the right books and make recommendations. “Employees with a passion for books are a must,” Veda explains—a lesson she learnt from experience. Having employed people from different backgrounds, she realises that finally only those who love books themselves can do justice to this job. In the case of Iloveread too, Vasuki says that many a time, its readers turn employees.

## Stumbling blocks

The challenge for these enterprises is the logistics. “Distribution across a wide



geographical area within NCR is in itself a huge task,” explains Miglani. While technology helps in keeping track, it requires resourcefulness to pick up and deliver on time. “It has been over 30 months since we went live. We have figured it out now,” says Vasuki. Basic things like preventive maintenance of bikes, factoring in the petrol price hike while creating membership plans, protecting against attrition and absenteeism are worked into its strategies. Currently, Iloveread caters to Chennai and Coimbatore, and plans to expand through franchises.

Indiareads has courier partners and relies on speed post for places where there is no courier service. “It is one of our greatest challenges and having local partners is our next plan,” says Veda. In New Delhi, the library already has its own delivery team and plans to extend this to Mumbai and Kolkata—places where it has a certain number of members. As the critical mass is achieved in different regions, delivery teams will also be established. “Right now, we even deliver to tea estates in remote locations. Smoothing out logistic challenges

continues to be our greatest focus area,” she adds.

## Gaining visibility

Referrals are a great way to get members and have worked in the past for these online libraries. The libraries are self-sufficient and have managed to grow and expand through internal accruals and private funding.

Being online, technology is a critical component to ensure efficient tracking and managing of inventory. “We have an in-house team of developers and servers to allow users 24x7 access to our website. We also promote authors on our website and make them accessible to our readers through our Facebook and onsite efforts,” explains Miglani. Book cafes and e-books are also on the anvil for this library.

As Vasuki explains, being a community library, spending time with customers on phone is one important way of networking and keeping customers happy. “We run a very popular Facebook page and a blog to connect with book lovers,” he adds. Iloveread also collaborates with Chennai Live 104.8 FM's PaperBack radio show (the only radio book club in the country) that airs every Saturday, where the members are the guests of the show.

Hosting events like the Mad Librarian's Tea Party and a book club on Saturdays (apart from PaperBack) brings readers together. “We have an initiative where we place books in auto rickshaws for people to read while they travel,” shares Vasuki.

Indiareads goes to campuses with books and, more importantly, involves authors for the students to interact with during its Literathon. Reputed institutions are targeted for this. Book events inviting authors and reviews on the site are other ways of getting the readers to interact. The library is already working with educational institutions to design their libraries. This year, the focus will expand to include corporate companies as well.

## In the future

The online libraries collectively believe that they have only touched the tip of the iceberg. And each of them states that there is room for competition as it will create growth for the segment itself.

What will be critical is for these libraries to create new avenues in the same space and bring about a judicious mix of the online and brick-and-mortar elements. Using this as a mantra, online libraries can more than do their part to encourage the art of reading.

—S. Meera

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# Cake for a Cause



**I**ndia's largest chain of bakers, The French Loaf, created a 100-meter-long photo cake of 1,000 kg by compiling 1,000 photographs of Isaignani Ilaiyaraaja on it.

The egg-less chocolate cake had movie posters and pictures from films and concerts of Ilaiyaraaja, and was arranged chronologically from his debut film Annakili to his latest project Neethaane En Ponvasantham.

The cake was displayed at Express Avenue Mall in Chennai on 2nd Oct, 2012.

"We are doing this as part of a social cause. The proceeds from the sale of the cake will be handed over to Ekam Foundation, which provides medical support to underprivileged children from many parts of Tamil Nadu," said Vipul Mehrotra, business head, The French Loaf.

"Last year we performed a similar feat as a

tribute to 70 years of Tamil cinema. This year we are doing it for legendary music composer Ilaiyaraaja," he added.

A team of 30 people headed by Boopesh Pichaimani, Head Chef, The French Loaf and Le Chocolatier, prepared the cake. "We have printed the pictures on sugar sheets with edible ink and have placed it on top of the cake. A total of 600 kg of chocolate mix, 150 kg of fresh cream, 240 kg of dark chocolate, 100 kg of white chocolate, 80 kg of sugar syrup, 60 kg of fruit gel and 600 sugar sheets have gone into baking this giant cake. Each cake was sold at Rs.1, 500," said Boopesh.

The event was part of the Joy of Giving Week celebrations in Chennai and many cine celebrities graced the event with their presence.

—Marie Banu





Photos: Marie Banu

# The Parrot Fortune Teller

*“It is very simple. Anyone can become a fortune teller. All that you need is a parrot; a pack of 27 tarot cards; and a book which outlines the message for each of the cards.”*

One Saturday, while strolling at Elliots beach in Chennai, I spotted a parrot fortune teller seated on the sand. He was anxiously eyeing the crowd, probably waiting for his customer.

I observed him for some time and hesitantly asked if he would give an interview for *Conversations*.

He instantly agreed.

I sat beside him and we conversed as if we had known each other for a long time.

62-year-old Jayaraman, belonging to the Vedan community, has been involved in fortune telling since the age of 17. People belonging to the Vedan community were originally bird hunters.

“My father was also a fortune teller. Earlier, I used to walk around the city, and have even travelled to Mumbai, Delhi, and Agra. Now, after getting diabetes, I only come to the beach as I cannot travel much,” he said.



“Where did you get this parrot from? I asked.

“About four years ago, I bought this parrot from a boy near Gandhi Statue at Marina beach in Chennai. In fact, the boy did not charge me anything as he had just captured three parrots from a nest, and was more than happy to spare one for me when he learnt that I was a fortune teller,” replied Jayaraman.

I politely enquired about fortune telling and Jayaraman was more than willing to share information.

“It is very simple and anyone can become a fortune teller. All that you need is a parrot; a pack of 27 tarot cards; and a book which outlines the message for each of the cards,” he said with confidence.

The 27 tarot cards represent the Indian cosmic system and 8 of these cards predict bad news. Each card contains the image of a Hindu deity and some contain images of a mosque or Mother Mary.

As we spoke, Esther, 40, walked towards Jayaraman and enquired the cost to check her fortune.

“It is just twenty rupees,” he said.

Esther was convinced to spend her money here, and sat beside Jayaraman clutching her hands.

I stepped away to click pictures, and witnessed the fortune telling process from a distance.

Jayaraman stacked the 27 randomly assorted tarot cards in front of him. He opened the cage, let the parrot out, and instructed it to select a card for Esther.

The parrot walked towards the stack of cards, rejected a few cards with her beak, and handed over her selection to Jayaraman.

“Is this the card meant for Esther,” he asked.

The parrot chirped signaling her approval.

“Are you sure that this is what you would want me to predict for her?” he questioned.

The parrot chirped again.

“Okay. Pray to Lord Muruga and then give me the card,” he instructed.

The parrot obediently walked towards the deity’s picture which was placed near her cage, and after prayer handed it over to Jayaraman.

Jayaraman fed the parrot with a few grains and locked her again in the cage.

Esther was tense until Jayaraman opened the card that was chosen for her.

“You have got a very nice prediction. Your card has a picture of Goddess Mahalakshmi. You will have good times ahead and need not worry about anything,” he said adding even more positive messages.

Esther face radiated with happiness. She thanked Jayaraman and left after paying him his fee.

Jayaraman was also happy that he could convey a positive message to his first customer.

The parrot kept chirping as if to draw my attention.

The chirping sound reminded me of a popular comedy clip in which Vadivelu enacts like a parrot when he is captured by a fortune teller.

Hiding my laughter, I continued the conversation.

“How long does it take for a parrot to be trained,” I enquired.

“It could take between three days or three months for a parrot to get trained. A trained parrot provides training to the new comer,” he explained adding that the white rat in the cage was a new comer.

Jayaraman earns around 100 to 500 rupees a day during weekends, and is not certain about his monthly income as earnings during the week days are not predictive.

“My wife is a palm reader. We earn enough to meet our daily needs. All my four children are married, and so we need to earn only for ourselves and for our grandchildren. We leave home around 4 PM and spend four to five hours at the beach every day,” he said.

“Have you ever checked your own fortune?” I curiously asked.

“No. I visit an astrologer instead,” he said instantly.

Speaking about his patrons, Jayaraman said with pride: “They are young and old; rich and poor. 10 percent of my predictions come true, and I have regular patrons as well.”

Like Jayaraman, there were two more fortune tellers who were seated at a distance away. While Vittal posed for a picture, the other fortune teller was shy.

Although most of us believe in destiny, the lives of these fortune tellers depend on the few who trust in parrot fortune telling. Heaving a sigh, I bid adieu to Jayaraman and his Salethu Selvarani wishing them luck in getting more patrons.

—Marie Banu



# Finding the Forgotten



A mission towards caring for the sick, dying and destitute has been Edgar Jones Paul's calling for decades, now. The co-founder and trustee of Little Drops shares his experiences in establishing his home...

When Edgar Jones Paul was all of 12, he lost his father in a road accident. Part of a family of seven, the loss of the lone breadwinner could have easily proven to be disastrous to him and the family. However, an almost heart-warming devotion to the Almighty — he “dedicated (my) life to Jesus” — didn't stop at bestowing him with qualities like faith, hope and courage, but also inspired him to do his bit for the abandoned. The story of Little Drops, the NGO that Paul would go on to establish a few decades later, is indeed a true reflection of the man and his mission.

“When my father died, the seven of us were suddenly confronted with the prospect of hard reality,” says Paul, reminiscing his early days, “It seemed as though life was going to be very tough; and indeed it was.” However, through sheer dedication, the lad went on to complete his elementary education from Madras Christian College School, and began pursuing a polytechnic diploma course on completion of schooling. “Back then, most of my friends were actively planning on pursuing professional courses like Medicine and Engineering,” he says, with a smile, “I didn't have that option; the

financial situation at home didn't allow for that luxury. I had to enroll into a diploma programme and start working at the earliest, in order to support the family.” As fortune and perhaps providence would have it, Paul then found work at Indian Airlines — a stage of his life which brought him closure and bore the fruit of his dedicated work and faith. But that was not enough.

“I knew that my calling was more than leading a comfortable life,” he says, “I wanted to do something for the downtrodden; the homeless; the destitute — those that were forgotten, even by their own.” In 1991, Paul and close friend, Selvaraj Bovas, together established a home for the destitute. They named it Little Drops. “It was Mother Teresa who once said that although many tiny drops of water make an ocean, ‘the ocean would be less without that one drop’,” says Paul, explaining the origins of the name of his home, “That inspired us to come up with the name Little Drops — the thought that every little bit of help goes a long way in making a difference.”

After registering their home in 1991, the duo went about looking for a place to build their home. “A friend had a 1,800 sq ft land in Paraniptur — four kilometers from Porur. We decided that it wouldn't be a bad idea to start there,” says Paul, “We built our home there in 1993.” Not knowing how to begin rescuing the abandoned, Little Drops first began by offering

Photos: AK



***“I wanted to do something for the downtrodden; the homeless; the destitute—those that were forgotten, even by their own.”***

services to the Mother Teresa's Home at Saidapet. “Our dorm could take no more than 15 inhabitants. So, when the number increased, we would have to move people to the verandah,” he recounts, “Not long after, we built an additional floor.” Over time, Little Drops began expanding its reach. Volunteers ventured out to the streets and looked for the destitute. “We would inform the police if we decided to give someone a home,” says Paul, “Sometimes, the police commissioner would also call us if and when his men spotted someone in need of help.”



Over the next decade, Little Drops' reach widened. Paul built another home at an adjacent village and even constructed a shelter in Sriperumbudur in 1998. Nearly another decade later, the NGO began work at Dharmapuri district. However, an intense struggle for funding was an ongoing battle that Paul waged, every single day that he carried out his mission. "When we had plans of expanding, we would go out, help raise funds and immediately try building another home at another place," he says, "The priority was to get as many people possible under our care." In the meanwhile, Little Drops also took the initiative to empower its very own staff. "In Dharmapuri, we realized that there were single mothers — women whose husbands had either died or deserted them — who were raising children who were sent to foster homes," he says, "We decided to provide employment to these women while providing education to their children at a school that we then established. Gradually, the school also started educating most children in the area, providing a more caring alternative to government education."

As on date, Little Drops has nearly five homes, including one in Manipur that it opened in 2009. Along the way, the home has ensured that most of the region's destitute, have received adequate care and hospice. Be it regular hospital visits, conducting surgeries or even taking care of burials, the NGO has shepherded those in need. "And that has been my passion, my mission, the very life that I wanted to lead," says Paul. "We oversee nearly four burials in a week," he continues, "In the course of our existence, we have buried nearly 2000 people."

Challenges, however hard, have never deterred the man from his service to society.

The future for Paul lies in the continuance of his good work. "I have just one aim in life: to bring all the destitute in the country, under my roof," he says, "I just want the abandoned and dying to know that if nobody wants you, Little Drops is here for you." Apt, perhaps, for an organization that has dedicated a great deal into caring and easing the burdens of the forgotten.

—Daniel Almeida



## POST GRADUATE DIPLOMA IN SOCIAL ENTERPRISE MANAGEMENT (PGDSEM)

**DURATION** – One Year (every Saturday and one Sunday in a month)

**ELIGIBILITY** – Graduate of any discipline. Knowledge of English is essential

**To promote the concept of social entrepreneurship amongst individuals who have an inclination towards social work**

**Participants gain a clear understanding of Social Entrepreneurship.**

**The course helps in understanding the development sector and practical knowledge of NGO management and legal requirements.**



**FOR REGISTRATION CONTACT:**

**CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INITIATIVE AND MANAGEMENT**

391/1, VENKATACHALAPATHY NAGAR, ALAPAKKAM, CHENNAI – 600 116.

PHONE: 044-42805365, MOBILE: 9282205123 OR 9884700029.

EMAIL: [chennai@csim.in](mailto:chennai@csim.in). WEBSITE: [www.csim.in](http://www.csim.in)



# Personal and Organizational Values – the alignment process

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

During my initial exploratory study on feeling of belongingness, what came out as the most connecting factor in people's sharing was the alignment between personal and organizational values. There was an interesting story narrated by an employee that he would never want to compromise quality and the organization upholds the same making his efforts worthwhile. For another the importance given to learning and freedom of exploration is keeping him working in the organization even if there are some difficulties. At the end of the day it is inner satisfaction from value alignment that defines the feeling of belongingness.

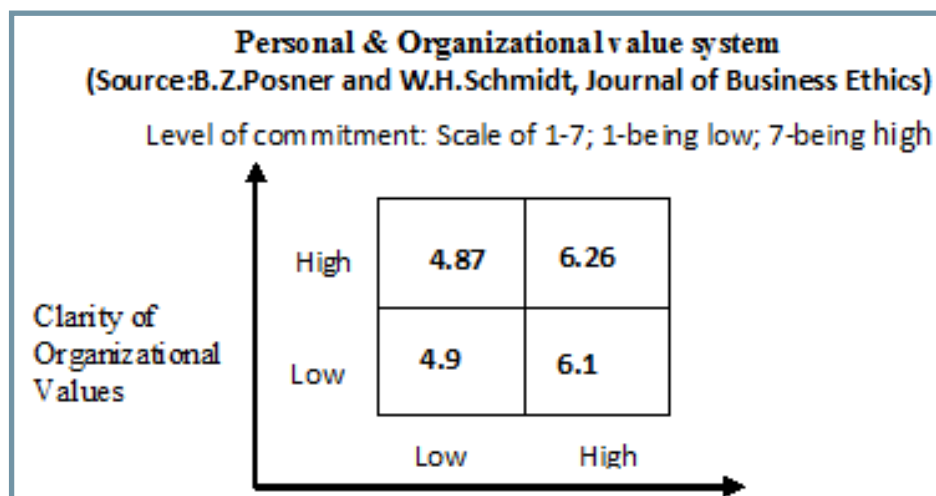
While it is easy to decide whether we want to be a part of the organizational vision or not, it is the values that turn out to be challenging. Every organization is nothing but a sum total of the individuals who work together. Therefore, every individual comes with a set of his/her own values that govern their behaviour in everyday life. While the organization may require a certain set of values to move on the path of its vision, the individuals need to also integrate and live those values. Whenever the individual values are not in line with the organizational values there are deeper human conflicts that get formed which destroys both organizational and individual peace. When there is deeper level of match between the two, the inner

in order to realize the organizational vision has to be recognized. When the beliefs that an individual holds and the beliefs that organization uphold are similar it impacts the ownership; commitment; extent of stress; the pace and quality of the decision making

***"Values are defined as 'those beliefs within me that govern my behaviour in any given context. Some of these beliefs are known to me but some are not. Yet they continue to govern my behaviour.'"***

processes; consistent growth of the organization; the morale of the people and feeling of sense of belongingness.

In a social organization the impact of values and behaviour directly reaches the



satisfaction in an individual is enhanced leading to higher level of satisfaction and therefore higher level of belongingness.

Values are usually most spoken but least understood and worked within the lifetime of an organization. Values are defined as 'those beliefs within me that govern my behaviour in any given context. Some of these beliefs are known to me but some are not. Yet they continue to govern my behaviour'. (Sampath, JM. 1999) The beliefs that the members of the organization need to hold

recipients. Any difference in the beliefs will lead to value conflicts in the field that impacts the decisions the members would take while working in the field. Most organizations work on driving the organizational values in every meeting but the clarification process of aligning the personal values is seldom focused. When the social entrepreneur works on an idea their beliefs are contributive to the vision that they embark on. In similar way they have to understand each member of the organization, the beliefs which govern

them at work and give space and time to articulate and align the same to the organizational functioning. Until the members of the social organization do not feel the inner peace and satisfaction in what they are doing, their ability to undertake the arduous journey, make a difference to others, and be healers for the society remains a far cry. Any amount of infrastructural issues, technical problems, political stress and pressures can be handled when there is clarity on the path and an assurance all are together on the path and agree to the process.

A clarification process would typically involve the ability to 'Connect, Correlate, Create' (Sampath, JM. 2010). It helps the individual to recognize and realize that there is a gulf between their own cherished values and the values they live through. The process of clarification should touch the very core of the individual to enable realization and deep change to happen. If by using authority the organizational values are forced upon the individual, the values are followed as a rule only and no internalization happens. In such circumstances, the commitment of the individual towards the organizational values would be very low affecting the performance of the organization. The ability to correlate to the context and create spaces will be affected. Hence, the clarification process

leading to alignment with organizational values if very important.

When the level of commitment was measured in a study across organizations the data that emerged indicated that when clarity on organizational values was high and clarity on personal values was low, the commitment actually came down to 4.87 from 4.90. People lost faith easily and blamed each other leading to lowering commitment levels. But when the clarity on both was high, commitment levels went up to 6.26. Hence, clarity and alignment of vision and values at an individual and at an organizational level need to be high to travel on the path of excellence.

## Reflections:

1. What kind of values clarification is used by my organization?
2. How much of clarity has been brought into organizational values that drive my organization?
3. What processes in my organization help me to understand the personal beliefs of the members?
4. What are the measures I use to know the extent of alignment between personal and organizational values in my organization?

—Kalpana Sampath, PhD



# From a fashion publicist to a social entrepreneur

**F**rom a fashion publicist to a social entrepreneur to an anti-graft activist, Radhika Ganesh has a portfolio that is as diverse and vibrant as her personality. An alumna of the prestigious London College of Fashion, UK with a dual degree in Fashion Design and Marketing, she has always been a driven achiever.

At a very young age she decided her calling was to be a part of endeavors that make a difference. Growing up in a family that broke all social clichés, further nurtured here desire to be a part of platforms that aid positive transformation within her society. Equipped with excellent communication skills she involved herself in a number of social causes and initiated several projects.

She saw her access to good education and global exposure as her strength and advantage to enable the change she envisioned. At the age of 17, as a fashion design student, Radhika launched the “Thandavam” project that initiated hearing and speech-impaired children into design studies. The project went on to train several specially abled children in a vocation that never occurred a possibility to them until then.



After her higher education in London, Radhika was well on the way to a flourishing career as a successful fashion publicist. She worked with top PR firms and represented several globally renowned brands before her love for India and her innate commitment to change towed her back.

On her return, she set up Syllogic Consultants, a social enterprise that

now works on several community and social transformation projects. Syllogic with its vision of “Enabling Integral Sustainable Growth in Indian Businesses” is vigorously working towards creating equitable and sustainable platforms for artists and artisans from Indian communities. Syllogic aims to recreate marketability and demand for products and produce that are truly Indian in nature, that promote wellness, conscious living and empower communities.

Syllogic partnered with Upasana, Auroville to launch Paruthi, an organic cotton brand born out of Kapas, a project aimed at educating and rehabilitating cotton farmers in Tamil Nadu. Paruthi has successfully inducted over 500 cotton-farming families, across 27 villages, into organic farming practices and has created an equitable and sustainable ecosystem for them. It is now a standing example of how communities can successfully and effectively be integrated into modern business practices.

Understanding the brutal reality of the dire straits our farming communities are in, Radhika is currently in the process of initiating her next venture. An integral

education and sustenance project, that looks at providing education, awareness and life skills training to orphan children from the suffering farming community.

Radhika has been a part of several forums and platforms that address sustainability at all levels. Amongst several other, she has had the privilege of being one of the contributing world speakers at the renowned “Think Forum” conducted by the Colombia University, USA, and she was one among the three international speakers who had the opportunity of addressing the congressional gathering about the policy deficits and lack of community growth aiding decision making within foreign policies before the 2010 UK general elections.

Apart from her passion for working on community endeavors, Radhika has always strived to be a vigilant citizen constantly lending her voice to social movements. She fierily took part in the fight for implementation of the Right to Information Act. She currently is also playing an active role in the Indian anti graft movement under Shri. Anna Hazare.

—Source: *tedxchennai.com*

# On The Bounds Of Hinduism

**H**aving been directed by the Editor, writes our representative, to interview Swami Vivekananda on the question of converts to Hinduism, I found an opportunity one evening on the roof of a Ganga houseboat. It was after nightfall, and we had stopped at the embankments of the Ramakrishna Math, and there the Swami came down to speak with me.

Time and place were alike delightful. Overhead the stars, and around — the rolling Ganga; and on one side stood the dimly lighted building, with its background of palms and lofty shade-trees.

“I want to see you, Swami,” I began, “on this matter of receiving back into Hinduism those who have been perverted from it. Is it your opinion that they should be received?”

“Certainly,” said the Swami, “they can and ought to be taken.”

He sat gravely for a moment, thinking, and then resumed. “Besides,” he said, “we shall otherwise decrease in numbers. When the Mohammedans first came, we are said — I think on the authority of Ferishta, the oldest Mohammedan historian — to have been six hundred millions of Hindus. Now we are about two hundred millions. And then every man going out of the Hindu pale is not only a man less, but an enemy the more.

“Again, the vast majority of Hindu perverts to Islam and Christianity are



perverts by the sword, or the descendants of these. It would be obviously unfair to subject these to disabilities of any kind. As to the case of born aliens, did you say? Why, born aliens have been converted in the past by crowds, and the process is still going on.

“In my own opinion, this statement not only applies to aboriginal tribes, to outlying nations, and to almost all our conquerors before the Mohammedan conquest, but also in the Purānas. I hold that they have been

aliens thus adopted.

“Ceremonies of expiation are no doubt suitable in the case of willing converts, returning to their Mother-Church, as it were; but on those who were alienated by conquest — as in Kashmir and Nepal — or on strangers wishing to join us, no penance should be imposed.”

“But of what caste would these people be, Swamiji?” I ventured to ask. “They must have some, or they can never be assimilated into the great body of Hindus. Where shall we look for their rightful place?”

“Returning converts,” said the Swami quietly, “will gain their own castes, of course. And new people will make theirs. You will remember,” he added, “that this has already been done in the case of Vaishnavism.

Converts from different castes and aliens were all able to combine under that flag and form a caste by themselves — and a very respectable one too. From Rāmānuja down to Chaitanya of Bengal, all great Vaishnava Teachers have done the same.”

“And where should these new people expect to marry?” I asked.

“Amongst themselves, as they do now”, said the Swami quietly.

“Then as to names,” I enquired, “I suppose aliens and perverts who have adopted non-Hindu names should be named newly. Would you give them caste-names, or what?”

“Certainly,” said the Swami,

thoughtfully, “there is a great deal in a name!” and on this question he would say no more.

But my next enquiry drew blood. “Would you leave these new-comers, Swamiji, to choose their own form of religious belief out of many-visaged Hinduism, or would you chalk out a religion for them?”

“Can you ask that?” he said. “They will choose for themselves. For unless a man chooses for himself, the very spirit of Hinduism is destroyed. The essence of our Faith consists simply in this freedom of the Ishta.”

I thought the utterance a weighty one, for the man before me has spent more years than any one else living I fancy, in studying the common bases of Hinduism in a scientific and sympathetic spirit — and the freedom of the Ishta is obviously a principle big enough to accommodate the world.

But the talk passed to other matters, and then with a cordial good night this great teacher of religion lifted his lantern and went back into the monastery, while I by the pathless paths of the Ganga, in and out amongst her crafts of many sizes, made the best of my way back to my Calcutta home.

—Source: *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*



# “Please spur your children to be the best in what they do.”

**Dr. L.S. Ganesan** tells **Marie Banu** how social entrepreneurship can be the way forward in changing the societal patterns in India.

**D**r. L. S. Ganesh, Dean of Students, IIT Madras is a Professor in the Department of Management Studies, and is a widely sought speaker on the themes of Education, Technology, Entrepreneurship and Development. He coordinates the unique MS (Entrepreneurship) programme of the Institute and until recently was the Advisor of the Cell for Technology Innovation, Development and Entrepreneurship Support (C-TIDES). Many of his students consider him to be among their most inspiring teachers. He loves work, meditation, philosophy, music, and dreaming.

*In an exclusive interview, Dr. L. S. Ganesh tells Marie Banu how social entrepreneurship can be an effective way forward in changing the societal patterns in India.*

**IIT Madras has been instrumental in spreading the concept of social entrepreneurship through various lectures and introducing an elective on social entrepreneurship as well. About introducing the idea of for-profit social enterprise — how have the students responded to this? Do you observe any attitudinal changes?**

We offer a minor stream consisting of three courses from the theme of Innovation and Social Enterprises with the idea of promoting, if possible, technology-centric social enterprises, in which technology plays a significant role for a social cause. That was the objective. Of course, we are

also okay with business model based social enterprises and that is why we started the minor stream. There are no prejudices or biases in whatever I have seen among the students who are participating.

We now have the fourth batch of students, and I find the students appreciating the ‘hybrid spectrum’ ranging from pure profit play on the one end to the fully donation based enterprises at the other. They focus ultimately on the effective transfer of value to the intended beneficiary.

**Some of your students have pioneered social entrepreneurship projects. Can you share with us some successful projects?**

Definitely! Thirumalai, a first batch student of the minor stream, took the course out of great passion and continues to work for the cause of rural communities since then. Although being a student of our MBA programme, he did not sit for placement. As he had already worked for a few years with a multinational company, he could dedicate his post-MBA career for a social cause, particularly focusing on ideas of value addition for the agricultural products produced by a rural community. They were simple folk, and at first could not relate to his idea.

But, once they caught on, things have stabilized in the

community. He has now moved on and is working with government agencies. He is formally associated with the social sector and is concerned with evaluation of the impact of social projects.

Shanmugam, who graduated with an MBA this year, has already set up a dairy centric social enterprise at the foothills of Yercaud near Salem.

We also have BTech+MTech dual degree students, who are working in the area of social entrepreneurship with a focus on the transportation sector. They have an interesting business model idea and have also invented some technologies for green energy transportation. They are in the very early stage of business and are trying to understand the business, technology, and market by learning from people in the transportation industry.

**Do you think Social Entrepreneurship is the way forward in changing the societal patterns in India?**

It is definitely an effective way forward. The reason is that we are trying to provide value to a very large population and, most importantly, as we have been conversing, never take away the dignity from a challenged person. You may do a hundred things, but never take away dignity. This principle has been well entrenched in all our students and is a good way to go forward.

The minor stream is popular, and we do get a handful of students from other departments attending the class out of sheer passion and interest.

**It has been said that management students should create value in markets, and build transformational organizations.**

**Do you think this is true? How many of your students have been successful in this?**

When a student graduates with an MBA degree, we should talk about entry level

management positions. Obviously, expecting a fresh MBA graduate to transform an organization is a tall call and I think it is unrealistic. But, if the question is whether they are recognized for their contributions to their organization, I would say, yes, to a very large extent. Many of our MBA graduates have won company awards — Best Employee Award and Team Awards — consistently year after year. This is hard evidence that there is something good that is happening in terms of their work.

If people are rooted in these four themes/questions:

(a) Effectiveness — Am I accomplishing what I am supposed to? (b) Efficiency — Am I using minimum resources while being effective; (c) Excellence — Am I struggling and pushing my limits; and (d) Ethics — Am I doing all these without violating any of the known and understood codes of ethics, I am sure we will all witness large scale desirable transformations around us. Very often, we are challenged on all the above four.

**There is a lot of pressure among students to perform well. How does IIT management help them to de-stress themselves?**

There are a lot of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities in which the students directly participate or are a part of the audience. In fact, yesterday we had an opera by a Norwegian troupe and our Central Lecture Theater was full. It was healthy entertainment and our students thoroughly enjoyed the programme, perhaps even without any idea of the language used in the lyrics.

We also have yoga and pranayama workshops. IIT campus has a fitness centre and offers one of the finest set of facilities in India for sports and games, both indoor and outdoor. We have a swimming pool, two squash courts and a number of basketball, volleyball, and tennis courts along with hockey and football fields and a stadium. Our campus also has the famous IIT-Chemplast cricket ground.

Students should make use of these facilities and grow healthy in body and mind. They should balance their time between academics and extra/co-curricular activities. We have many clubs —

Astronomy club, Ham club, Auto sports club, Music club, Electronics club, and so on. It is possible for a student to lose himself in the kind of facilities we provide here. However, it seems that there is also a sizeable population stuck in social networking and computer gaming.

**For aspiring IITians, what is your advice for their parents?**

Studying in IIT is a blessing, as it is one of the fine institutions in our country. Historically, IITians have done well and the government has done well in promoting these institutions. The challenge is that we have only sixteen IITs to accommodate the 10,000 plus young men and women out of the 600,000 plus applicants who take the entrance exam after plus two.

One need not get obsessed with gaining admission into an IIT. There are very good institutes in our country which are good in economics, medicine, law, and social sciences. The simple lesson that I would like to share with parents is this: “please spur your children to be the best in what they do.” I agree that they do need constant guidance and encouragement.

It is difficult for teenagers to understand life, economic stability and family stability. It is very difficult for 16-year-olds to understand these unless they are soaked in some of their family’s affairs. This is the truth.

Parents should infuse the spirit of excellence in their children. If you are painter, be the best painter; If you are a carpenter, be the best; if you are a farmer, be the best; if you are a mechanic, be the best; in short, “be the best”. The point is that the world must have enough space to absorb excellence and must not tolerate mediocrity. We need to be a nation that is excellent and is reputed for the highest quality of thought, word and action.

## Editorial

**Latha Suresh**  
**Marie Banu**



Photo: Marie Banu