

# Conversations

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## Cover Story >> Pg 6 Every Child Can!

**Aid India's initiative to simplify learning for the rural children**

## inside



### Alumni Talk Pg3

#### Special Children in a Special School

Senthamizh Selvi's mission to  
provide care for special children



### Profile Pg9

#### Home of Hope

About Prathyasha's school for  
children living with HIV



### Chit Chat Pg12

#### Icon of Motherhood

An exclusive interview with  
Dr. Kamala Selvaraj

## From the Editor

### Dear Friends,

If a child is given love, he becomes loving. If we offer him help when he needs it, he becomes helpful. If he is truly valued at home, he grows up secure enough to look beyond himself and cares for the welfare of others. This has been

proved by the change agents who work with children of different capacities, and we take pride in featuring a few of them in this special edition.

Children are the brightest treasures we bring forth into this world. By giving

them adequate love and affection, we can build their self-esteem, which is the magic wand that shapes their future.

Let's celebrate the birth of every child!

**P. N. Devarajan**



to learn • to heal • to raise

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Photo: CS Sathish Anand

# Incredible India

**Y**ou are aware that in India, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and Ahmedabad to Kolkata, there is one thing in common among people—the attitude towards compliance of law, rules, and regulations particularly with regard to traffic rules.

The attitude appears to be similar to people in all states even though people belong to different culture, habits, and speak different languages. It is sad that motorists continue to violate the rules not only endangering their safety, but also affecting the lives of others.

When we open the newspapers everyday morning, we read of news items like the ones below:

- Roads becoming killing fields, should we not act?
- Two fatally knocked down by bus
- Women and daughter run over by lorry
- Role of people in day-to-day policing

42 persons die everyday in Tamil Nadu due to road accidents. When will the terrorism end on the roads?

—Rtn. Narasimhan Rajagopal

## Information provided by the Commissioner of Police, Chennai for the month of October 2011

**Number of road accidents - 721**

**Loss of lives due to accidents - 111**

**Number of cases booked for:**

- Traffic violation - 2,84,457
- Signal violation - 24,457
- Wrong side driving - 847
- Over speeding - 4,837
- Violation of one way rules - 5,995
- Violation of no free left - Nil

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**



# Special Children IN A SPECIAL SCHOOL

*“Initially, I thought that training would make my kids completely normal. Only later did it sink in my mind that they can only be trained and not completely recovered.”*

**T**he birth of a child is the best moment that every parent can be entitled to. Ten months long wait and anticipation now transforms to apprehension about when the child will become active, crawl, walk, and talk. These are moments that they long for. What if the child was different from every other kid? What if they need more time and assistance to manage their day to day activities? What if they have to live their entire life with such help?

“It was like all hell breaking loose”, says Senthamizh Selvi, Principal, Kumaran Special School. This school was started by her in 2002 with the aim of facilitating effective inclusion of disabled persons in the working society. Being a mother of two sons—affected by mental retardation and cerebral palsy—has taken her through a journey that culminated in the establishment of this school.

Recognizing the special needs of her children, she admitted them in Madhuram Narayanan Centre at T.Nagar in Chennai to provide them training in basic activities required for everyday routine. “This was when I came to terms with the needs of my children and joined the school as a helper. My children, along with others, were taught to dress, eat on their own, speak, and use the toilet,” says an emotional Selvi.

“It was here I realized that my children were better than many others, and understood the limits of their capacity. As my children grew here, I too grew as a parent of special children. I won the ‘Best Parent’ and ‘Full Attendance’ prize in Madhuram Narayanan Centre. Initially, I thought that training would make my kids completely normal. Only later did it sink in my mind that they can only be trained and not completely recovered,” she adds.

On completing her teacher training, Selvi decided to open a school that will cater to the needs of special children. Having begun with six children, including her sons, the school now trains 35 children up to the age of 22. The services provided here include yoga, physiotherapy, toilet training, vocational training, and special training.

Children learn to make paper bags, candles, jute bags, pen-refills, handkerchiefs, hand-towels, leather key-chains, phenyl, liquid soap, and decorative flowers made from waste silk cocoons, etc. The latest introduction in the school is the ceramic unit and horticulture. “While counting the *agarbatis* (incense sticks), they forget what comes after 12. They also grow to assist the other children at the centre”, recounts Selvi.

Kumaran Special School also has a job-oriented Vocational Training programme called ‘Able Art’ which imparts training on tailoring,

food production, weaving, printing, desktop publishing, and front office training.

“When I see them doing their work slowly, I feel happy and liberated. It reminds me of the days when I decided not to go to temples after I learnt that my children were mentally retarded”, she adds nostalgically.

Running the school with seven staff members is quite a task she explains. “Regular funds have been a persistent problem for us. The monthly fee of Rs. 200 that is charged per student is our source of funds for sustenance.”

“The Social Entrepreneurship for Vocational Rehabilitation Programme at CSIM has helped me to understand the basics of fundraising and equipped me with skills to manage my organization. It is only through this course that I came to know that funds can be raised. Besides, this course also gave insights on caring for the hearing and visually impaired, and providing training in speech therapy”, she recollects.

After completing the course at CSIM, she applied for funds to purchase a van for her school and succeeded. “The children are now picked up and dropped back at their residences. The course has been an eye opener! I learnt that I could approach the banks for funds,” she says gleamingly.

When asked about the response of the parents of the special children studying in her school, Selvi says: “They see me as a role model. On sharing my experience with the other parents in the school, I think I have instilled the

confidence in them to accept their children and care for them.”

“My elder son used to be hyper active while my younger son could not even sit straight. Through training they began to ask what they needed. It was a milestone for me. Their progress has been my energy! My elder son is not an engineer, nor is he a doctor. He is independent, working in a rabbit farm”, says a proud Selvi who adds that her younger son can write the channel number to ask for his favourite programme on television.

How supportive has the family been was a very fulfilling question to her, for her husband definitely needs a mention. “He is very patient and never allows me to lose my temper with the kids. He respects their choice and wish, instructs me to ask their favorite color while purchasing their clothes,” she says cheerfully.

As for future plans, Selvi wants to see Kumaran Special School develop into a residential programme.

—Shanmuga Priya.R

*For more information about Kumaran Special School, please contact Senthamizh Selvi at 9840423125 or write to kumaransplschooll24@gmail.com*





# The spirit of Young India

“In the last five years, Pavithra has matured into a young, inspiring changemaker who is creating ripples in the community around her.”



The young in India today have spunk, character, and a sure-footedness that comes from deep within where they believe they can achieve the impossible. Challenges don't deter them and circumstances are momentary. They are ambitious and responsible. They are courageous and willing to be accountable. This is a series of stories, I would like to bring together, of young people who inspire with their spirit and grittiness.

## *The strength of Spirit: Pavithra KL*

I met 16-year-old Pavithra, and I saw a spark of promise that inspired me to invest in this young girl. Residing in my neighbourhood, Pavithra once walked into my office and passionately presented her case to work with us. She had no skills, but had this strong conviction—she will not hear a 'No'. We gave her a volunteering project to manage a summer camp for 'Dream A Dream', and as they say the rest was history!

Two months after the camp she parked herself again at our office seeking a job, and she got it. This unsure shy girl had the spirit of a fighter and winner and it was this spirit that told us that we should invest in her.

Pavithra relates to herself as the Panda character in Kungfu Panda who is chosen by Master Shifu as the Dragon Warrior. Like the Panda she was unsure, but there was something special within her that was yet to be discovered. Dream A Dream as the Master brought out the best in her.

Having born into very difficult circumstances and being the second girl in a cohort of 3 sisters, Pavithra has never had it easy. With very limited resources and a society that didn't believe much in the capability of girls, she grew up to much ridicule and a consistent message that 'You are good for nothing!'

When she came to Dream A Dream she was unsure of herself, but desperate for support. Her father had stopped working and her mother had always been a home-maker. She was asked to drop-out of college and instead work in order to support the family. This young girl took it upon herself to change her family's situation, but not at the cost of her own education. She chose to join an evening college and approached Dream A Dream for a job. Her family was disappointed and relented with this decision as they were not happy to have their daughter return home late night. But, Pavithra pursued her decision as she wanted to do something good with her life and wanted to prove to her family that she can!

Pavithra joined Dream A Dream as an intern in March 2007 with very little knowledge of working in a professional environment, nor having English or Computer skills. She was scared, but willing to give her all. Her role as a Dream Funday (half-day to one-day learning exposure for children) coordinator gave her the essential skills of project management. She visited places in Bangalore, which she had never visited earlier and learnt to interact with volunteers, teachers, and vendors to get her work done.

She worked for nearly 14 hours a day and during every weekend, but never complained. Spending her day at office, rushing to college in the evening, and returning home late night to take care of household chores and supporting her family became her routine. She set challenging goals for herself, and in the next two to three years achieved them all. She repaid the family debts and her personal debts that she had taken to support her education costs. She further supported her sisters with their personal goals and aspirations.

Pavithra's journey has not been easy. There were

days and moments when she was in doubt; days when she was overwhelmed with the enormity of personal challenges in her life and wanted to give it all up. Many a times, she wanted to drop-out of college and wondered if she will ever be able to live up to her own expectations. Fortunately, these were momentary and her inner spirit finally won.

In the last 5 years, Pavithra has matured into a young, inspiring changemaker who is creating ripples in the community around her. She has transformed the life of all her family members and today they enjoy a quality of life that did not seem possible a few years back. All this has been possible because of a 16-year old girl who did not want to accept what life had given her, and had the courage to change it.

In professional life, Pavithra has taken on bigger responsibilities. She currently manages a computer education program for over 500 young people at Dream A Dream. While she has built excellent project management skills, she is learning the fine art of building and nurturing relationships with stakeholders, learning to motivate and inspire a team of facilitators and volunteers who support her in the program, and also learning to build a larger vision for the program. Pavithra is consistently aware that she has a long way to go and continues to invest in her own personal growth. She is a lead facilitator and trainer at Dream A Dream. She is part of a team of Lead Trainers with another youth focused organization called 'I Create' where she trains young people from difficult circumstances to start their own business.

Pavithra also completed the Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Program at CSIM to broaden her knowledge and understanding of the social sector and also get exposure to causes different from children. She volunteers for a

Wildlife Conservation group and supports them to track various animal and reptile species in the Western Ghats of Karnataka. She also volunteers with a women's initiative called Ubuntu assists them to mobilize women from her community into their network, besides conducting art workshops for the women in Ubuntu programs.

She has many dreams and talks very passionately about each of them. She wishes to work in the space of empowering young people, giving them access to the opportunities that she got at Dream A Dream, and inspiring them with her own story. She wants to be a donor and support causes that she is passionate about and support organizations that have high standards of professionalism and accountability, something she has learnt at Dream A Dream. She also wishes to be a business entrepreneur. She has a few ideas in mind that she is currently working on and hopes to launch one of them in 2012.

Pavithra represents the spirit of the young in India—restless, ambitious, and responsible. She is a Changemaker, and with everything that she has achieved in transforming the lives of her family and people around her she is unique. She is just at the beginning of her journey and one can only imagine what someone like her can achieve with the spirit of a winner deep within her. Watch for this young, spirited girl who is all of 20 today, but is already building a vision to transform this country!

—Vishal Talreja

*Vishal is the co-founder and executive director of Dream A Dream and is deeply inspired by the potential of the young people in this country to transform their personal lives and this country by building a community of changemakers.*





S.P.B. Charan and S.P. Sailaja



Chinni Jayanth



Jayendra



Mahadevan



Neena Reddy



Chef Regi Mathew



Suhasini



Sudha Raghunathan

## Battle of the Buffet 2011

**T**he way to a man's heart is through his stomach. And that was precisely what the third edition of the Battle of the Buffet 2011 achieved with the 2,000 odd guests, who came together to celebrate 'giving' at the Chennai Trade Centre in the city on 9th October 2011.

Celebrated as part of the Joy of Giving Week, the event was organized by Oriental Cuisines Pvt. Limited and Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM). 12 leading five-star hotels in the city spread a sumptuous buffet with a wide range of cuisines. Over 51 NGOs and 31 corporate houses participated in the event. In all, 1.4 crores was raised through the sale of dinner coupons and corporate sponsorships.

The event began with actor, director and social activist Suhasini Maniratnam sharing the idea behind the Joy of Giving Week with the guests when she said, "This is the third year. This is a brilliant initiative and I have to thank Mr. Mahadevan for this." Apart from tickling

the taste buds, the event offered a treat for music lovers as vocalists S.P. Sailaja and S.P.B. Charan together with their orchestra belted out Kollywood hit songs. The most awaited part of the event was the auction of celebrity memorabilia, with Suhasini donning the mantle of the auctioneer accompanied by actor and comedian Chinni Jayanth. This was a new element added to the celebrations this year.

Speaking at the event M. Mahadevan, managing director, Oriental Cuisines, said, "This response we have got shows that we have a positive India amidst the negatives we see. I thank all those who donated. It is not for the food but for the cause. We started with Rs 75 lakh that we got in the first year. This year, we have received Rs. 1.4 crores (excluding the auction)."

"We are grateful. We have raised Rs 31 lakh. Thanks to the trustees. We have 180 patients to whom we offer dialysis for free and for subsidized rates. Hats off to the Battle of the Buffet," said Latha A Kumaraswami, Managing Trustee, TANKER Foundation.





Balaji Sampath with the children at a village tuition centre

# Every Child

# CAN!

“Right to Education does not mean right to children’s access to school alone. Although 99 percent of the rural children in our State attend school, 53 percent of the children studying in fifth standard at government schools are unable to read; 47 percent of them unable to subtract

”

Manjula arrived at the tuition centre at 6:00 P.M. There were over 20 children waiting for her, few seeming exhausted after play. “Can you teach me subtraction, please?” asked Kasi opening his mathematics book. Manjula was pleased to know that her student was eager to learn. She wrote on the black board ‘17 - 8’, and asked Kasi to solve this problem.

Kasi counted his ten fingers, and looking at his toes continued to count until 17.

“What are you doing?” asked Manjula. “I am subtracting, Miss,” replied Kasi.

Manjula drew him nearer and taught him to solve this problem quicker. She held his hand and told: “Start counting after 8 and stop when you reach 17.” When Kasi finished, she asked: “What is the answer?” “It is 9, Miss” said an excited Kasi.

Manjula, Aid India volunteer, spends her evenings during weekends at Kalpakkam village to teach the poor children to read and write. “I have been volunteering for this centre for over two years now. Teaching children mathematics and English through simple methods motivates them, and I thoroughly enjoy their company,” she said cheerfully.

Aid India was founded by Balaji Sampath, an Asoka Fellow, in 1996. After completing his B. Tech in IIT Madras, and PhD in Maryland University at the US, Balaji decided to work full-time on education, health, and livelihood for the rural children. Currently, Aid India reaches to over 60,000 children. Cumulatively over the years Aid India programs have impacted over two million children.

Having won several accolades including the Times of India Social Impact Awards in 2011, Aid India is now striving to create awareness on the quality of education that is being provided in rural India. Their objective is to increase resources that would help to improve the quality of education.

“Although there are educational institutions—government schools; low cost private schools; community run schools; and NGO run schools—that cater to the poorer children, we observed that there was an issue of quality in all of these services. Aid India therefore worked towards developing substantial material on low cost, and good quality teaching pedagogy to provide the right teaching inputs to children,” said Balaji Sampath.

Reminiscing the early years of Aid India, Balaji stated: “We first focused on building a team in Tamil Nadu—volunteer base, and NGO partners. It is only for the last 7 to 8 years that we have been focusing exclusively on education. We mobilized volunteers from software companies and students from IIT, BITS, and Madras University who had engineering and social science backgrounds. Our core area of work was to teach children an easy method of learning science, mathematics, and English.”

“Our focus has always been poorer children, and we ensured that our methodology was simple for them to understand. We worked with teachers—government school teachers; and teachers who were not qualified but worked in difficult circumstances and communities. A few village schools had also asked us to train their teachers, put in processes, and make their school in an overall much higher level that it was. We developed pedagogy, methods

and materials which ensured that the quality of learning levels of children increased.”

Talking about the process of developing teaching methods Balaji enthusiastically said, “A lot of effort goes into developing the pedagogy. We start with a basic idea that is well researched. But, what has been said in a world level research need not necessarily work out in a small village like Satyamanagalam or Dharmapuri. We therefore test it out and bring about changes. It sometimes takes up to one or two years to come out with a good solution to solve a problem in science or mathematics.”

“We know that all children can’t learn at the same pace. We therefore identify children who are lagging behind and specifically teach them. Our modules have the same problem being taught in many different ways and is done through a lot of fun activities that interests children. Given that the teachers work in difficult circumstances and the children are from poorer backgrounds, we fine tune the methodology to fit in the existing curriculum and ensure that the technology works in all situations. For instance, we started teaching fractions to a large number of children and spent nearly one and a half years to arrive at a methodology to teach it in an easier way. Today, our team is an expert in teaching fractions in different ways,” Balaji quipped.

Besides Science and Mathematics, Aid India also researched on spoken English in over 100 schools across the State. “Most NGOs have focused on children’s access to education, while ours have been to ensure best quality learning for children. Working on modules is a continuous process. We recently printed one lakh books in English and Tamil and distributed them to rural children,” remarked Balaji.

Raising the bar for social service, Aid India is now organizing a marathon in Chennai on the 12th of November, 2011 to sensitize the larger public on the quality of education that is being provided to rural children, thereby facilitating a platform for advocacy with the government.

“The idea is to mobilize support and make people aware of the problems that children face, particularly in rural areas. Around 2500 people (both adults and children) from all over the State will participate in this event and several children will share the struggles they faced to get educated. We do not want people to consider it as an accepted factor that the government school quality would be poor, and that the children who study here would not be able to read or subtract. The basic idea is to spread the message that children today are unable to read, while every child can!” explained Balaji.

“If only we continue to allow this to happen, we are speaking about 10 million children each year who would lack the ability to access resources and claim their rights. We feel strongly that this has to stop urgently! People will contribute money, participate in the run, and demonstrate their support. We feel strongly that if the public pressurizes the government, then there would be a change in the entire educational system,” he added.

“Right to Education does not mean right to children’s access to school alone. Although 99 percent of the rural children in our State attend school, 53 percent of the children studying in fifth standard at government schools are unable to read; 47 percent of them unable to subtract. This shows the society, government, and education system’s gross negligence. We are not talking of their ability to do algebra or fractions, but their problem in learning the basic skills. Most of these children are from marginalized communities, those whose parents are not able to help them in their studies or monitor them. As there is no public outcry and demand for better quality education this problem continue to exist. We want to get people to say—I care about it,” opines Balaji.

Balaji Sampath believes that with concentrated effort this problem can be solved in just four months’ time. He recalled his experience teaching the rural children and said, “After one of my sessions, a child held my hand and would not let me go. Their affection has been my motivation to continue my work. Support from people has been spontaneous. Becoming an entrepreneur is not a big deal. Continuing and sustaining is the hardest part.”

Let us join Balaji Sampath in his mission to provide quality education for the rural children in whichever way we can!

—Marie Banu

For more information, please contact Aid India at No. 7/4, Besant Road, Royapettah, Chennai-600014. Phone: 42636125 or 28350403 or write to [info@aidindia.in](mailto:info@aidindia.in).





# Driven By Compassion



Rama



There is an old saying, “When you receive a good turn, do pass it on. It will surely come back to you someday!” Going with this tenet, Mrs. Rama, Social Worker, decided to start Vishvodayaa Trust, an organization that works for the empowerment of women and children’s education. As she puts it, it was her way of reciprocating all the support (physical and moral) that her family had got during their days of troubles in the past. “My husband, an IT professional, consultant and educationist met with an accident. While we were coping with the trauma, a lot of people helped us. Leave alone support, they even donated blood. It was then that I decided to give back to the society in some way or the other,” says an emotional Rama.

Moving to Madipakkam in 2000, Rama started volunteering with the local residents’ welfare association. “I would write to the Municipal Corporation representing the residents of my locality and ensured that our under-developed locality has access to roads, rain water drains, street lights and other basic amenities. Later, I also started volunteering with the Municipal Corporation for their Polio Vaccination camps and eradication of Encephalitis Camps,” she adds.

In 2002 Vishvodayaa Trust was registered with three members on its board, and Rama as its Managing Trustee. A nursery school, “Baalyaa” was started in Keezhkattalai shortly thereafter, which according to Rama is the first nursery school in the neighborhood that catered to early childhood education. “It was here that I started working with Learning Disabilities (LD) first. The school was registered in 2002 shortly after the Kumbakonam fire accident. I am proud to say that our school is equipped with the right people and the right

facilities. We follow the Montessori system of education which includes children with LD. Impressed with our work the officers even granted recognition and license to run a primary school!” recounts Rama.

By 2005, Baalyaa Nursery and Primary school was functioning on an Integrated Education framework. Presently, 77 children study in Baalyaa. In this, 25 percent have LD and 40 percent are from lower income groups, most of them being first generation school-goers who study along with children from affluent families. “Many a times, parents of children with differential learning capabilities are themselves insensitive and uninformed of the issue. Other parents fear that their children might start aping a disabled child. At Vishvodayaa, we try to sensitize the parents about the need for every child to grow up in an equal opportunities environment. We firmly believe that the society, parents and teachers should work

his problem had significantly reduced. Encouraged by the results, we hired speech and occupational therapists to cater to more such children. Our operational costs were on increase, and our school was starting to get labeled as a special school due to the model we followed. Therefore, we had to discontinue that routine. Now, our focus is to gain the full attention and support of parents on the issue of learning disabilities and their role in overcoming this problem.

The school functions on the nominal fee paid by the parents and also on private donations. “We do not give anything for free as its value will die down,” says Rama. The school presently operates out of a two and a half ground campus in Keezhkattalai. Vishvodayaa Trust is on the lookout for funders for their upcoming mega project—expansion of the school up to 12th standard.

Vishvodayaa also runs several programs aimed at making women more financially as well as

several activities. We organize a yearly Mela (Fair) for women and our participants keep coming back every year. I am very happy to say that we have been quite successful in keeping our aim to produce quality teachers.”

“I am saying this from the experience of having worked with several teachers in my school who have shown deep sensitivity and insight in their work with children. I am elated to know that I have contributed in some way to their blossoming into such fine teachers. In general, I believe that women should not only be independent, but equally contribute to the family along with their husband. The woman of the house is an important contributor. Unless women themselves realize it, they are never going to get away from the vicious cycle of oppression,” Says Rama.

“I believe that every one of us is disabled in one way or another. While some of us can overcome the disability because of the close support systems of families; others also need such support to do so. Everything in life can teach us a lesson. For me, even my dog has taught me many vital lessons. For instance, dogs or pets seldom show their frustration or anger towards us. They show love and loyalty for the tiniest act of feeding and keeping them. I try and help as many people as possible and in as many ways as I can. It gives me immense satisfaction,” concludes Rama.

In a world mauled by conflict and hate, here’s a welcome draught of compassion!

—Archanaa R.

Many a times, parents of children with differential learning capabilities are themselves insensitive and uninformed of the issue. ”

together to provide a holistic childhood for every child, regardless of class barriers or any other disabilities,” says a resolute Rama.

Recounting her challenging experiences with educating children with learning disabilities, she states: “One of our students had both of his parents with high flying careers. The child had a gait problem, but his IQ levels and other bodily functions were normal. After a few months of studying in our school, his therapists observed that

socially independent. Their Teacher-training program has been successful for many years now, with three of their trainees now having set up their independent educational centres. Counseling and vocational courses and workshops are also organized regularly.

“Women are often misguided and underrated. I experienced it first hand during the Trust’s registration process. In order to help women understand their potential, our Trust is involved in



For more information about Vishvodayaa, please contact Rama at 9444408116 or write to [vishvodayaatrust@gmail.com](mailto:vishvodayaatrust@gmail.com)



# Home of Hope

“We would like our visitors to come and play with our children, spend time with them, thereby making them feel that they are normal and usual as others.”



**M**usic, dance and theatre have come together to help positive children ‘live’ their lives. Mellow Circle Prathyasha – Home of Hope’ is a home for the children affected by the pernicious Human Immuno Deficiency Virus (HIV). Mellow Circle Prathyasha Trust was established in 2007 and the Home became operational from 2009. It is a project undertaken by Mellow Circle—a registered society of like-minded professionals, businessmen, and senior executives who pool their talent to work for the less privileged brethren of the society.

The donation of half an acre of land near Avadi in Chennai during 2007 by Mr. K.N.Oommen, a friend of Mellow Circle, in memory of his wife, marked the early steps. The Home of Hope was inaugurated on 19th May, 2009 commemorating with the World AIDS Orphaned Children’s Day and International Candle Light Memorial organized in memory of all those who had died due to AIDS.

Children here are also referred by the Thiruvallur Positive Network, a unit of the Indian Network of Positive People. Beginning with four children, the Home now houses 15 children, of whom 12 are infected and 3 are affected. The 2400 square feet building hosts a dormitory with attached toilets, dining hall, kitchen, and a dispensary. The Home has also indoor and outdoor games facilities.

The Home is supported by close friends, donors and few corporate bodies. But, it is this group of businessmen, doctors, architects, teachers, and other volunteers who come together to put up annual Christmas plays and music programs to raise funds for sustaining the services of the Home. “All of us sing, dance, act, seek sponsors, and sell tickets. You can catch us live on 26th and 27th November at 6.30 P.M. at Museum Theatre in Chennai to witness our 12th production titled ‘The Rented Christmas’.” It is a Dramatic Musical with a cast of over 75 actors,” says Mr. Mohan Daniel, Managing Trustee, Prathyasha Trust.

Prathyasha aims at providing health, education, and emotional support for the children. Their nutrition intake and timely medicines are strictly adhered to in order to maintain the CD4 count. “Monthly health checkups at Thiruvallur Hospital, periodic blood tests to monitor the CD4 count are a regular feature here,” explains Mohan Daniel.

“Our children did not like the mid-day meals that were provided in the schools and so we even pack lunch for them. During admission the CD4 count was below 300 and 200, but now it has improved to the level of any normal person,” says Mohan Daniel who recalls that Anti Retroviral Therapy (ART) medication needs to be taken at the right time regularly, and is a non-negotiable to check the replication of the virus.

What bothers Mohan Daniel is the absence of a proper framework or a diet plan for positive children from national as well as international bodies. “The diet we follow was prescribed by our friend Mrs. Suja Isaac, Director of Soukya, Holistic Healing Center, Bangalore,” he points out.

Did we think getting positive children admitted in schools is a difficult task? Mohan Daniel declines stating that every school cannot decline the rights of

education to any positive child as per government regulations.

“By providing all these facilities we are not trying to foster institutionalization. Most of them have a single parent. A child was taken back to the family by the mother, but was brought back the very next week as the mother could not take care of her. Caring for positive children calls for attention to every facet of their routine,” justifies Mohan Daniel.

At Prathyasha, recreation also has its share! Playground and play equipment keep the children engaged during leisure, besides classes on basic computing. As part of Rotary Club of T-Nagar and Interact Club initiative, painting and English speaking classes were conducted for the children here. “Teachers and students from Padma Seshadri Bala Bhavan School and Balalok School spent a day with our children. We take the children to the beach, or for a movie, visit museum, and other places once a month,” quips Mohan Daniel, taking pride about the children being invited to put up a national integration play during the Green Day and Krishna Jayanthi celebrations of

Padma Seshadri Bala Bhavan School.

Prathyasha Home also welcomes mothers of the positive children to work here. “Not many of the mothers’ turn up or stay longer due to their health condition. Some parents visit their children once a while and some don’t. We also have some children who do not wish to go back to their families at all,” adds Mohan Daniel heaving a sigh.

The Home is quintessential in handling the emotional needs of the children. “Being positive cannot stop one from yearning for care and affection. When a child’s grandmother died in Coonoor, the child was sent along with our Project Coordinator to attend the ceremonies and brought back,” he says.

“We would like our visitors to come and play with our children and spend time with them, thereby making them feel that they are normal and usual as others,” expresses Mohan Daniel. This reiterates that lop sided emphasis on prevention than on support and care is a worrisome trend.

Children at Prathyasha celebrate every festival—Onam, Diwali, Christmas, or Pongal—irrespective of diversities. It means for them another occasion to be happy and together.

The Trust is now tasked with raising the second floor of the building to provide for separate dormitories for boys and girls, study, and recreation rooms. The simple plans and steps towards caring for these children, the energy that goes into executing the plays and music programs to sustain these plans, and the level of comfort that the children experience here—all clearly convey that Prathyasha is indeed a Home of Hope!

—Shanmuga Priya.R

*If you wish to know more about Prathyasha, please contact Mohan Daniel at 9841074841 or write to [mohandaniels@gmail.com](mailto:mohandaniels@gmail.com) or visit [www.prathyasha.in](http://www.prathyasha.in)*





# Mind Control

**M**r. S. Ranganathan, I.C.S., Collector of Vellore, Mr. S. V. Ramamurthi, I.C.S. and Mr. T. Raghaviah, late Diwan of Pudukottah State, visited Sri Ramana Maharishi's Ashram.

**Mr. Ranganathan asked Maharishi:** Kindly instruct me as to how the mind may be controlled.

**M.:** There are two methods. The one is to see what the mind is; then it subsides. The second is to fix your attention on something; then the mind remains quiet.

The questioner repeated the question for further elucidation. The same answer was returned with a little more added. The questioner did not look satisfied.

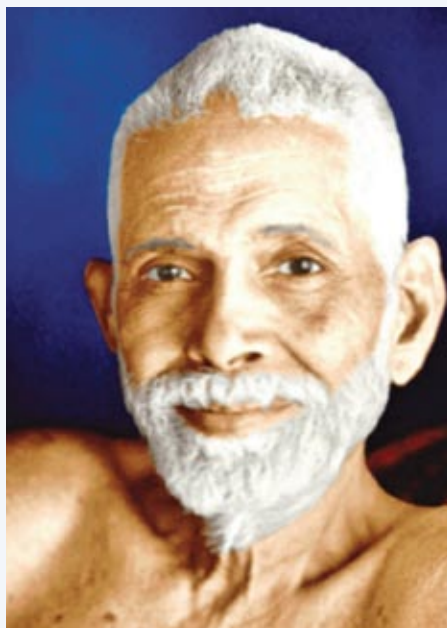
**Mr. Raghaviah:** Men of the world that we are, we have some kind of grief or another and do not know how to get over it. We pray to God and still are not satisfied. What can we do?

**M.:** Trust God.

**D.:** We surrender; but still there is no help.

**M.:** Yes. If you have surrendered, you must be able to abide by the will of God and not make a grievance of what may not please you.

Things may turn out differently from what they look apparently. Distress often leads men to faith in God.



**D.:** But, we are worldly. There is the wife, there are the children, friends and relatives. We cannot ignore their existence and resign ourselves to Divine Will, without retaining some little of the personality in us.

**M.:** That means you have not surrendered as professed by you. You must only trust God.

**Mr. Ramamurthi:** Swamiji, I have read Brunton's book 'A Search in Secret India' and was much impressed by the last chapter where he says that it is possible to be conscious without thinking. I know that one can think, remaining forgetful of the physical body. Can one think without the mind? Is it possible to gain that consciousness which is beyond thoughts?

**M.:** Yes. There is only one consciousness which subsists in the waking, dream and sleep states. In sleep there is no 'I'. The 'I-thought' arises on waking and then the world appears.

Where was this 'I' in sleep? Was it there or was it not? It must have been there also, but not in the way that you feel now. The present is only the 'I-thought', whereas the sleeping 'I' is the real 'I'. It subsists all through. It is consciousness. If it is known you will see that it is beyond thoughts.

**D.:** Can we think without the mind?

**M.:** Thoughts may be like any other activities, not disturbing to the Supreme consciousness.

**D.:** Can one read others' minds?

The Master as usual told him to find his Self before worrying about others. "Where are others

apart from one's own Self?" asked the Master.

**Mr. Raghaviah:** How shall we correlate the higher experience with the lower experience (meaning spiritual experience with mundane affairs)?

**M.:** There is only one experience. What are the worldly experiences, but those built up on the false 'I'? Ask the most successful man of the world if he knows his Self. He will say "No".

What can anyone know without knowing the Self? All worldly knowledge is built upon such a flimsy foundation.

**Mr. Ramamurthi:** How to know the 'Real I' as distinct from the 'false I'.

**M.:** Is there anyone who is not aware of himself? Each one knows, but yet does not know, the Self. A strange paradox!

The Master added later, "If the enquiry is made whether mind exists, it will be found that mind does not exist. That is control of mind. Otherwise, if the mind is taken to exist and one seeks to control it, then it amounts to mind controlling the mind, just like a thief turning out to be a policeman to catch the thief, i.e., himself. Mind persists in that way alone, but eludes itself."

—Excerpted from Sri Ramana Maharishi teachings

## Limitation – Inner block for growing

“Me! A Social entrepreneur? Are you crazy? I am not born that way you know. Only some are meant for it. I wish my parents would understand this is what I want to do? Others feel I am just pigheaded and not listening to them. Do you know my background? Do you think I can ever succeed being a social entrepreneur? Oh, great people were pure lucky, I am not! I have a family and I am responsible for them.”

These are some of the dialogues we often hear when someone wants to actually chase a dream and lead a life of social entrepreneur. So, are social entrepreneurs born? Or are they nurtured? Do they have some competencies that others don't? What role does the environment play in their life?

We are not solitary reapers but live with people around. There is always a condition that surrounds us with people and issues, termed as context. The family, society, financial, infrastructure, and so on pose a whole lot of limitations to self in the journey towards achieving the dream. These are limitations which we face day in and day out. In order to make a living and be in comfort zone, we begin to accept the limitations as ours and go about life just dreaming with a whole lot of 'ifs' and 'buts.' Interestingly there is another context that is within each of us which is equally, if not more important. That is our beliefs about the self image that we hold within ourselves that governs each of our behaviour and decision. Each of us is a product of who we think we are.



A man found an eagle's egg and placed it under a brooding hen. The eagle hatched with the chickens and grew to be like them. He clucked and cackled; scratched the earth for worms; flapped his wings; and managed to fly a few feet in the air. Years passed. One day, the eagle, now grown old, saw a magnificent bird above him in the sky. It glided in graceful majesty against the powerful wind, with scarcely a movement of its golden wings.

Spellbound, the eagle asked, "Who is that?"

"That's the king of the birds, the Eagle. He belongs to the sky. We belong to earth—we're chickens," said his neighbour.

So the eagle lived and died a chicken, for that's what he thought he was.

(Sampath. J.M. story 77 *Discovery—3rd edition*, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 1998)

Every experience in life leaves behind an impression within us which becomes an opinion. When opinions get crystallized they become our conclusions. Conclusions when lived become beliefs, and these beliefs over a period of time embedded in our culture become convictions. Between the movement from living for oneself to living for the larger world, and believing in the difference one can make to this world, a number of beliefs stand as hurdles. A social entrepreneur is born and nurtured within first, before he is seen by the world outside. The hurdles within has to be passed to empower oneself to pass the hurdles outside.

The toughest battles are the ones that are fought within. The one who wins the battle within will hardly lose the battle outside. (Sampath. J.M. *Inner realities*, Insight Publishers, Bangalore, India, 2003)

Most of us have our own assumptions about the context that we are in and hundreds of doubts on the self to be able to work with these assumptions. Mind like a pendulum goes back and forth between the beliefs from past experiences and the assumptions of the future demands. Life is lived more within the mind than in reality. Whatever the contextual conditions may be, the life within looms large with hurdles in front making even the smallest movement as tough one.

I need to first ask myself what my vision is, that is a purpose for my existence. How much do I allow myself to influence myself? What are the dialogues that go within my mind that does not allow me to

*A Series on Growing  
-Reflections for Deep Change*

move towards that vision? How many of them are assumptions within me and how many are the reality of the context?

Social entrepreneurship calls for moving away from several comfort zones and known spheres with an unrelenting focused attention towards the dream or vision that one is pursuing. To gather enough power within to move, I need to identify the beliefs that are holding me as a result of my learning from upbringing, indoctrination, socialization right from childhood and modify my beliefs to enable me to move on the path of my vision. Unless my beliefs within are not worked with, the empowerment to begin the journey of being a social entrepreneur does not fructify.

### Points for Reflection:

- What are my true limitations to chase my vision? Are they within? Or they outside?
- What are my beliefs that enable me to progress towards my vision?
- What are my beliefs that stop me from progressing towards my vision?
- How many times am I willing to drop the assumptions that I hold within and go out to truly explore the context?
- How many times in a day do I influence myself? Or allow myself to be influenced by others?

—J.M.Sampath & Kalpana Sampath





# Cake for a Cause



**A**s part of promoting Joy of Giving Week event French Loaf of Oriental Cuisines Private Limited prepared country's longest eggless photo cake in 1000 Kg and displayed at Express Mall in Chennai.

The 100-meter long photo cake displayed the album of 75 years of Tamil Cinema. Thousands of general public and film lovers expressed their interest to see the cake and of course buying the cake at Rs. 1500 per Kg. The entire fund that was raised from this event was contributed to renovate the kitchen of Mahesh Memorial Trust, which caters to pediatric cancer patients.

Film personalities Suhashini Maniratnam, Director Jayendra, Director K Bhagyaraj, Actor Poornima Bhagyaraj, Director R Parthiban, and several others were part of the occasion. Mr. Mahadevan, Chairman and Managing Director of Oriental Cuisines said, "We are extremely happy because we have set a new record! It is very special because this record breaking cake has 1000 faces of renowned film stars carved out of icing which are significant to 75 years of Tamil cinema and shall be the longest one to be made in the world. What makes us even more proud is that this initiative will bring smiles on faces that are fighting with hope against pediatric cancer."





# Icon of Motherhood

**Dr. Kamala Selvaraj shares with Marie Banu her thoughts on the stigma of childlessness and her efforts to promote motherhood.**

**D**r. Kamala Selvaraj, MD DGO PhD, is the Associate Director of the Fertility Research Center at GG Hospital in Chennai. She commissioned the First Test Tube Baby of South India in August 1990 and since then has had many achievements in the field of assisted reproduction. In 2002, she was awarded PhD for her thesis on 'Premature Ovarian Failure and its Management'.

She has many publications to her credit in several national and international journals as first author, and has authored chapters in textbooks on assisted reproduction. She is also the recipient of several awards including Best Lady Doctor award (1993), Mahila Shironmani Award (1995), Rajiv Gandhi Memorial National Integration Award (1995), and Seva Ratna Award.

*In an exclusive interview Dr. Kamala Selvaraj shares with Marie Banu her thoughts on the stigma of childlessness and her efforts to promote motherhood.*

**Childlessness is still seen as curses in India. What are your thoughts on this?**

Society still considers a childless woman as barren and unlucky. They don't pause to think that it takes two hands to clap and that the man could be at fault as well. Likewise, a man always needs to be worked up before we pay attention to the women. Earlier in my practice, some men who had no sperm production used to consult with two wives, often they would be sisters. So, I used to think how lack of examination of the man has destroyed the lives of two women.

Nowadays, although the awareness level has increased and people know that the man can also be at fault, the taboo is still palpable. Women who do not have children are not allowed to participate in auspicious family functions and are considered as a bad omen. I advise women who undergo fertility treatment to tell their relatives that they are planning to have a child later, and to secretly pursue their treatment. I continue to tell them not to show their weakness and to be mentally strong.

**Infertility treatment nearly 25 years ago was not heard of. But, today you have people all over the world consulting you for treatment. Is this due to increase in awareness that infertility can be treated or is it due to the fact that there is a rise in infertility worldwide?**

Every woman wants to be independent. For this, she needs to be educated and have a secure job. When she reaches this level she is already 28 to 30 years of age. It takes a while for her to find a suitable and professionally well settled partner. They plan their family a year later as they need time to adjust to each other's lifestyle. The highest fertility period for a woman is between 20 to 28 years of age and they easily cross that!

Infertility rates in the last two years have climbed up owing to awareness and detection, as well as, lifestyle and environmental factors. Stress has been a major contributor considering that couples are working more towards luxury than actually spending quality time with each other. Age of both partners is also important where higher the age, more the chances of babies with down's syndrome and other anomalies.

**What is your advice for such couples?**

One who is rich is content with what he has; but one who is poor wants more and more. There is no end for greed! If couples cannot prioritize or balance their career versus need for children, then we are certainly going to be handling more and more difficult cases in

the future. I always advise couples to plan at least one child before thirty or at least by 35 years of age. If they intend late child bearing then they need to be adequately prepared physically and mentally, and always plan conception with the help of an infertologist.

**You have brought happiness in the lives of many mothers. While the rich can afford the ART (Assisted Reproductive Techniques), what is the solution to those who can't afford it?**

I still feel India has better treatment options at a reasonable price in comparison to the rest of the world. Couples should understand that in a private set up, it is only imperative that a lot goes into maintenance and care to give good results. We cater to those that can afford nominal charges, and we also help those patients who fail repeatedly by giving them free treatment.

Every specialist can offer free treatment according to their capacity and power. By and large, the government should avail facilities and make it possible for better reach of ART in Government colleges and hospitals. First of all, the stigma attached to infertility should be abolished and adoption should be advised to those who have been proved that they can never bear a child. This would keep unscrupulous practice at bay and also help adoption of children that need homes.

**After the tsunami, there were a lot of women who had lost their children opt for ART. Can you share your experience?**

We provided free treatment to all the tsunami patients. Each of the couples had not lost just one, but two and sometimes tragically three. I felt very bad! My mother used to say that when a parent is alive, they

should never lose their child. I can't imagine how these patients could still manage to smile at me and say that they were happy to see me. I could not smile back at them!

These women had been sterilized and one of them was pre-menopausal. I offered free treatment to all of them for test tube babies. It was only after they became pregnant I charged them a nominal amount towards room rent charges.

They had lost all their children, but I could give them only one!

**Born to yesteryear Actor Gemini Ganesan, what inspired you to choose the medical profession?**

After I completed my schooling, my father asked me if I wanted to get married or pursue higher studies, I said that I wanted to study. In those days, he said that there were only two dignified professions for women—teaching and medicine. I hated teaching and hence chose medicine.

Actually, my father had wanted to do medicine. It was for this reason he married my mother who was from a well-to-do family as her father promised to send him abroad after marriage to study medicine. Soon after his wedding, my grandfather expired and therefore he had to stay back to take care of the family. His lifestyle thus changed, maybe for the better.

As his ambition was not fulfilled, he wanted us to pursue medicine. Now, we are nine doctors in the family—three of his daughters (that includes me); my husband; my daughter; my son; my brother-in-law; my nephew; and my niece. I struggled a lot to come to this level. Our future generation now has everything in a golden plate.

**You appear to be a very cheerful person. How do you cope with stress?**

It is spontaneous and natural. Everybody is going through stress and smile costs me nothing! When I am making someone pleasant, I feel happy.

My elder sister Narayani once narrated an incident to me. She was traveling in a car with my father when she was a child and saw him waving his hand vigorously to a man riding a bicycle. She observed that the man did not reciprocate and hence asked my father why he did so. He replied to her: "I thought he waved and so waved back. If he did not reciprocate, it does not matter. If only he had waved and I had not reciprocated, he would have felt bad."

I always remember my father who was down to earth. He used to be cheerful all the time and made the place around him lively.

## Editorial

**Latha Suresh  
Marie Banu**



Photo: Deepak D Menon