

Conversations

A Chronicle of Social Currents

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District Governor RI Dist 3230

From the Editor

Dear Friend,

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence is not an act. It's a habit"—is a famous quote of Aristotle.

There is nothing that will shape your destiny more than your habits. Because, you are invariably the sum of the

choices you make in your life. And those choices are greatly influenced by your habits, good or bad, which are difficult to break.

Each changemaker featured in this edition follow the habit of unconditionally loving the people

around them. They have successfully brought about positive social change and touched the lives of many.

Let us learn to emulate them and spread cheer and joy wherever we go. Happy reading!

P. N. Subramanian



to learn • to heal • to raise

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Satire in Uniform

Recently at a Traffic Signal, I saw a police constable stopping a two-wheeler and telling him that not wearing a helmet and violating the signal will not only endanger his life, but the lives of others as well. The motor-cyclist apologized, and said that he will henceforth abide by the traffic rules. The police constable stated sarcastically: "Well, if you remain alive after driving back without a helmet, you may follow the rules."

—Rtn. R. Narasimhan
District Chairman, Public Safety
Rotary District 3230, Chennai

Food For Thought

Whenever you see an ambulance rushing with the siren hooting, just imagine that one of your relative or a friend is being taken to a hospital for an emergency treatment.

Are you aware that many sick or injured patients lose their lives because they reach the hospital late?

Please stop your vehicle and give way to the ambulance, however busy you might be to reach your destination. Also, request others to stop and give way to the ambulance.

You can save a life!

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
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On Troubled Waters

Since my childhood I have been in love with water. I have bathed in every pond in my locality and have spent the greater part of my childhood playing by the sea.

For most kids, playing with water is a source of delight. The very thought of rains, puddles or pools, river banks or beaches, the sound of water and the sheer joy of splashing, spraying, drenching or floating in it is enough to lift one's spirits off a nasty exam or a lengthy homework to do. Well, what happens when the childish craze of water turns into a deep love of one's life? We are about to find out from the story of I H Sekhar.

A hereditary fisherman and one of the precious few water conservationists in Chennai city, Sekhar has dedicated his life towards the reversal of water exploitation in the ECR belt, starting southwards from his ancestral locality of Injambakkam.

At 56 years old, Sekhar's enthusiasm and cheer belies his age as he speaks of his love for water. "Since my childhood I have been in love with water. I have bathed in every pond in my locality and have spent the greater part of my childhood playing by the sea. In fact, when I was little and would often disappear for a long time from home, my mother would send people out to search at the ponds in our area, almost sure that I must have drowned to death," chuckles he, adding that "water is very important to me. I strongly believe that anybody who messes with water would have to deal with divine fury", a tinge of seriousness taking over in his tone as he speaks so.

While doing odd jobs in his early youth and serving as a boatman on his father's traditional 'maasila padagu', a massive boat laboriously manned by 25 men, Sekhar slowly groomed himself to be the typical son of the family, working towards paying for his sisters' weddings and taking care of his parents when they took ill. Simultaneously, he started the Injambakkam Village Help Association as a reaction to the rising sand-smuggling and ground-water contamination in the area. With excessive sand removal from the once dune-laden beaches, the sea water soon seeped into the ground water table, making it unfit for agriculture (irrigation) in the surrounding areas. Sekhar says around 33 acres of arable land were lost due to this problem, back in the 1990's. Unwarranted land occupancy was another issue that irked Sekhar and he appealed for an order from the government to restrict them. In the ensuing fight with the system and also with the anti-social elements that occupied prime lands on the sea-shores, Sekhar missed the bus to getting settled in a regular family-life. Although he had plans to go abroad and even get married there, his die-hard love for water kept him firmly bound to home and hearth.

In 2007 Sekhar joined the certificate course on social entrepreneurship at CSIM and from there his efforts got direction,



CSIM helped me place my feet firmly in the work that I so loved, that I am forever indebted to them

focus and clarity. "CSIM helped me place my feet firmly in the work that I so loved, that I am forever indebted to them" he says cheerfully. He attributes his motivation to Mrs. Sudha Ramalingam and says it was Mrs. Latha Suresh, CSIM Director that laid the foundation for Nature Trust, an organization that he founded in 2007 that works on garbage disposal, creating fish-habitats and on cleaning of water-bodies.

When he is not fighting against illegal occupancy and water contamination, he is coordinating sapling planting drives, pond-cleaning sprees, gardening and adding speed-breakers to the accident-prone ECR. Getting a little nostalgic, he recalls caring for his mother who in her later stages of life had suffered from critical ill health. "My mother always said that being born as a woman is too difficult. It moved me and I learnt how to cook and do every household chore so that my mother could get to relax a little. I was very fond of her," says he nostalgically.

"As I was engaging in difficult fights with the system, my beliefs and actions were



looked upon as taboo by my own relatives. They even today try to keep their children away from me for fear that I might have an 'influence' on them," says Sekhar. "Of course, they do not know that their children in fact love their Uncle and often sneak a hearty chat with me and even offer to help me whenever I am in need," he says adding that, "I do not need much. I earn and spend my earnings on my pet projects, such as the Gandhi statue that I had installed and inaugurated in our locality by former president of India Dr. Venkatraman."

Sekhar says, "My fish habitats require very little money to invest in. I regularly interact with my neighbours and even with strangers and foreigners. These leisurely chats are the escapades into my distant dream of going to America."

Dreams hardly take his eyes off the 25

tanks that he is presently aiming to conserve, out of which 10 have already been retrieved from an almost irreparable state to a functioning state. His aim is also to save water bodies that lie in the stretch of Kottivaakkam to Mahabalipuram, a distance of about 40 kms. Sekhar lives in his own house, but spends a greater part of his time at a neighbour's, whose family and their lush green backyard provides enough care and company to this lone fighter.

Armed with historical knowledge of Injambakkam, of which his family is one of seven original settlers, Sekhar's pride and sense of belonging to his homestead is admirable. How can a conversation with this man of the sea be complete without a mention of the tsunami?

Pat comes the answer, "I am thankful for the tsunami!" Perplexed, one waits for his explanation and he says how difficult it was earlier to convince people of the bane of sand smuggling. It was later proven that those areas where the sand dunes remained untouched were left with very little damage, whereas water did break in and plunder into the areas where sand was disturbed. From the aftermath of Tsunami, my community started placing some faith in my words and have shown greater cooperation towards my initiatives."

"What are we doing to our beautiful land?" he laments, "Who can live without water? How can we be so foolish as to contaminate the very elixir of life on this planet?" He carries on fighting against squanderers and connen, trying to build a new relationship between people and Mother Nature. His spirit undying, his previous records encouraging, there is hardly any doubt that he will reach his milestones with time. We salute!

—Archanaa.R

Are we serious about Corporate Social Responsibility?

Even as government puts up new company bill that encompasses CSR as mandatory spent, the companies will be required to take CSR in a more scientific manner. With an aim to improve corporate governance, the government has approved various amendments to companies Act, including mandatory earmarking of funds by companies for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) spending. As per the amendments approved by the Union Cabinet, the companies would also have to give preference to the local areas of their operation for such spending. The companies would have to either implement mandatory CSR spending or 'cite reason for non-implementation' or any short-fall, as per the proposed amendments.

One needs to appreciate efforts of the government and Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs. Both have been very active in putting up a proper suggestive framework for this bill for the right audiences and for co-ordinating and ensuring that the bill has the right contents. Their work will increase many fold in the coming years as after the bill gets passed, corporates will seek guidance from the Government to implement CSR activities correctly. We hope that it will guide them to spend money as per stakeholders' needs and aspirations. It is so true, as if your stakeholders are happy then your shareholders are automatically happy! We too would be very happy to assist Indian corporates in ensuring that they not only get to have Global Best Practices, but will also be able to show Indian good practices



to global CSR fraternity, given our global reach and infrastructural base.

Mandatory or not, one fact remains that we are living in a critical time, where global supply of natural resources and eco-system services are declining dramatically, while demand for these resources is escalating. Business can use CSR and corporate sustainability to produce direct benefits for the bottom

line. The companies can achieve operational efficiencies by reducing energy and materials as input factors for production. Wastes can also be reduced and materials can be recycled. These sorts of actions from eco-efficiency can produce concurrent environmental and economic benefits for the company and thereby contribute to stronger financial performance and more positive

profitability. Managing potential risks and liabilities more effectively through CSR tools and perspectives can also reduce costs. Using corporate responsibility and sustainability approaches within business decision-making can result not only in reduced cost but can also lead to recognizing new market opportunities.

There are various studies that have examined the relationship between CSR and corporate financial performance and most of the evidence suggest that the links are positive. According to a study by Tima Bansal, Executive Director of the Network for Business Sustainability at Western University's Richard Ivey School of Business, CSR is significant to a company's long-term survival.

Bansal tracked the progress of 211 firms deemed socially and environmentally responsible in the early 1990s over the subsequent two decades. She compared their performance with that of an equal number of companies not identified as responsible. She found that business with sound CSR principles- equitable wages, display of philanthropy, marked efforts to reduce carbon emissions – were more likely to survive that 20-year period. "I don't think there's one big company that hasn't thought about CSR," says Bansal.

With new company bill coming into force, we need to ask Indian companies if they are ready to take a plunge? Seriously!

—Rajesh Tiwari
CEO of Indian centre for CSR
and Editor of CSR Today

Into The Self

A poem as homework ocean asked me
to write
It did not make me delight
As I had never done it before
Now, it is time to bring 'myself' to the
fore.

Anything but the self cannot be the
subject
All other themes I need to reject
During last weeks its depth together
could we explore
Such an awesome experience I had
never before.

A true friend I have found who helped
me to grasp the essence
Which makes all other mundane
worries and fears a nonsense
Describe to self was the question he did
ask
And I thought oh, what a task!
Having a peep into my source
Makes me realize it is my force
All I need is to do just to trust it
And everything will be a perfect fit.

Experiencing the self is like switching
on a powerful light

It is indeed a real delight
Once you have known the face of the
inner being
Relaxation of mind and body is
spontaneously arising
The 'AHA' experience cannot be
described
I wish it can be a medicine to humanity
that can be prescribed.

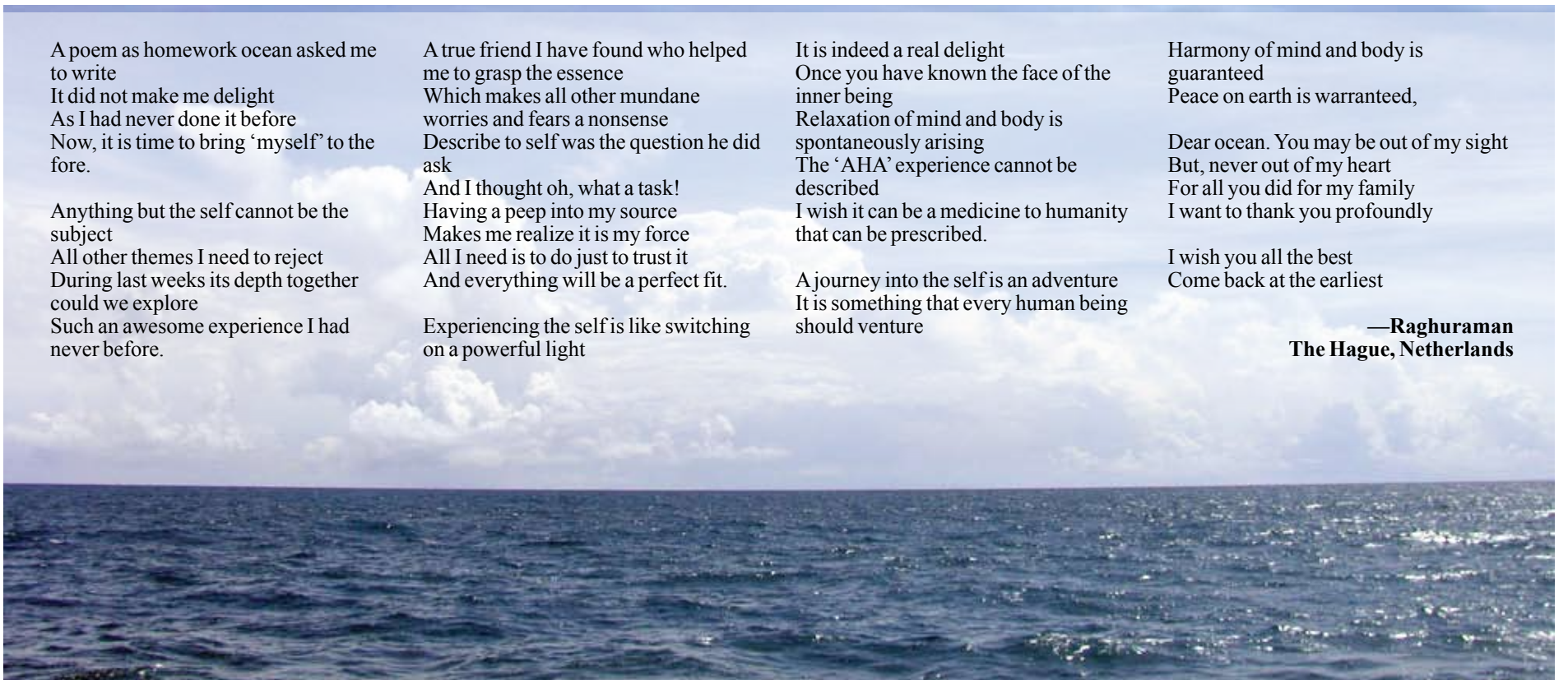
A journey into the self is an adventure
It is something that every human being
should venture

Harmony of mind and body is
guaranteed
Peace on earth is warranted,

Dear ocean. You may be out of my sight
But, never out of my heart
For all you did for my family
I want to thank you profoundly

I wish you all the best
Come back at the earliest

—Raghuraman
The Hague, Netherlands



Crafting value for artisans

Industree Crafts helps with the livelihood of many rural artisans by driving value for their products through its retail brand, Mother Earth. As it continues to scale up and reach out to more artisan groups, it hopes to generate a turnover of Rs. 100 crore in the next three years.

"India has the largest creative industry workforce but holds only two per cent of the global market share," says Neelam Chhiber, co-founder and managing director of Industree Crafts Pvt. Ltd. (Industree). Set up in 1994, Bengaluru-based Industree is a for-profit organisation that forms an essential link between rural artisans and the urban market, thus driving value for both the artisans' products and their livelihoods.

"For centuries, crafts have been an individual/family practice and not a community enterprise. Hence, there is limited growth in their productivity and better scope for the middleman or trader," says Chhiber. Where Industree comes in is to bring these skilled individuals together under the framework of a group enterprise and thus, reap higher productivity on a group level. "Such groups will also have better access to working capital and raw material and this will help streamline their work," she adds. According to a social audit done in 2007 by UK-based The Social Audit Network, for every Rs. 100 increase in Industree's sales, artisans' income went up by Rs. 58. "We were able to triple their income and move them up the value chain," states Chhiber. Industree works with 3,000 artisans through its self-incubated groups, individual artisans, and through non-governmental organisations (NGO) and co-operative (co-op) societies.

Turning to Mother Earth

Industree converted its retail brand name to Mother Earth from its eponymous name in 2008 when Future Ventures, the investment arm of the retail heavyweight Future Group, invested Rs. 10 crore. Mother Earth retails products such as clothes, accessories, home products and food. "We wanted to position the brand as a socially and environmentally sustainable one. Mother Earth seemed the apt name for it," shares Chhiber. The investment helped scale up the social enterprise model. Future Group currently has more than 50 per cent stake in the brand. The company also received funding from US-based Grassroots Business Fund for US \$1 million in 2011, which was used to strengthen its manufacturing arm and scale up its supply chain. Mother Earth now has seven self-owned stores across Tier I cities in India and hopes to open eight franchisees in the coming year. For fiscal 2011, the company reported a total income of Rs. 10.14 crore. It is now looking to register a turnover of Rs. 15 crore for fiscal 2012 and is targeting a turnover of Rs. 30 crore next fiscal. With that target, it also hopes to break even.

Taking root

A graduate of National Institute of Design, Chhiber worked as a consultant for various handicraft corporations such as Handicrafts and Handlooms Exports Corporation of India Ltd., UP Export Corporation, and Tamil Nadu State Handicraft Corporation among others, in designing products with artisan groups and helping market them. The idea of Industree came about when Chhiber was doing a study, funded by the Development Commissioner for Handicrafts, on stone crafts of India. During the course of the project, Chhiber met Gita Ram of Crafts Council of India and got discussing about

partnered with a design store to sell its merchandise. "We started exports in 2000 because retail was not booming back then," say Chhiber. But by 2005, it returned to retail and the brand was re-launched and had three stores. With the artisans group being self-run, it requires loans to sustain the work. And to help the group repay those loans, Industree has to ensure regular orders which the erratic exports market alone could not guarantee. "Stores help create demand which goes back to these groups," says Chhiber. In 2007, its turnover was Rs. 4 crore with equal measures of revenue coming in from exports, shop-in-shop sales and its own stores.

supply chain is working capital. We have tied up with Corporation Bank and are in the process of tying up with Yes Bank to facilitate working capital to these groups," she adds.

Helping lives

In addition to its company's ambitions to sustain the value created for artisans, in 2000, Industree set up 'The Industree Foundation' which is a non-profit organisation that has trained 10,000 artisans in 10 years. It serves as an implementation agency for government schemes in this sector and trains artisans through those schemes. It is currently in the process of training 7500 people through such a scheme. It also hopes to tie-up with the National Rural Livelihood Mission and is in discussions with the National Skill Development Corporation.

According to a social audit done in 2007 by UK-based The Social Audit Network, for every Rs. 100 increase in Industree's sales, artisans' income went up by Rs. 58.

Industree has about 25 self-incubated groups consisting of 300 artisans (contributing to 30 per cent of its turnover) through its foundation. Besides, it also works with individual artisans and through NGOs and co-op societies that contribute another 30 per cent to its turnover. Many of them are concentrated in the south but there are programs running in Rajasthan, Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh through the foundation. Though Industree already buys from these regions through traders, it is also building its own supply chain. The producers also have shares in the company and hence, an ownership in the brand. About 10 per cent of the shares are placed in a mutually beneficial trust that artisans can access.

Weaving a path

Chhiber was recently bestowed as the winner of the 2011 Social Entrepreneur of the Year award by The Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, a sister organisation of the World Economic Forum, for her contribution in helping artisans' lives. "The award helps bring the sector into the limelight and the importance of traditional livelihoods, especially with increasing rural unemployment," she says. And Chhiber wants to see Industree continuing to positively impact more lives of such artisans. By promoting it as a sustainable and modern lifestyle brand, she hopes to introduce personal care products soon. She is also working on building an e-commerce portal.

"We are looking at other avenues like wholesale business and distribution. Right now, exports contribute very marginally so we want to rebuild it. These new avenues should take us to a target of Rs. 100 crore in the next three years," she concludes.

—Mahathi R. Arjun

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



The first Industree store was set up in 1996 in Bengaluru generating Rs. 3 lakh per month with the annual turnover for the first year being Rs. 36 lakh

the crafts sector. The idea was to set up a private company to design contemporary products with rural artisans and create a demand for them. The idea turned to reality with three initial shareholders including Chhiber and Ram, who each put in Rs. 20,000 and Ram loaned the company a further Rs. 12 lakh. The first Industree store was set up in 1996 in Bengaluru generating Rs. 3 lakh per month with the annual turnover for the first year being Rs. 36 lakh. The store continued until 2000, when it

Facing challenges

Chhiber also joined the Social Impact International programme and US-based Global Social Benefit Incubator course, which taught her to build the company's strategy and scale up. One of the major challenges Industree had to encounter was the fractured supply chain in the traditional crafts sector. "We first approached artisans through NGOs and co-op societies, but it took us 10 years to realise that working with other entities does not work. So, now we build our own production groups but they are owned by the producers. We simply handhold them," says Chhiber. To strengthen the supply chain, artisans were teamed into self-help groups of 15–20 that would be recognised by financial institutions to avail loans. Industree had to steadily build the community group by group, give regular orders and link them to banks. "The biggest missing piece in the

AT THE HEART OF ART



Through Viji's journey, the entrepreneur in her has strived to be more than what she is — an artist. One of the more notable aspects of her career has been her efforts in providing upcoming artists with a platform to display their skills.



When she had her first art exhibition in 1989, Viji Nageswaran didn't know just yet, that a few years down the line could well see her with an art gallery of her own. "The critics in Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore loved my work, and it all began on a good note for me," says the prominent city-based artist who also runs Vinnyasa Premier Art Gallery. In due course, as her husband (Nageswaran)'s business kicked off, a mezzanine floor became vacant at the establishment. "He suggested that I use it as a makeshift gallery of sorts," she says, "I jumped at the idea. Not many artists had much space back then, and any semblance of a platform for your work, was a huge gift." There, began a journey that today, stands the test of time thanks to commitment, sheer talent, a proclivity for the artistic and most importantly a social edge that Viji continues to possess.

Vinnyasa began at the humble mezzanine floor in 1996. "I began by shipping in the works of some of my artist friends in Bombay," says Viji, "The gallery also had on display, some of the works of local artists too." For the next two years, the mezzanine would be Viji's art space — but not for long. "As we went about work, we realized that this wasn't much space, given the number of paintings we were bringing in. The wall space was just not enough." Her solution came in the form of the Late T T Vasu, who used to head affairs at The Music Academy. "Mr Vasu inaugurated our gallery in 1996. When I met him, I simply asked him if we could use some space at the academy, and he said yes," she says, "This was a huge blessing since The Music Academy is definitely one of the city's better-known landmarks, and augured well for my gallery." Vinnyasa was at The Music Academy for nearly seven years and a half. When a change of guard occurred at The Music Academy in the mid-2000s after the demise of Vasu, there was a need to shift Vinnyasa from the premises. "I was thankful for all the help, and began looking for another space for my gallery," says Viji. And that was how the present location of the gallery, at CIT Colony, came to be.

Through Viji's journey, the entrepreneur in her has strived to be more than what she is — an artist. One of the more notable aspects of her career has been her efforts in providing upcoming artists with a platform to display their skills. "Being an artist myself, I know the pain that most artists undergo while they are

beginning their careers. Art is a passion that comes with a heavy price tag," she says, "You invest a lot of money into buying your canvas, paints, brushes, and a lot of time too. You then spend for a studio, for publicity, for conveyance charges. However, you aren't exactly assured of getting it all back. Should you have a show and somebody likes your work, chances are you'll make a sale and get some money. Should that not happen, you go back and paint again simply because you love art." Given the situation, one of Viji's other passions, was to help upcoming artists. "The need of the hour was space — a platform for someone's work," she says. "One concern that most artists who let out their galleries to other artists, is that they might lose potential clients. I didn't let that affect me. If an artist was in need of a client, and if my art space would help them out, so be it."

Viji's affordable art shows were for unknown artist and for "hobby painters" too. "I would look at their works, and if I found them interesting, I would invite them to do a show with other artists at my gallery," she says. This way, a number of independent artists received some publicity and platform for their work. Along the way, several independent artists became increasingly aware of Viji's work. Many of them would write to her, requesting for space, send in some of their works and postcards. She became known as a shepherd of sorts, for independent artists.

Some of her more notable initiatives include a tie-up with Dr Ambika Kameshwar's Theatre for Holistic Development, where Viji provided her gallery for Dr Ambika to conduct some of her workshops. Vinnyasa has also been instrumental in its support of the Multiple Sclerosis Society. "Two years ago, we organized a live painting by Thotta Tharini, whose works was later auctioned off," she says, "We raised three lakh rupees, which went to the Multiple Sclerosis Society." Vinnyasa has also offered a helping hand to Shiva Shakthi Homes.

No amount of work would be complete without support from the family, and in that respect, Viji has had more than she could ever need. "My husband has been extremely supportive in this journey," she says, "My two children, settled abroad, have also been supporting me fervently." For now, encouraging young upcoming artists is what Viji will continue doing even as she commits herself to do her bit for encouraging art in all its form and beauty.



"Two years ago, we organized a live painting by Thotta Tharini, whose works was later auctioned off. We raised three lakh rupees, which went to the Multiple Sclerosis Society."

Listen carefully to successful people all over the world and they will tell you one thing. Opportunity quietly surrounds you. Information and knowledge are within your reach. Prosperity is silently knocking at your door. Victory mysteriously awaits you.

Subtle and elusive as it may seem, there is no scarcity of success. It is available to all of us. The only real problem is how we choose to respond to the unlimited abundance that is ours for the taking. Do we accept it or reject it? Do we allow it or resist it? Do we demand it or dismiss it? Do we take it in or turn it away?

Stop and ask yourself: How do you see the world? How do you see yourself in the world? How do you see your relationship with the world? Do you see the opportunity? Do you believe it is yours for the taking? Do you feel worthy of success? Do you feel deserving? Are you asking for it? Are you looking for it? Are you listening for it? Are you open to it? Are you allowing it to manifest in your life and your presence, or have you convinced yourself that you do not qualify for one reason or another? Are you seizing the opportunity to advance yourself and the

world in a mutually beneficial way, or are you putting it off for another day? Are you expecting success or suspecting it? Are you even aware that the choice is up to you?

I am fortunate to work with many successful executives, professionals, military leaders, authors, consultants, teachers, parents, coaches, and athletes around the world and a term I hear more and more frequently is 'Step Up'. From North America to China to Brazil to countries all over Europe, the mantra is the

same. We need people to step up. We believe in them. We see the potential. We know they can do better. We want them to succeed. We just need to see them take charge and step up.

In other cases, proactive people are advancing themselves without being asked or encouraged. They just do it, often surprising the people around them. They use the ten 'take-aways' described in this book to tap into their true potential. This illustrates that we do not need permission

to step up. We do not need to be told to do it, or even asked. We can apply these take-aways to our personal and professional lives wherever and whenever we want. The key is to know that we can step up and then to know how!

Take these tips and use them to elevate your life.

- Take ownership and responsibility for your outcomes
- Take a good, honest look in the mirror
- Take time to reflect on who you are and what you are capable of
- Take measure of your current state—the good, the bad, and the ugly!
- Take advice from wise counsel
- Take a chance
- Take action
- Take another look at your life and your results
- Take a knee and give thanks for what you are and what you have

—An excerpt from *Stepping Up* by John Murphy

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E-SEOP – Online Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Programme – an online course for working professionals who cannot attend regular classes. Regular interactive webinars will be conducted.

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For registration and enquiries contact Mr Sundar Jothi at 9841641813 or 044-42805365 or write to chennaicsim@gmail.com.
For more information, please visit www.csim.in

Join the social citizens league and bring about social change!



Simple Yet Workable

At Sukriti, a four pronged strategy is followed to address the diverse needs of the disabled, i.e. prevention, rehabilitation, advocacy, and employability.

There are a number of proverbs, idioms and quotes saying that simplicity has its own value attached to it. It can also be the way in which an organisation's work is planned and administered. So proves Sukriti Social Foundation, a registered Trust, established in 2006.

Sukriti began out of one individual's conviction to the cause of the 'dis.' no, 'differently – abled'. Sowmya Simhan, the Founder of Sukriti appears to be a very amiable and socially conscious person. As the conversation sets in, I begin to realise that I was more than correct. Herself a differently abled, Sowmya has strived and struggled to live life as normal as anybody else would. That brings us to the objective of this institution. Sukriti wants to contribute to building a society where the differently abled enjoy equal opportunities and are able to live with dignity and self-esteem.

Sowmya had always intended to work for the benefit of people like her, once she became independent. "There were a lot of physical, social and emotional barriers I had to overcome. Fortunately, I had a few support systems that helped me to get through these obstacles. It cannot be the same for everybody," asserts Sowmya. Realising the kind of hardships that the differently abled have to face on a daily basis, she decided to do her bit in making their lives better and livable. Right from her first salary, she has continued to pool resources for this cause.

During her student days, Sowmya had volunteered for a number of organisations. Today, she is a board member in most of these organisations. Interestingly, she did not restrict herself to the issue of disability. "I have worked with organisations across sectors and this has helped me to understand the social and economic barriers for the differently abled from different perspectives," she explains.

Sukriti came into existence with generous contribution from friends and family who knew what Sowmya was working for. "It is a kind of acceptance that we strive for in this society. Those

who understand support our activities," remarks Sowmya, who is also a member of the Lions club.

At Sukriti, a four pronged strategy is followed to address the diverse needs of the disabled, i.e. prevention, rehabilitation, advocacy, and employability. Their interventions pertaining to prevention creates focus on the causative factors and channelizes

Sukriti to make the beneficiaries employable. The transition from a time when the society refused to recognise the disabled to now, when a lot of organisations work for their welfare has a lot of aspects to ponder over. "Today, there is more awareness and marginally more respect for us than earlier. If we look at a span of two decades there has been a change in people's

attitude. Yet, there is a long way to go ahead," she exclaims.

Lamenting about the fact that a large number of parents still view disability as a curse, she calls for the acknowledgement of every individual's potential, whether abled or disabled. "Why would disability disprove our potential in doing something?" Sowmya insists that the role of a family, the first support system for any individual, is of prime importance in dealing with the disabled. "While abilities are totally ignored, disability is looked at with magnifying glasses. This is where the role of family falls in place."

In the context of employability, Sukriti has provided cycle training programmes for 44 individuals since 2009. 34 persons have been rehabilitated successfully and are now earning around 4,000 to 8,000 rupees a month. Another 16 individuals have used the training as a source of supplementary income. What is more appreciable is that numbers do not drive the work at Sukriti. "We are a small organisation. We do not work on targets. We want to reach as many as our resource base permits. All we want to do is a thorough work in every individual's case," says Sowmya.

Sukriti's advocacy activities focus on creating awareness on different forms of disability and a barrier free environment for the disabled. "The construction of ramp at Valluvarkottam is entirely our effort," she says proudly. The mention of government policies does not excite her as she feels that they are outdated. "The aspirations of a disabled person are not the same, as it was 20 years ago. As scenarios keep changing, so should policies, suiting their current needs and aspirations," she adds.

On a concluding note, she states, "All we need is an opportunity to prove our ability, firstly to ourselves and then to the society. We do not need sympathy!" Calling for a concerted effort from all sides, Sowmya is prepared to wait, because it will take time for change."

—Shanmuga Priya.T.



efforts to contain the same. When prevention does not succeed, rehabilitation is looked at multiple levels. Distribution of mobility aids at Sukriti has made a remarkable change in the individuals' lives. "Being able to move around independently, without anybody's help, is in itself a great sense of freedom and achievement for us," she says.

The fact that rehabilitation is not the end of the cycle is very well articulated in Sukriti's activities. Sowmya delves into concepts of economic independence and the self-esteem that fosters in the minds of the differently abled, as she elaborates on the training programmes organised by

We do not work on targets. We want to reach as many as our resource base permits. All we want to do is a thorough work in every individual's case

The Discrimination of the Four Castes According to Jati and Guna

Once I went to see Swamiji while he was staying in Calcutta at the house of the late Balaram Basu. After a long conversation about Japan and America, I asked him, "Well, Swamiji, how many disciples have you in the West?"

Swamiji: A good many.

Q: Two or three thousands?

Swamiji: Maybe more than that.

Q: Are they all initiated by you with Mantras?

Swamiji: Yes.

Q: Did you give them permission to utter Pranava (Om)?

Swamiji: Yes.

Q: How did you, Mahârâj? They say that the Shudras have no right to Pranava, and none has except the Brâhmins. Moreover, the Westerners are Mlechchhas, not even Shudras.

Swamiji: How do you know that those whom I have initiated are not Brahmins?

Q: Where could you get Brahmins outside India, in the lands of the Yavanas and Mlechchhas?

Swamiji: My disciples are all Brahmins! I quite admit the truth of the words that none except the Brahmins has the right to Pranava. But the son of a Brahmin is not necessarily always a Brahmin; though there is every possibility of his being one, he may not become so. Did you not hear that the nephew of Aghore Chakravarti of Baghbazar became a sweeper and actually used to do all the menial services of his adopted caste? Was he not the son of a Brahmin?

The Brahmin caste and the *Brâhmanya* qualities are two distinct things. In India, one is held to be a Brahmin by one's caste, but in the West, one should be known as such by one's *Brâhmanya* qualities. As there are three *Gunas*—

Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas—so there are *Gunas* which show a man to be a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya or Shudra. The qualities of being a Brahmin or a Kshatriya are dying out from the country; but in the West they have now attained to Kshatriyahood, from which the next step is Brahminhood; and many there are who have qualified themselves for that.

Q: Then you call those Brahmins who are *SâtTVika* by nature.

Swamiji: Quite so.

As there are *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*—one or other of these *Gunas* more or less—in every man, so the qualities which make a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, or Shudra are inherent in every man, more or less. But at times one or other of these qualities

predominates in him in varying degrees, and it is manifested accordingly. Take a man in his different pursuits, for example: when he is engaged in serving another for pay, he is in Shudrahood;

when he is busy transacting some piece of business for profit, on his own account, he is a Vaishya; when he fights to right wrongs, then the qualities of a Kshatriya come out in him; and when he meditates on God or passes his time in conversation about Him, then he is a Brahmin. Naturally, it is quite possible for one to be

changed from one caste into another. Otherwise, how did Vishvâmitra become a Brahmin and Parashurâma a Kshatriya?

—Source: *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*



Emotional Satisfaction – the heart of Belongingness

Unless the heart ticks, nothing moves. So is the role of emotional satisfaction in feeling of belongingness. This dimension is highly intangible and variant from individual to individual. Yet, it is a highly powerful determinant of belongingness. While sharing about belongingness many have remembered how small acts of emotional connect goes a long way in making a person feel belong to a group.

Emotions play a very significant role in human beings. Antonio R. Damasio, Head of neurology at The University of Iowa College of Medicine explains, "In truth, reasoning/decision-making and emotion/feeling intersect in the brain. Feelings and emotion have a powerful influence on reasoning. Feelings have a say about how the rest of the brain and cognition go about their business." Satisfying ones emotions would mean:

- there is enough opportunities to feel various emotions;
- space to identify and express them;
- there is adequate acceptance of the emotions felt and expressed by the members of the organization; and
- there are processes to learn about self leading to higher level of emotional maturity.

Whenever there is a block in any of these processes, the members naturally feel constrained. In order to exist in such an environment they begin to alter, mask, and/or express emotions that are accepted; and hide those that are not accepted. The eastern world, as such, is torn between the eastern upbringing and western orientations in the space of emotional connect and emotional expression. This causes many abrasions in organizations leaving behind confused and dissatisfied lot.

Social entrepreneurs are intense

individuals and this intensity is a necessary feeder to the passion with which they follow their vision. Therefore, the emotions may also be intense and need careful taming if they have to manage teams and build institutions. Further, if they have people working both in the city office as well as at the grassroots, there is a difference and the processes leading to emotional satisfaction amongst the people in the city office and those at the regional office may be very different. Those who interface with both the groups are confused as to where they belong. This can be greatly solved with a deeper sense of emotional consciousness.

Organizations do not usually focus on understanding the emotional space in the psyche of the organization. In organizations today emerging from the theories of emotional intelligence, emotions are seen as something that needs to be managed through logical articulation processes. Understanding emotions as intelligence helps little in managing them, while understanding them as emotional consciousness renders an ability to accept, exist, and transcend the same—allowing the ability to make choices. The meaning of emotional consciousness, as said by management thinker Dr. J.M. Sampath is: "Our ability to align with the larger consciousness and allow it to flow through us to be able to respond with the emotions that are appropriate to a given context. It includes paradoxes of the emotions and transcends to enrich the emotions of life and life itself."

The eastern orientation emerging from Indian psychology has a very well laid out '*Rasaanubhava*'—experience of the *rasas*

which are still preserved in the art forms of music and dance. Eight key emotions were identified in the Bharata's *natyashastra*: love, humor, courage, fear, compassion, horror, disgust, and astonishment. The ninth

which was added much later was the *shantha rasa*—inner calmness. They also further provided a well thought out classification on how the *rasas* are intertwined. This was further connected to a "*sthayi bhava*," (the permanent state of mind), and *vyabhichari bhava* or *sanchari bhava* (transitory or passing state of mind). The

language too was supportive by having different terms to describe each of these. The eastern culture therefore allowed a wide expression of emotions in varied spaces and these were experientially studied and understood through insights into what causes each of them and how they are being expressed. They were more humane and contextual.

While the emotions stirred in the human being may be innate, the expressions of those are through taming and socialization processes. When organizations simply define only the expression of emotions, but do not align with the inner feelings and socialization outcomes per se, it causes abrasions. The more genuine and honest the environment, the more honest and genuine will be the expressions. Organizations need to focus not only on managing the emotions but also on nurturing the same.

The organization has to keep tab on:

- the relationship that people have with each other in the organization



- the extent of genuineness and honesty that is appreciated within the organization
 - capability of the people to get in touch with their feelings and emotions in the shortest time possible
 - the spaces that are available to explore the feelings and emotions when they are inappropriate
 - the extent of time and energy spent in understanding the context
 - the willingness to explore and process the feelings and emotions
 - the willingness to accept others as they are and give them the freedom
- Understanding and dealing with emotions is a journey, not a destination to reach. The worst that someone can do is to put rules and policies on the expression and make it a robotic activity space. The satisfaction comes from the space that each one feels they are accepted and their emotional maturity is allowed to blossom as their tenure in the organization grows.

Reflections:

1. What is the extent of space, energy and time provided within the organization to build healthy, nurturing relationships?
2. What are the processes that are created within the organizations that allow healthy expression of emotions?
3. What learning and development interventions are continually undertaken that nurtures and builds emotional consciousness amongst the members of the organization?
4. What are the ways in which intensity and emotional maturity are balanced by the social entrepreneur?

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath, PhD

Angels in Disguise



It was around 8 in the evening and Hari was playing cards alone in his little home. The platform adjacent to the compound wall of a huge bungalow at JJ Street, near Poes Garden in Chennai, is where he lives.

Hari has established his home in about 15 square-feet space in this platform. He had lined the floor with a mat and blankets, and stored his clothes with the help of newspapers. Although the street was busy with traffic, there was an unusual silence when we approached him.

Archana, Coordinator, The Banyan, and Sangeetha Ranganath, Volunteer, greeted Hari and offered him a dinner packet. He accepted it unhesitantly and smiled.

The dinner packet contained lemon rice and vegetable sabji that was provided by Winners Bakery, a project of Chennai Mission.

Chennai Mission along with The Banyan launched 'Kind People, Happy City', a movement to sensitize people to the needs of the homeless people, during the Joy of Giving Week in October 2012. Through this program, free food packets are offered to around 45 homeless people in Chennai every day.

Chennai Mission coordinates the cooking and packaging of the food packets. Mr. Balu of Winners Bakery supervises this activity, and ensures that each day there is a different variety of rice that is being served. To name a few, vegetable rice, tamarind rice, lemon rice, *jeera* rice, vegetable *biryani*, and egg curry rice. Each pack contains 450 grams of nutritious food in it and is kept ready for distribution by 6:45 pm every day.

The Banyan manages distribution through volunteers. 30 food packets are served to the homeless men who are housed in the shelter run by The Banyan at Domnikuppam, Santhome, while 15 packets are distributed to the homeless people who live on pavements in the city. This number will increase as and when more people are being identified for support.

"How are you, Hari?" asked Archana.

"Fine," he replied.

"I have been asking you to come to our shelter home at Santhome. Why don't you see how it is? There are many people here who will give you company, and you will be taken good care of. See, you are playing cards all alone," said Archana.

Hari took a glance at the cards lying in front of him and looked at Archana as if agreeing to what she said.

"Where do you go to have your bath and wash your clothes, Hari? You look prim and proper today," asked Sangeetha influencing him to speak.

"I go to the sea. I also wash my clothes here," he said faintly.

"When can I take you to the shelter home?" she enquired directly.

After pausing for a moment, he said: "On Tuesday."

Hari spoke good English, and had a collection of pens. He appeared lost and waiting for his family to take him back home. Probably he had a fight and moved out impulsively and is now regretting for it. None of us could guess what the truth is.

Bidding adieu to Hari and informing him that we would come again to see him, we set off to meet our next dinner guests.

Sangeetha is a Physiotherapist and volunteers once a week to coordinate the food distribution. While she was at the wheel, Archana was looking out at the dark corners of the streets if there were any more homeless people who needed our attention.

As we stopped in front of the Light House railway station, about 10 to 12 men, women, and children came

running towards us. Archana greeted each one by name and when she saw more men approaching her, she held the food packets higher.

"You are drunk. How can you expect me to give you food? This is meant for only those who do not have money or home," said Archana assertively.

Failing to persuade her further, these men slowly walked away.

Parvathi received her packet and thanked Archana. She asked her politely, "When are you going to take me to my friend, Poongavanam? I really miss her a lot."

"I shall let you know soon," replied Archana.

"Poongavanam and Parvathi were living at the pavement near the railway station for several years. When Poongavanam suffered a stroke, she was shifted to a home run by Missionaries of Charity at Ennore. Now Parvathi wants to join her," explained Archana.

Sangeetha and Archana spent considerable time interacting with the people here, and I was overwhelmed. For these homeless people, Archana and Sangeetha were angels in disguise who reminded them of hope.

"We are very careful in choosing our beneficiaries as we need to be certain that we reach out to only those who are homeless and lack family support. All our guests are certain that their dinner would arrive around 8 PM. It is not just food that we give, but our time to listen to them as well," said Sangeetha.

In less than an hour's time, we had distributing all the food packets that we had. We returned to our starting point—Winners Bakery.

Mohanraj was heading back home after a long day at work. He works as a cook at Winners Bakery. When we told him that all the food packets have been delivered to our dinner guests, he said, "It gives me immense satisfaction to cook for these homeless people. I would like to visit them some day."

Archana said spontaneously: "Please join me when I visit them again. I am sure they would love to meet you too."

—Marie Banu

Kind People, Happy City(KPHC)/ Kanivaana makkal, Aanandhamaana nagaram, is a movement promoted by Chennai Mission and The Banyan, with the goal of fostering a caring community, so lives of vulnerable people are bettered.

Every person can contribute to this movement by participating in street engagement, befriending a homeless person or sharing resources like food and clothes.

Loosely structured and driven by passion and individual commitment, we aspire to build local ownership over the next few years and tap into Chennai and India's rich culture of giving and caring.

If you would like to volunteer with KPHC call Archanaa on 9840523235.

“I did not have surplus money when I made my first contribution. But, God gave me much more.”

Rtn V Raja Seenivasan tells Marie Banu what inspired him to venture into philanthropy.

Rtn V. Raja Seenivasan is a Leather technologist from the First Batch of Anna University. He started his own Leather business in 1987, which has now transformed into a leading company—VRS Leathers Private Limited—that manufactures and exports finished leather around the globe.

Rtn. Raja joined the Rotary Club of Madras West in 1997 and served as its President in 2002-03 when he won ‘The Silver Rotary Action Trophy’ for best overall performance. From 2003-04, he held various District Positions and assignments including Assistant Governor. He initiated many projects of which the ‘Care for tender feet’—providing footwear to children—is ongoing.

Rtn. Raja and his spouse Mrs Jayanthi are well known for their philanthropic nature both in and out of Rotary. Rtn. Raja was unanimously elected as the District Governor in 2012-13.

In an exclusive interview, Rtn. V. Raja Seenivasan tells Marie Banu what inspired him to venture into philanthropy.

Who has been your inspiration to venture into philanthropy?

I can say that it was my mother. She used to say: “You give, and God will give you more.” This has been my philosophy right from my college days. I used to help my fellow students who could not afford to pay their fees. Later on, after getting into business, I wanted to do something more for my society. Once I joined Rotary and started meeting amazing people here, I was motivated to contribute more. In Rotary, Past District Governor JB Kamdar (who has given more than 250,000 USD and still keeps giving) is my inspiration.

You have been offering awards to outstanding students in academics? Does your passion lie in education?

I strongly believe that education is the key for our country. Rotary or the government need not have to give anything free to our society, if we empower them with education. Once educated, people will get jobs and be on their own.



Photo: Marie Banu

Besides instituting awards in my parent’s name, I also support children who need financial assistance to study, either through Rotary or directly.

With Rotary Club having several school projects, what efforts has the club taken to sensitize girl children on prevention of abuse?

School is one of the key focus areas of Rotary. When Rotary celebrated its 100th year in 2004-2005 under a project called ‘Schools into smiles’, we surveyed about 1,000 schools that needed attention. On need basis, we renovated 100 schools and provided many schools with toilets as well.

Educating children on awareness and prevention of abuse who are in the age-group of 12 to 15 is difficult as it is a sensitive topic. We therefore conducted several sensitization programs for school teachers on how they can educate children to be careful and prevent abuse.

One of the key achievements of Rotary Club in India is the ‘Pulse Polio Campaign’. Can you tell us more about this?

Pulse polio program is a global program. During the 1980s, the whole world had around 400,000 polio cases every year. It was at this point in time, Rotary wanted to take up the polio eradication program. We were already successful with the red measles program in Tamil Nadu.

The polio vaccine was invented by a Rotarian. When Rotary celebrated its

centenary, we initiated the 20-year program (1985 – 2005) with the objective of eradicating polio in the entire world. We first launched a pilot project in Philippines, and after its success took it to a global level. We convinced the government one by one, and launched the program in many countries.

Many governments joined Rotary in its efforts, but funds were an issue. Rotarians mobilized funds and even gave 2.5 crore rupees to the Government of Tamil Nadu to buy the polio vaccine.

Three years ago, Bill Gates, a philanthropist donated 100 million USD as a challenge grant to the Rotary. Once Rotary raised this amount, he offered 255 million USD. This time, he asked us to raise only 100 million USD. We succeeded in this as well. He was impressed with the way in which Rotarians raised funds and conducted the programs, and offered a third grant of 100 million USD.

People asked Bill gates why he chose to contribute to Rotary, and not to WHO directly. His answer was: “I have worked with the Rotary in Africa and in other places. I am confident that whatever money I give Rotary, it reaches the beneficiaries fully.”

In 2012, we had only 200 cases reported in all the three countries put together—Pakistan, Nigeria, and Afghanistan. India has become polio free for the last two years. In another year, we will be certified by WHO as a ‘Polio Free Nation’.

What are the programs that you

envision during your tenure as District Governor for the Rotary?

In 1995, globalisation and liberalization of economy began in India and our growth has been terrific since then. I asked myself: “Has this growth reached all the people?” The answer was “Not yet.”

Today, around 70 percent of the people in our country still live in villages and lack access to education, health care, and basic facilities. Having visited several villages, I believe that if we improve access to education and health care facilities, the average Indian life expectancy, which is 63 years now, would increase considerably.

There are 118 clubs in Rotary which comes under 5 revenue districts—Chennai, Kanchipuram, Thiruvannamalai, Vellore, and Thiruvallur. We wanted to make an attempt along with the government and corporate houses to create 100 model villages in these districts and provide them with education, vocational training, water and sanitation facilities, and social support.

Rotary termed this project as ‘Happy Village’ as we believe that only happy villages can create a happy India. We involved the community in each of the villages in our sanitation awareness program that was conducted by experts.

The villagers were made to draw their social map in an open space of land. Different colors were used to denote houses, temples, roads, water facilities, and places they used for open defecation. Once this was outlined, they were made to realize the need for proper sanitation. With funds from Rotary Foundation, we have now constructed several toilets in villages and this project is a huge success.

How do you find time for social work?

After I got involved in Rotary, there was no looking back. It became my passion. It is because of my family involvement that I am able to spend more time for Rotary than anything else.

Being the District Governor is demanding and like a full-time job. I feel that it is a great opportunity that has been given to me to change hundreds of lives. While giving, you feel happy. I did not have surplus money when I made my first contribution. But, God gave me much more. I remembered what my mother told me: “You give, and God will give you more.”

Editorial

**Latha Suresh
Marie Banu**