

# Conversations

A Chronicle of Social Currents

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About lives of wig-makers in Chennai

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**"The things that do not belong to you, you have no right to enjoy."**  
An exclusive interview with Shri. U. Sagayam IAS

## From the Editor

**Dear Friend,**

A poem by Mary Anne Radmacher inspired me.

If you would dream it -BEGIN it.

If you have an idea -OPEN it.

If there is longing -ACKNOWLEDGE it.

If there is mission -COMMIT it.

If there is daring - DO it.

If there is love - SPEAK it.

If there is resource - USE it.

If there is abundance- SHARE it.

Your purpose is what you must do.

Embrace the truth of your purpose each minute of your precious life. Life begins

when you do.

The heroes featured in this edition have indeed adopted this philosophy in their lives.

Read them and get inspired!

—PN Devarajan



to learn • to heal • to raise

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# Premonition

**M**y recent trip to Coimbatore was a traumatic experience as I witnessed a fatal accident for the first time. I was invited to conduct a fundraising training for NGOs at the CSIM branch here on a Sunday. After work, my colleagues and I visited the Marudamalai temple which was just seven kilometers away from the place of training. Although we suggested hiring a cab, our counterpart at Coimbatore offered taking us in his Tata Indica.

Winding through the narrow roads, we drove uphill. The lanes were filled with suspense, as we never had the least clue about the cars that were approaching us from the bend. "It is risky, isn't it? I never drove uphill. It is a bit scary," I said signaling my fear as the driver was rash in driving.

My counterpart quipped: "Well, you should be scared of elephants and not vehicles here."

Observing the driver to be thrilled with the remark, I stopped to comment further. The drive downhill was even more treacherous and I was hoping to reach my destination soon.

When we drove past Vadavalli, in an instant, an 80-year-old man who was crossing the road got hit by our car. He was thrown across the road and laid flat on his back, with his head bleeding profusely.

He died the next day. It was very pathetic to see the family members grieve and the driver get beaten up.

Within a week after the accident, the driver sought bail, and the car was released by the cops. It is learnt that the insurance will pay the old man's family a solatium of around 3 lakhs.

But, what about the life of the man himself?

Life is precious! Yours as well as others!



A good attitude is a safe attitude. People need to drive with care and responsibility.

*Here are some pointers to warn you about your driver's attitude:*

- driving too close to the vehicle in front;
- turning or reversing negligently;
- careless changing lanes;
- driving at an inappropriate speed;
- failing to obey traffic signals; and
- late use of or failing to use indicators

—Marie Banu

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

| Loss of lives due to accidents | No. of accidents reported |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>106</b>                     | <b>805</b>                |

**NUMBER OF CASES  
BOOKED FOR TRAFFIC  
VIOLATION: 2,97,415**

- Signal violation - 15,976
- Wrong side driving - 80
- Over speeding - 4,224
- Violation of one way rule - 17,811

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**

  
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# EMPOWERMENT by all means

**“A woman, who once used to lock herself inside the house after the child leaves for school, is now working for the federation’s administration. They now participate in meetings like men. They are equal now!”**



**T**he self help group movement in India has opened doors for women to experience economic independence through financial intermediation. Today, the groups have grown to walk that extra mile in developing their communities. Radhika, Founder, Sivagami Rural Women Federation in Villupuram, is one such empowered woman, who has designed her own journey in this road.

Even as a school student she was drawn towards social concerns, and she always intended to bring about a change in her own style. Though she had to discontinue studies after twelfth standard, her attention to social issues only grew manifold. She grew to be a keen social observer. The fact that her husband was disabled did not deter her from beating her own drums. “I wanted to prove that life is what you see and make of it,” asserts Radhika.

Although being the mother of two daughters, she attends SHG meetings regularly and guides her members. She is also the District Secretary for the political party Samuga Samathuva Padai and has actively campaigned for the cause of returning the panchami lands. “I intend to convincingly show that women can work like men, multi-task in the social work field,” she says.

As a trainer for the last ten years, she has equipped the women in her network with skills such as jam, sauce, and pickle making. The groups have together organized periodic medical camps, awareness on the use of sanitary napkins, and the importance of using toilets. They have been able to efficiently use the funds to construct toilets in the neighbouring villages. Of late, they have also propagated kitchen gardens for farmers

and the cultivation of herbal crops.

Motivation to engage in multiple activities comes from Radhika’s sense of curiosity. “I always want to learn and explore,” she quips. She explains that there are women who are well read but yet remain housewives on the one hand, and women who want to study but are not motivated to do so on the other hand. “Today, these women have come forward to complete their degree through correspondence, which is a great achievement considering the prevalence of social taboos in the rural landscape.”

Radhika believes that this entire social activity helps women in parenting, more so striking a chord with their children. The self-help groups have adopted ten villages in the district where they distribute books and note books to school students, toys to children at balwadis and also run evening tuition centres. Further, they have launched a tailoring institute in Dindivanam and Semmangalam districts.

According to her, change and development are both relative terms. The very fact that women have begun to approach the groups for help is in itself an indication of success. “A woman, who once used to lock herself inside the house after the child leaves for school, is now working for the federation’s administration. They now participate in meetings like men. They are equal now!” says a proud Radhika.

Commenting on the acknowledgement given to women self-help groups, she justifies, “If not for the results shown, the Andhra Pradesh government would not have proposed a dedicated bank for women SHGs and the Central Government would not have reduced the rate of interest for these groups from 12 to 7 percent.” Above all, what is to be



work. The course at CSIM helped me organize my activities towards caring for the people. It gave me the confidence to talk to different stake holders appropriately. CSIM has played a crucial role in moulding me as a social worker.”

Being in the forefront of a women’s federation and a political party is not an easy task. But, Radhika seems to have gotten the grasp of it. The two roles complement each other well.

Ms Sivagami IAS, whom Radhika met about ten years ago is her source of inspiration. Ms Sivagami’s resignation to concentrate at the grass root level has impacted her strongly. “I realized from her that there was much to be done for the people and education certainly is not a barrier,” explains Radhika, who acquired a degree in Sociology at the age of 34.

She adds that family cannot be a hurdle to our social interests. “This is how social work is. Not all can have the same attitude towards society. As a social worker, I must and I have been able to manage personal and professional life at a reasonably well,” she signs off.

—Shanmuga Priya.R.



We take in boys who are fairly independent as far as their personal chores are concerned. Their IQ levels need to be above 40 in order to qualify.



# Clockwork Precision

“Our boys come from poor families. So it is essential for us to find placements for the boys so that they may contribute to the family’s income.”

**M**ental Retardation is the colloquial term used to refer to a complex range of diseases that affect the human brain. It is also a loosely used term, and a social taboo is prevalent upon anybody who is said to suffer from it. In other words, a person with mental retardation is said to be unfit for any form of social interaction and therefore many families hide or restrict the very existence of such an individual to the confines of their homes. That people with mental retardation can also be productive individuals is something that is often overlooked by many. Here is an organization that not only nurtures skillful individuals but also has managed to tap into their award-winning abilities.

Navajyoti Trust was founded by a prosperous industrialist D.J.K. Cornelius in 1968 at Bangalore. The objective of this trust was to start a vocational training center for youth aged between 14 to 22 years. In the nineties, the Trust launched a centre in Chennai. A campus spanning 10 acres of land in the prime industrial locality at Ambattur, this center serves as a home and workshop for young men who have a mild form of mental disability.

“We take in boys who are fairly independent as far as their personal chores are concerned. Their IQ levels need to be above 40 in order to qualify. Here the boys are trained in academics as well as mild engineering assembly skills. The trust not only takes care of their training and accommodation, but also helps them in procuring their disability ID cards and the MTC bus pass. Attenders are available to keep the boys some company,” Says Balakrishnan, Trustee, Navjyoti.



The work timings for the Trust are from 9:00 am. to 5:00 pm. The trust offers the boys a week’s holiday once in every four months. “We started off with just eight boys, but today we have 28 boys and three teachers at our centre. We do not offer an annual leave for the boys, since a long break from work would hinder their ability to recollect what they had learnt before the holidays,” says Balakrishnan.

Teachers in the centre have been trained specifically to work with persons with disabilities. The Navajyoti Trust offers a one-year Diploma in Vocational Rehabilitation which is recognized by the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI), the apex body governing the interests of persons with disabilities at the national level. This diploma course has been offered by Navajyoti Trust since 1995 and Navajyoti is one of the first NGOs to launch such a course. Today, according to Balakrishnan, there are 13 other institutions that offer similar programs.

Navajyoti Trust gets its funding from Central and State government grants, corporate support as well as from private donations. “The grants take care of our



training costs and teachers’ salaries. We invest our donations in fixed deposits and use the interest amount to meet our expenses which is around nine lakh rupees per year,” he says. The boys who stay for the three year period at Navajyoti Trust learn to become self-reliant and independent. The teachers take them on field visits and teach them important life skills, such as how to take a train or bus to and from a particular place. Placements are done through the Shell-Employee Trust. Companies such as Delphi-TVS, Diamond Chain, Brakes India Ltd. recruit the boys.

“Our boys come from poor families. So it is essential for us to find placements for the boys so that they may contribute to the family’s income. We largely tie up with printing presses, automobile assembly centers, and banks even,” adds Balakrishnan.

“We design the factory fixtures to suit the boys’ abilities. Their medical condition leaves no room for error in mechanical tasks and their enthusiasm and commitment to their job is infectious. Recently Delphi-TVS presented us an award for being their Outstanding Supplier! It was all because the

boys would turn in their goods well ahead of time because of their dogged commitment,” he says with pride.

Each boy earns an average of Rs. 3,500 per month. There is a certain pride and dignity and a boost of self-confidence that inculcates in the child. Navajyoti Trust has two centers in Chennai, one in Ambattur and another at Sriperumbudur. Being located close to the industrial belt of the city, the trust enjoys the affiliation of the best industries.

In 2008 the trust celebrated its 40th anniversary with great gusto. Over the years it has adapted itself to the times and today it stands testimony to the long standing struggle for the rights of persons with disabilities, especially mental disabilities.

Tucked away in a corner of the city, quietly working away are 28 boys who are more than what meets the eye. The world still calls them names, but little does it know that their eye for precision at work and sense of time surpasses that of anybody else.

A nod to Navajyoti Trust, an organization that respects these individuals for their worth and carefully nurtures them so that they may shine.

—Archanaa R.



“I have to plant at least one sapling every day, otherwise I don't get a sound sleep that night,” says Mullaivanam, a businessman and an avid environment-enthusiast who is promoting tree-planting through his Tree-Bank in Sriperumbudur. Introduced in 2008, the tree-bank is a voluntary association of environmental conservation activists and volunteers who give away free saplings to anybody who seeks them. Mullaivanam is one of the seven trustees who have set up this Tree-Bank. “We have requests pouring in from schools, colleges, from families for birthdays and other special occasions. We coordinate home-deliveries within the city, but mostly we suggest spots which are conducive for planting and meet people here. We agree to part with the saplings only when we get a commitment from the other party to take care of the plant.”

“We receive large orders from individuals as well as public and private organizations. Since we do

learnt how easy this can be, and now it is a habit that I enjoy continuing.”

According to Mullaivanam, donation of a sapling is the best form of help. “I believe that every other kind of donation serves merely as a means to satisfy man's selfish motives. Tree-donation alone helps build a safer, more vibrant world not just for mankind, but for all living creatures on the planet,” he opines.

When Mullaivanam and his friends go about tree-planting, the passersby are largely indifferent. Some ask why, but only a few care to find out how to do it themselves. It is for this reason that Mullaivanam has taken up the responsibility of spreading this message to the society. He visits schools, colleges, and corporate houses along with his friends to talk about the necessity for tree-planting exercises. He also lobbies with the government to bring about systems that would encourage the general public to engage in tree planting.

“I would suggest that for every two-wheeler that is purchased, the Regional Transport Officer (RTO) must insist the buyer to plant and maintains two saplings, and in the case of a four-wheeler, to plant and maintain four saplings,” says Mullaivanam. Another idea that he proposes is to divert waste water from roadside eateries to water trees that are planted on the sides of main roads. “Instead of letting stinking waste water run along the road or into the drain, why not recycle it?” he asks. He reckons that most states in our country are in sheer negligence. He cites the examples of Kerala and Karnataka who have taken care to maintain greenery in their state. For a man of such passion towards nature, Mullaivanam's family extends whole-hearted and ready support. “My son and daughter accompany me during most of my tree-planting drives,” he says enthusiastically.

As he signs off, Mullaivanam says, “Whatever I do is just a drop in the



ocean. I would love to gift a sapling to every human being on earth. Since that is not possible, I'm doing my best to reach out to people and make them environment conscious.”

“No excuse can be given to not maintain a plant or a tree. All one needs is a square-foot of space in a corner of your house and one litre of water a day. Tell me, is that too difficult?”

A pertinent question indeed! Let us take a cue and let us bring a plant to life today!

—Archanaa R.

# Painting THE World Green

“Tree-donation alone helps build a safer, more vibrant world not just for mankind, but for all living creatures on the planet.”

not have the necessary transport to deliver across cities, we take utmost care in packaging the plants. In case of bulk orders, we ask the receivers to prepare the planting slots prior to delivery of the saplings,” says Mullaivanam.

For Mullaivanam, nature is mankind's first mother. He says: “When a child is born, even before the mother holds and nourishes the child, it is Mother Nature who provides the first nourishment—air for the child to breathe and water. A cradle is made out of wood and so is a coffin. It pains me to see how we as a race have destroyed so much of nature's bounty. Every day I wake up thinking what I am going to do to nourish the earth?”

Such deep-felt concern for nature was instilled in him since his early days. Reminiscing his childhood, he says, “My Grandfather and father were both farmers. Although I was raised in the city, I would always accompany my grandfather in his daily gardening chores. He was always planting saplings around the house. He would simply collect any leftover seeds from the fruits and vegetables that we ate at home and sow them. He would recycle old rubber tyres, plastic-covers, containers, and coconut shells, and use them as flower pots. It is from him that I



Mullaivanam

# The Fine Strands

Conversations team spends an evening with the wig-makers in Chennai

**K**attunayakan means 'the king of the jungle' in Tamil. They are one of the earliest known inhabitants of the Western Ghats engaged collection and gathering of forest produce, mainly wild honey and wax.

The Kattunayakans believe in Hinduism and speak in a language which is a concoction of all Dravidian languages. The main deity of the tribe is Lord Shiva under the name of Bhairava. They also worship animals, birds, trees, rock hillocks, and snakes.

Displaced from their natural habitat, many of them have taken to a different livelihood in cities, often living in urban squalor. The Conversations team spent an evening with 44 families of the Kattunayakan community live in Ennore, a suburb in Chennai. These families make wigs.

As we wound our way through the narrow lanes, we saw a group of women approaching us. One of them, a middle-aged woman, urged us to walk towards the first lane to our left. My NGO contact Latha introduced her as Mariamma, a wig-maker.

We followed Mariamma's instructions and just before we took the bend to our left, we noticed men and women waiting in front of their homes and children seated on the compound walls. The lane, which seemed to be less than five meters in width, was lined with open drainage. They were all curious to know who we were, where we came from, and why we were visiting them.

Latha introduced us to the community and explained the purpose of our visit. Mariamma instantly went inside her home and brought a plastic bag which had human hair and bamboo frames in it.

While I looked for space to do my interview, I saw AK craning with his camera in whatever little space was available.

The women cleared the path in front of Mariamma's house and sat on the ground to demonstrate the making of wigs. They seemed to be

least disturbed by the drainage stench and the dust on the road. They spread out the raw material on the bare road, picked up the hair in parts, and started working on the wigs. I noticed that the raw material had human hair of varied sizes and wondered how this could be made into a wig of at least 12 inches length.

Just then, Masi, 58, the head of the Kattunayaka community at Ennore, emerged from the crowd and seated himself beside the women. He commanded authority and initiated the conversation.



"I am the guru for all these wig-makers here. I have been engaged in wig-making since I was 16-years' old," he said, holding out a bamboo frame.

I was glad to have the guru of wig makers as my first interviewee and asked him about the wig making process.

"We first weave the hair in this bamboo frame. We then attach small parts of hair to get the desired length. I can make a wig (hair extension) of about 12 inches length in about an hour's time and in a day I can make up to 10 wigs. I sell each wig for between 30 and 150 rupees depending on the quality and size," Masi told me. "On an average I earn around Rs. 2,000 a month."

"For how long have you been living here?" I asked.

"We are a nomadic community that settled in Ennore 40 years ago.

We lived here in thatched huts for over eight years while this land was owned by Mr. Ramamurthy Iyer, a Village Muncif (leader). It was then given to us free of cost by Mr. Ramamurthy Iyer. Each of the 44 families who lived here was offered one and a half cent of land to construct a house. Most of us stayed to live here, while a few sold their land to others," he replied.

Mariamma signaled me to come closer to her. I slowly slid away from Masi and asked Mariamma to tell us about her family and the income she earned

from wig-making.

"I am a widow with four children. My oldest daughter is married and one of my sons has completed his tenth standard. The other two sons are studying in the neighbouring government school. I can make up to 12 to 15 wigs a day and travel to Parrys corner and T Nagar to sell these wigs," she said, heaving a sigh.

"We purchase human hair from the local barbers and beauty parlours in the city. We cannot afford to buy good quality human hair that is sold in Tirupati as these are meant for the export market and are sold in tonnes. We therefore buy nylon hair that is sold by a retailer near the temple at a much lower price. This costs Rs. 750 per kilogram, and we can make 15 wigs in this. Each wig is sold for Rs. 60, which means that we earn a profit of Rs. 10 per

nylon wig," she added.

"Does your income suffice to meet your family needs?" I enquired.

"No. I cannot afford to cook twice a day, therefore I cook only dinner. I save a portion of this meal to serve as lunch for us the next day. We eat all kinds of meat, except humans and dogs. We cannot afford to buy lamb or beef, hence hunt for cats, pigs, turtle, squirrel, myna, or sparrow. Cat meat is a delicacy," she said with a smile adding, "I leave home around 9 am to sell the wigs to local customers in the city and return by 6 pm. There are days when I do not make even a single sale. My children and I also engage in rag-picking to earn some money, but that too does not suffice," she said.

The wig-makers who live in this colony were mostly poorly clad. The average family size was seven and there were around 200 children in this colony. All the families held ration cards and all the children studied in the neighbouring government schools.

I asked if the government provided the community with any benefits.

"The government has not bothered about us at all. We only have a ration card. That's all!" Mariamma complained.

When I asked her if she was seeking support from the government or NGOs, her response was immediate: "An institute in Erukencherry is engaged in wig-making on a larger scale and has a good export market. They have specialized machines and offer training to women. If only they can train us, we can earn much more."

Latha intervened and mentioned that she was working on this request already.

As the evening drew closer, we bid adieu to the community. We saw a huge crowd following us until we reached our car. The crowd that had first appeared curious now seemed hopeful of obtaining support.

—Marie Banu



I leave home around 9 am to sell the wigs to local customers in the city and return by 6 pm. There are days when I do not make even a single sale. My children and I also engage in rag-picking to earn some money, but that too does not suffice.

Photos: AK

# On the Yelagiri Hills, tribal women reach for the sky



“However, the biggest challenge before us is marking our territory. Before we started out, most of the business was in the hands of private organisations. Our first task was to adopt a new business plan.”

A self-help group (SHG) of tribal women that has been running business on the Yelagiri Hills for seven years recorded their highest ever profit at the end of 2011. While the group made a sum of Rs. 4.2 lakh, each member received a profit of Rs. 12,000 in addition to their monthly salary.

The women began the group with the help of the Tamil Nadu Development Corporation (TNDC). “Each of us contributed a sum Rs. 10 in the beginning. Once we managed to collect enough funds, we wrote a letter to the Collector asking for his help. That is when the TNDC stepped in with a loan of Rs. 10 lakh,” explained Janaki, Secretary of the group.

The SHG was thus created with 40 women, all of whom belonged to the Hindu Malayal Makkal community,

person has held the post of President, she will not be given the opportunity to run for the post until all the other members have had their turn,” she elaborated.

But the women are faced with different challenges from time to time. “Ever since Jayalalithaa’s government came to power, the support we used to receive from the government has been wavering,” said Janaki. “Several groups have been holding protests against us from time to time, opposing the financial support we receive from the government.”

“However, the biggest challenge before us is marking our territory. Before we started out, most of the business was in the hands of private organizations. Our first task was to adopt a new business plan,” Janaki stated.

“As boating is the main attraction here, we started off by renovating the area around the lake. New tiles were laid down. Simultaneously, the lodge was converted into a store. It was stocked up with items that would appeal to the tourists.”

The influx of tourists has been increasing steadily. “Yelagiri sees about 5,000 tourists during the week. This number doubles during the weekend. The month of May is a very busy time for us. It is the time of the summer festival. Various shows are held on the hills. This includes the fruit show, the flower show and the boat show. In fact, we participate in some of these shows,” Janaki said, showing a wooden shield that her group won at the handicrafts show last year.

The very first award they received was in 2007. It was given to them by the government to mark their successful beginning. The women plan to repeat their success in the new year. “We’ve been talking to the tourism board. We want to add new features to the destination and do whatever it takes to promote it as the perfect weekend getaway,” Janaki signs off.

—Karishma Rajani  
Asian College of Journalism

“Several groups have been holding protests against us from time to time, opposing the financial support we receive from the government.”

which literally translates into ‘tribals of the hills’.

However, the group is still liable to pay Rs. 6.9 lakh to the government and they’ve been working hard at it. Ambika, the treasurer, went on to explain the functioning of the group. “Since we’re in charge of the shop, the toilets, the ticket counter at the entrance and the boats, we follow a pattern of rotation. For example, if you work at the shop for a week, you will have to serve at the ticket counter the week after that.”

The group follows a certain hierarchy. The president is the highest authority followed by the Secretary and Treasurer. “The hierarchy is only applicable at the administration level. When it comes to work, we all put in the same amount of hours,” Ambika said. “We hold elections every year. The process ensures there is no repetition in terms of the post. If a

## Easing pain, bringing home care to the fore



**L**axmi Iyer is 67 years old and has brain metastasis. She needs medical attention—more importantly morphine, which helps keep the intense pain at bay.

Surana is 57, suffering from lymphoma and needs medical dressing once a week along with counseling for the pain she goes through every single day.

Albertina Lawrence is also 57, with advanced breast cancer which has now ulcerated and needs weekly dressing and administering of morphine for the pain.

And then there is Shordap, who is 58 with ovarian cancer needing an oxygenator and a Fowlers Cot. She needs medical attention, but she can barely move out of her home.

These are but a few who need home based care and pain management; thanks to the advanced stages of cancer and therefore terminally ill. The common thing for all of them is—the intense pain they go through, hardly have anyone who can care for them on a daily basis, and are very poor to boot.

What can they do if family and friends give up on them? Life is tough as it is without having to care for someone who is anyway going to die. Sounds callous? But, that is the reality for the terminally ill, where giving care and attention is something most of them simply cannot afford.

This is where palliative care comes in.

Palliative care in India is still in its nascent stages and there are few organisations that have taken up this aspect of looking after people who are terminally ill. Without going into statistics, one can say that the needs far exceed the facilities simply because the numbers of those living normally don't get much attention.

Most of these patients are too sick to even be able to go and visit the hospital and get medical attention, which is primarily to be pain free and be in a state where they can be given a dressing and kept

reasonably clean till the last breath. By all accounts, this is a luxury.



The World Health Organisation defines Palliative Care as an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing problems associated with life threatening illness through prevention and relief of suffering. It integrates the physiological and emotional aspects of patient care and is a support system for both the patient as well as for the family.

The thought of trying to do something for terminally ill people is what gave birth to 'Cancare Foundation'.

Four doctors and three others with a mission to do something in this direction got together and started Cancare Foundation. The purpose was to extend home based care to the terminally ill cancer patients and also support surgeries, radiation and chemotherapy of needy patients from low income groups.

Dr. S G Ramanan, Medical Oncologist and

Managing Trustee, Cancare Foundation, says, "The trauma of cancer can be devastating for the patient and the family and more so to those from the low income groups. While cancer cannot add days to their life, the Cancare Foundation adds life to their days."

That's how Cancare Foundation was set up. Cancare therefore supports cancer surgeries, radiation, chemotherapy, bone marrow transplantation, and palliative care admissions. It also takes care of the nutritional needs of children undergoing chemotherapy, ensures home based care for those dying, and finally initiates education and research.

Eventually, Cancare Foundation will also initiate certificate courses in palliative care training.

"It is only two years since Cancare Foundation came into existence. In that time, it has reached out to many terminally ill patients with the help of a van donated by a well-wisher which has a doctor, a trained nurse and a social worker on call. Regular home visits has been possible with the help of these three who try and visit at least four to five homes in a day. While the steps have been small, they have been persistent and consistent," says Akhila Srinivasan, Trustee, Cancare Foundation.

But, the journey has only begun. The road ahead is long and there is much more to cover. There is much to do and many more miles to cross. Death in the end needs to be peaceful and complete. Cancare Foundation strives to make it possible in the best of its abilities.

—Chitra Mahesh

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## Swami Vivekananda in conversation with his disciples

It was the 19th *Vaishākhā* (April-May) of the year 1303 B.S. Swamiji had agreed to initiate the disciple today. So, early in the morning, he reached the Alambazar Math. Seeing the disciple Swamiji jocosely said, “Well, you are to be ‘sacrificed’ today, are you not?”

After this remark to the disciple, Swamiji with a smile resumed his talk with others about American subjects. And in due relevancy came along such topics also as how one-pointed in devotion one has to be in order to build up a spiritual life, how firm faith and strong devotion to the Guru have to be kept up, how deep reliance has to be placed on the words of the Guru, and how even one’s life has to be laid down for his sake.

**Then putting some questions to the disciple, Swamiji began to test his heart:** “Well, are you ready to do my bidding to your utmost, whatever it be and whenever it may come? If I ask you to plunge into the Ganga or to jump from the roof of a house, meaning it all for your good, could you do even that without any hesitation? Just think of it even now; otherwise don’t rush forward on the spur of the moment to accept me as your Guru.”



And the disciple nodded assent to all questions of the kind.

Swamiji then continued: “The real Guru is he who leads you beyond this *Māyā* of endless birth and death — who graciously destroys all the griefs and maladies of the soul. The disciple of old used to repair to the hermitage of the Guru, fuel in hand; and the Guru, after ascertaining his competence, would teach him the *Vedas* after initiation, fastening round his waist the threefold filament of *Munja*, a kind of grass, as the emblem of his vow to keep his body, mind, and speech in control. With the help of this

girdle, the disciples used to tie up their *Kaupinas*. Later on, the custom of wearing the sacred thread superseded this girdle of *Munja* grass.”

**Disciple:** Would you, then, say, sir, that the use of the holy thread we have adopted is not really a Vedic custom?

**Swamiji:** Nowhere is there mention of thread being so used in the *Vedas*. The modern author of *Smritis*, Raghunandana Bhattacharya, also puts it thus: “At this stage,\* the sacrificial girdle should be put on.” Neither in *Gobhila’s Grihya-Sutras* do we find any mention of the girdle made of thread. In the *Shāstras*, this first Vedic *Samskāra* (purification ceremony) before the Guru has been called the *Upanayana*; but see, to what a sad pass our country has been brought!

Straying away from the true path of the *Shastras*, the country has been overwhelmed with usages and observances originating in particular localities, or popular opinion, or with the womenfolk! That’s why I ask you to proceed along the path of the *Shastras* as in olden times. Have faith within yourselves and thereby bring it back into the country. Plant in your heart the faith of *Nachiketā*. Even go up to the world of

*Yama* like him. Yes, if to know the secrets of the *Atman*, to liberate your soul, to reach the true solution of the mystery of birth and death, you have to go to the very jaws of death and realise the truth thereby, well, go there with an undaunted heart.

It is fear alone that is death. You have to go beyond all fear. So from this day be fearless. Off at once, to lay down your life for your own liberation and for the good of others.

What good is it carrying along a load of bones and flesh! Initiated into the Mantra of extreme self-sacrifice for the sake of God, go, lay down for others this body of flesh and bones like the Muni Dadhichi! Those alone, say the *Shastras*, are the real Gurus, who have studied the *Vedas* and the *Vedānta*, who are knowers of the Brahman, who are able to lead others beyond to fearlessness; when such are at hand, get yourself initiated, “no speculation in such a case”.

Do you know what has become of this principle now? — “like the blind leading the blind”!

—Sourced from the diary of a disciple - Sharatchandra Chakravarty

## Clarity on organizational vision - the guiding light

A Series on ‘Belongingness...nurturing people connect.’

One of the first dimensions that needs to be One of the first dimensions that need to be addressed to build belongingness is to converge all the people in the organization and move them towards one direction. The social entrepreneur needs to gain clarity first and then institutionalize the same to the rest of the people in the team and largely to the organization.

For a social entrepreneur ‘vision’ is something that comes most of the time through an intense experience and a series of thoughts that go along with it. It is highly challenging to transfer the experience, its intensity and the resultant feelings to another set of people who are going to work as a team. The team will have to equally feel, envision, foresee and journey in the path that the social entrepreneur has set out. The speed and depth at which the team will travel is directly related to the alignment between the social entrepreneur and the team in the intensity of feelings and thoughts towards the cause. Higher the alignment, higher the efficiency of the team. This if not done will leave behind a series of human problems leading to questions on belongingness, retention, and sustainability of the team.

The word ‘vision’ has been many a time interpreted with meanings relating to goals, mission, milestones, targets, etc. This only leads to more confusion than clarity. A vision conveys a sense of possibilities and hope; it also inspires and motivates while

also having an air of grounded reality. Further, it serves as a beacon for guiding our decisions and the changes required for continuous growth. Vision according to us is not a destination, but a path. It lends a sense of purpose to existence of the person and/or organization.

*The characteristics of a vision would be:*

- Vision provides meaning to every action of the individual and the organization
- Vision may or may not be attainable. It is also like a horizon that keeps stretching beyond limits and boundaries
- Vision is something that stretches the capacity and utilizes full capability and competencies of the person and the team
- A vision many a time evolves but does not change into divergent paths. It may have branches but they are all aligned and converge into one path
- Vision is larger than self; something that leaves behind a trail that makes a difference to the people around or the world
- Vision may have a competitive edge. But it also transcends competition and leads to evolution
- Vision and purpose become the anchor to sustainability

Many a time for the social entrepreneur once the vision is identified and the seeker is committed to journey in the path, the universe converges itself to support him/

her in continuing their journey and in attainment of their goals. When the social entrepreneur begins the journey the entire path is not visible. But the discussions on the vision have to be initiated along with the team. Once the direction is set and clarity obtained, each one is able to formulate a number of missions within that journey. Every mission will have several goals and every goal is fulfilling a dimension of the mission. There are several plans made to achieve a goal and every plan will have a strategy. This strategy needs to be in line with the vision and purpose. The vision is the guiding light in every major decision and steers the team towards realizing the same.

Many social entrepreneurs articulate well within themselves, but may not find it necessary or may find it difficult to articulate their thoughts with the team. The result will be a team that agrees on the goals, understands the direction but have varied purpose within them that will impact on the decisions taken by them in crisis. Giving sufficient time for the teams to discuss the purpose will help to focus their energy and effort. The team members are like the sun rays doing their best. But, vision is like the magnifying glass that can convert these rays into an extra source of energy, i.e., fire. The vision has the power to utilize all the competencies of the team members and direct it towards a purpose.

*The key actions:*

- To set the vision and articulate it in simple terms which will guide the team on an everyday basis.
- The team as a whole has to work towards lending to the vision where

vision becomes larger than self.

- The efforts should be to spend considerable amount of time to set the foundation right by processes of deep reflection and right questioning which the core team has to do.
- A good amount of time spent on understanding the vision right at the induction time for the members who join the team.
- Every time a critical decision is made, it should be aligned to the vision. All processes and systems enable the journey towards the vision. The vision has to be integrated into every action of the team.

### Reflections:

1. What is the amount of time have I spent with the team articulating the vision, mission and goals?
2. Does pursuing that activity describe a future more attractive than the present for me and my team?
3. Does it challenge and stretch my and the team’s capacities and capability?
4. Will it serve as the framework for enabling decision-making in every context?
5. Does it lend as a sense of purpose to the sustainability of the organization?
6. Are the people following the leader able to understand and envision the selected path?

—Kalpana Sampath, PhD.

“We believe that the cost of health care will reduce by half over the world. The cost of health care at present is not real.”

# Heart

# Matters



**D**r Devi Prasad Shetty is a renowned cardiac surgeon and Philanthropist from Bangalore. After completing his graduate degree in Medicine and post-graduate work in General Surgery from Kasturba Medical College, Mangalore, he trained in cardiac surgery at Guys Hospital in the United Kingdom. He returned to India in 1989 and initially worked at B.M. Birla Hospital in Kolkata. In Calcutta he was the doctor for Mother Theresa.

In, 2001, Dr. Devi Prasad Shetty, founded the multi-specialty hospital chain, Narayana Hrudayalaya, in Bangalore, which is all set to replicate the low-cost, high-volume model of healthcare that he pioneered across India and overseas. This cutting-edge affordable medical care solution is the next big opportunity in the healthcare sector. The Narayana Hrudayalaya Hospitals, currently has 14 hospitals with 6,000 beds in seven States, and is planning to invest nearly Rs 5,000 crores on setting up a chain of 100 low-cost specialty hospitals and at least three more health cities in the country.

A true social entrepreneur, this is what Dr Shetty says about his affordable healthcare model: “We believe that the cost of healthcare will reduce by half over the world. The cost of healthcare at present is not real. An affordable healthcare model is sustainable because it offers volumes. The number of procedures done will go up, significantly driving down the cost. Pharmaceutical companies and medical equipment companies will sell more and doctors will operate more. It is not about choosing niche centres of excellence model or one-stop multi-specialty hospitals. It is not going to be one-size-fits-all.”

“There are buyers for Rolex watches as well as for Titan ones. We are focused on multi-specialty model, but we use other models as well. We have a stand-alone heart hospital; we do dialysis services; run cardiology and cardiac surgery. Our vision is to add 30,000 beds in the next five to seven years in India, Africa and other Asian countries.”

*A chat with Dr. Devi Shetty, Narayana Hrudayalaya was arranged by WIPRO for its employees. Here is the transcript of the chat:*

**Q:** What are the thumb rules for a layman to take care of his heart?

**A:** Diet - less of carbohydrate, more of protein, less oil; Exercise - half an hour's walk, at least five days a week; Avoid lifts and avoid sitting for a longtime; Quit smoking; Control weight; and Control BP - blood pressure and sugar.

**Q:** Is eating non-veg food (fish) good for the heart?

**A:** No

**Q:** It's still a grave shock to hear that some apparently healthy person gets a cardiac arrest. How do we understand it in perspective?

**A:** This is called silent attack; that is why we recommend everyone past the age of 30 to undergo routine health checkups.

**Q:** Are heart diseases hereditary?

**A:** Yes

**Q:** What are the ways in which the heart is stressed? What practices do you suggest to de-stress?

**A:** Change your attitude towards life. Do not look for perfection in everything in life.

**Q:** Is walking better than jogging or is more intensive exercise required to keep a healthy heart?

**A:** Walking is better than jogging, since jogging leads to early fatigue and injury to joints

**Q:** You have done so much for the poor and needy. What has inspired you to do so?

**A:** Mother Theresa, who was my patient.

**Q:** Can people with low blood pressure suffer heart diseases?

**A:** Extremely rare.

**Q:** Does cholesterol accumulate right from an early age (I'm currently only 22) or do you have to worry about it only after you are above 30 years of age?

**A:** Cholesterol accumulates from childhood.

**Q:** How do irregular eating habits affect the heart?

**A:** You tend to eat junk food when the habits are irregular and your body's enzyme release for digestion gets confused.

**Q:** How can I control cholesterol content without using medicines?

**A:** Control diet, walk and eat walnut.

**Q:** Which is the best and worst food for the heart?

**A:** Fruits and vegetables are the best and oil is the worst.

**Q:** Which oil is better - groundnut, sunflower, olive?

**A:** All oils are bad.

**Q:** What is the routine checkup one should go through? Is there any specific test?

**A:** Routine blood test to ensure sugar, cholesterol is okay. Check BP, Treadmill test after an echo.

**Q:** What are the first aid steps to be taken on a heart attack?

**A:** Help the person into a sleeping position, place an aspirin tablet under the tongue with a sorbitrate tablet if available, and rush him to a coronary care unit, since the maximum casualty takes place within the first hour.

**Q:** How do you differentiate between pain caused by a heart attack and that caused due to gastric trouble?

**A:** Extremely difficult without ECG.

**Q:** What is the main cause of a steep increase in heart problems amongst youngsters? I see people of about 30-40 years of age having heart attacks and serious heart problems.

**A:** Increased awareness has increased incidents. Also, sedentary lifestyles, smoking, junk food, lack of exercise in a country where people are genetically three times more vulnerable for heart attacks than Europeans and Americans.

**Q:** Is it possible for a person to have BP outside the normal range of 120/80 and yet be perfectly healthy?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Marriages within close relatives can lead to heart problems for the child. Is it true?

**A:** Yes, co-sanguinity leads to congenital abnormalities and you may NOT have a software engineer as a child

**Q:** Many of us have an irregular daily routine and many a times we have to stay late nights in office. Does this affect our heart? What precautions would you recommend?

**A:** When you are young, nature protects you against all these irregularities. However, as you grow older, respect the biological clock.

**Q:** Will taking anti-hypertensive drugs cause some other complications (short/long term)?

**A:** Yes, most drugs have some side effects. However, modern anti-hypertensive drugs are extremely safe.

**Q:** Will consuming more coffee/tea lead to heart attacks?

**A:** No.

**Q:** Are asthma patients more prone to heart disease?

**A:** No.

**Q:** How would you define junk food?

**A:** Fried food like Kentucky, McDonalds, Samosas, and even Masala Dosas.

**Q:** You mentioned that Indians are three times more vulnerable. What is the reason for this, as Europeans and Americans also eat a lot of junk food?

**A:** Every race is vulnerable to some disease and unfortunately, Indians are vulnerable for the most expensive disease.

**Q:** Does consuming bananas help reduce hypertension?

**A:** No.

**Q:** Can a person help himself during a heart attack (Because we see a lot of forwarded e-mails on this)?

**A:** Yes. Lie down comfortably and put an aspirin tablet of any description under the tongue and ask someone to take you to the nearest coronary care unit without any delay and do not wait for the ambulance since most of the time, the ambulance does not turn up.

—Source: [narayanahrudayalaya.wordpress.com](http://narayanahrudayalaya.wordpress.com)

“The things that do not belong to you, you have no right to enjoy.”

U. Sagayam IAS discusses with Marie Banu social issues that are of concern today

**S**hri U. Sagayam IAS is currently the Managing Director of Co-Optex. He is the first IAS officer in the state to upload details of his assets on the district website, taking fellow officers by pleasant surprise. Due to his actions against corrupt activities, he was transferred 18 times in a span of 20 years.

*In an exclusive interview, U. Sagayam IAS discusses with Marie Banu social issues that are of concern today.*

**How are you able to maintain your character of being an honest person, given the social pressure one faces today? Who has been your inspiration?**

First of all, the credit goes to my mother Tmt. Sawariammal. I basically hail from an agrarian family. My father is a small farmer, and my mother is upright in character. When I was about 10 years old, I went along with some boys to an orchard that was owned by a Chettiar to pick mangoes. When I returned home, my mother did not accept these mangoes and she told me to throw it away. When I was hesitant, she advised me saying: ‘The things that belongs to you, you must enjoy. The things that do not belong to you, you have no right to enjoy.’ This is how she taught me to be honest and upright.

We owned a small piece of land extending to 2 to 3 acres where we cultivated minor millets like ground nuts. Adjoining our land was an acre of uncultivated *poromboke* land. As a small boy, I asked my mother, ‘why not cultivate this land as well?’ She gave me the same answer: ‘whatever belongs to you, you must enjoy.’

My mother has created a great impact in my life. Today, if I am honest and upright despite the several hurdles I have faced—the credit goes to her. I will continue to be so until the last day of my career.

**Your thoughts about elders being abandoned by their children? How effective is the Senior Citizen’s Act, 2007?**

As a Collector, I have received a lot of complaints from senior citizens that they have been neglected by their sons and daughters. I could also observe that the condition of the senior citizens were extremely pathetic.

When I served as the Collector for Namakkal District, I once received a complaint from a 70-year-old man who hailed from a small village near Thiruchengode. He complained that his son had taken away the little property he owned. He mentioned that he was literally on the street as no one cared for him, especially his son. I immediately directed my officials to enquire into the issue. They reported that his son was adamant not to take care of his father. Thereafter, I ordered arrest of the son using the provisions under Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and



Photo: Pradeep kumar: D

Senior Citizens Act, 2007. I can say that I was the first person in our country to use this provision to take action against a son who had neglected his father.

I personally feel that this is not an isolated case. There are a lot of such cases reported across the state and similar situations do prevail in other countries as well. This is not a good sign!

We administrators should be determined to enforce this Act against children who are neglecting their parents. There is a need to educate children about their duty to take care of their parents. Therefore, there should be a blend of both—enforcement and education.

**Do you think that our education system should include value education as part**

**of the curriculum?**

Naturally! Our education system has many flaws. Today, children are made into mark making machines. When I visited schools at Namakkal, there were complaints from children that they were not allowed to play games.

Children have a right to play and this gives them great happiness. Play is not just a physical activity. It involves many things—to be united; to care; and share for others. But, in most of the schools there is no scope for children to play as there are no extra-curricular activities, and the children are made to study all the time.

The moral education that we used to have earlier is now dispensed with. I feel that our schools and colleges should ensure that moral values are taught. The

government should ensure that this is strictly adhered to.

**The weaving community in Tamil Nadu is on the decline. What are the measures that are being taken by the government to ensure their quality of life?**

The government is serious to take care of the welfare of our weavers. Obviously, we are concerned about their pathetic condition. Their earnings are meager and we have decided to enhance it at par with the minimum wages that are paid under the Minimum Wages Act.

We have been also seriously planning to substantially increase the sale of Kanchipuram silk sarees and share a portion of the profit that would be generated additionally with the poor weavers. I am sure this will enable them to improve the quality of their life.

**Which of the social issues are of concern today?**

As an administrator, I have witnessed a large scale of migration of villagers towards urban areas. Today, I would describe the social mobility as a major crisis and problem. The urban areas are not in a position to accommodate the migrants, provide basic amenities, infrastructure, and employment.

Obviously, there is an increase in the rate of crime. Due to the exodus of migration from rural to urban India, I am sure that food security is at stake. It is obvious that the next generation of farmers is not going to engage in agriculture as it is no longer a profitable proposition. The cost of agricultural inputs is expensive and the returns are meager.

I consider this as a major social issue of concern. The government should address this issue taking into consideration the serious implications.

**You are an inspiration for the youth. What is your advice for IAS aspirants?**

I am happy to be an inspiration for the youth. I want them to build a new society and a new nation that is uncorrupted. I want them to be honest and upright as this is what our country requires today.

For IAS aspirants, I would say that it is a very good opportunity to serve our country. One doesn’t hope to make money by choosing a career in the civil service. But, if you are determined to be honest and upright, the scope is enormous to serve our country.

## Editorial

Latha Suresh  
Marie Banu