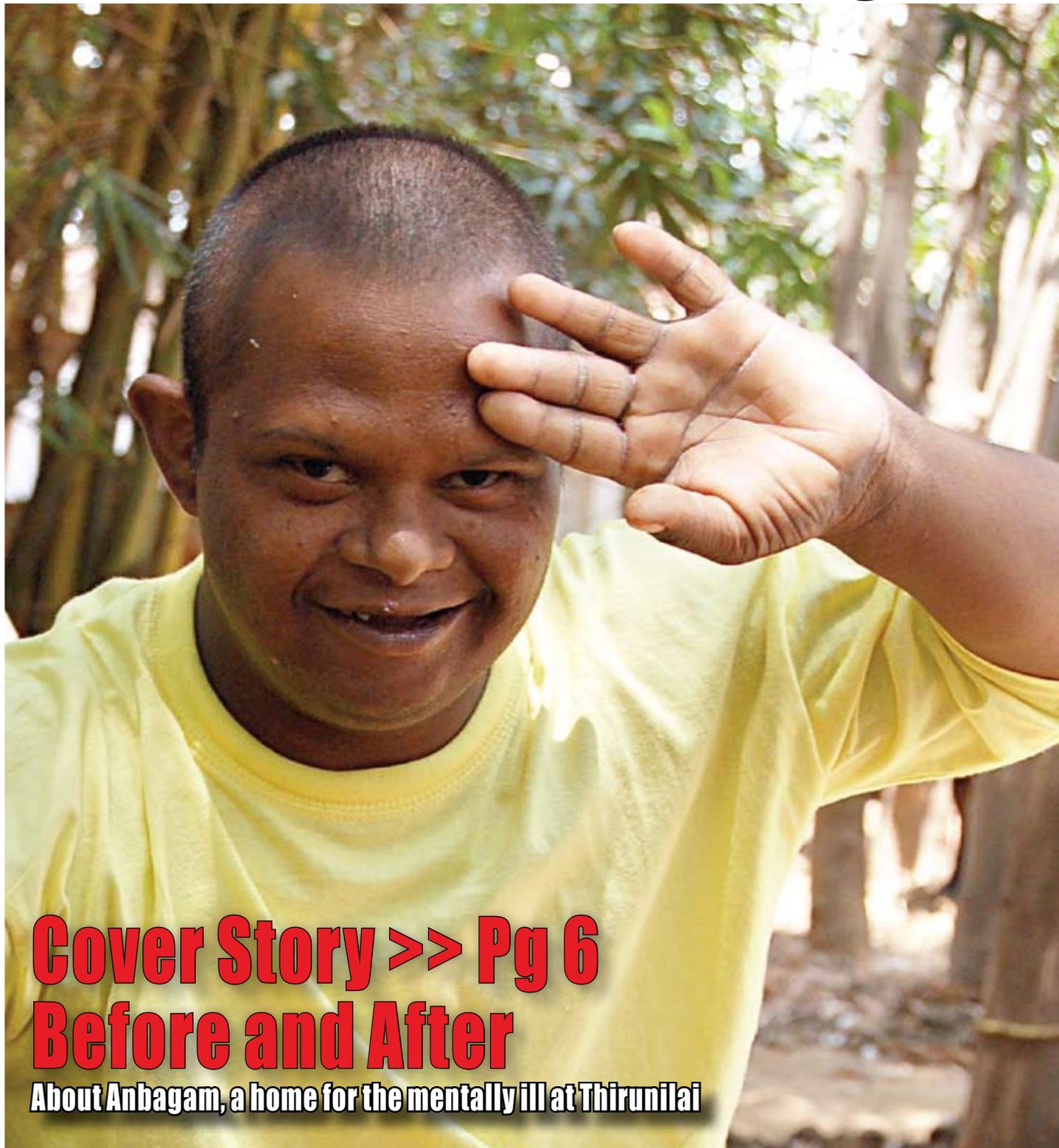


# Conversations

A Chronicle of Social Currents

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## Cover Story >> Pg 6 Before and After

About Anbagam, a home for the mentally ill at Thirunilai

Photo: Marie Banu

### From the Editor

Dear Friend,

The first day of May commemorates International Workers' or Labor Day around the globe.

Contrary to popular belief, May 1 is not entirely dedicated to today's workers and their demands. This day is meant to remember those heroes who struggled, fought and even died, for the

rights of workers that we enjoy today.

This centuries-old holiday reminds citizens to examine the precedents that led to the establishment of the rule of law, and to improve our understanding and appreciation of the important contribution these sources have made to the creation of our free society. Handing them the job directly is not the solution, showing them a path to get a foothold is.

In this issue, *Conversations* has made an attempt to feature manual scavengers in our country and throw light on the backward lives they still lead. Like them, there are thousands of more people in our society who need attention.

It is time for us to give due value to our workforce, because our nation's future and success depend on them.

—Marie Banu

## inside



### Alumni Talk Pg 3

**Earn And Learn: Paving the way for high productivity**

Promoting 'earn while you learn' concept amongst children.



### Profile Pg 9

**Scavenging through an undermined goldmine**

ARUL's efforts in Rehabilitating manual scavengers in villages of Ramanathanpuram district



### Chit Chat Pg 12

**"If I am what I am, it is nothing unique. This is how a normal human being is supposed to be."**

An exclusive interview with Dr. Christodas Gandhi, IAS)



Published by:

Mr. P. N. Subramanian  
on behalf of

Centre for Social Initiative and Management

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

Phone: 044-42805365

Website: www.csim.in

# Texting At The Wheel Took A Young Life

The text message Alexander Heit was typing when police say he lost control of his car and ran off the road.

LOS ANGELES : A U.S. family has published the last, cut-off text message written by their twenty two-year-old son who crashed his car and died while using his cellphone, in the hope of preventing similar tragedies.

Alexander Heit drifted across the road while exchanging texts with a friend, realised suddenly and over-corrected with the steering wheel, sending his car rolling off the road. He was pronounced dead at North Colorado Medical Centre on 3rd April, and his family agreed with the police to issue a photograph of his last text exchange. The text shows two messages from a friend, that says: "Hey man I had to run out for like an hour," to which Heit was replying: "Sounds good my man, seeya soon, ill tw..," before abruptly stopping.

Witnesses said he seemed to have his head down, and began drifting into the oncoming traffic lane when a vehicle slowed and moved over just before Mr. Heit looked up. "As he did, he jerked the steering wheel hard, over correcting the south side of the roadway, rolling and flipping the vehicle," said a statement by police.

His mother Sharon Heit said : "Please, vow to never, NEVER text and drive. In a split second you could ruin your future, injure or kill others, and tear a hole in the heart of everyone who loves you," she added.

—Courtesy Hindu April 13, 2013



**INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE COMMISSIONER OF POLICE, CHENNAI FOR THE MONTHS OF JANUARY TO APRIL 2013**

Loss of lives due to accidents

**421**

No. of accidents reported

**1132**

**NUMBER OF CASES BOOKED FOR TRAFFIC VIOLATION:**

- Signal violation - 47,456
- Wrong side driving - Nil
- Over speeding - 29,216
- Violation of one way rule - 44,682

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**

# Earn And Learn: Paving The Way For High Productivity

**“We have made sure that we work with the resources that we have. That we don’t have to ask anyone for funds to run our trust.”**

A humble, quaint, two-roomed office, situated in the middle of a street littered with houses, shops and even chickens, exudes positivity and hope for the youth of Tindivanam, a town in Villupuram district of Tamil Nadu. Over the recent years, productivity among youth has taken precedence in the country’s affairs, be it in small towns or metropolitan cities.

With much anticipation and a negligible amount of struggle, I reached the office and was welcomed by a composed yet enthusiastic man who, along with 9 trustees, founded Ellorkum Ellam Educational Trust, an organisation that predominantly aims to provide education and work for unemployed youth of the town. The trust also focuses on education and awareness of organic farming and lucrative farming techniques across villages in the state. Targeted at young men and women between the ages of 18-25 years, Ellorkum Ellam (which in English translates to, ‘Everything for everyone’) Educational Trust is the brainchild of Dr. Seenuvasan. An enterprising individual by nature, he founded the trust in 2011 after completing a Social Entrepreneurship Outlook Programme at CSIM in Tindivanam, his hometown. Earlier, he had earned his Bachelors degree in Mathematics and went on to pursue a Masters in Computer Science, after which he successfully completed and received a Doctorate in Sociology. Apart from running the trust, he is also the Head of Department of Computer Science at a local college. Crediting his participation in various college councils such as N.C.C and N.S.S for providing the drive to take up social work, he staunchly believes that occupying oneself in productive work at almost all times is pivotal to the growth and development of one’s personality and self-image. “There exist many distractions and missed opportunities which stand a nagging testimony of under-utilised or even, untapped potential among youngsters. My trust aims to make youth independent and stand on their own two feet

through the method of earning while learning.” Simple yet handy skills like DTP work, candle making, printing banners and servicing computers are taught at the trust on a daily basis. These skills, most popularly, binding are all taught to differently-abled people as well, and the marketing of the finished goods are taken care of by the trust. Over 100 ably skilled students have been produced, and approximately 70 of them have been employed in companies, or have started their own businesses across different cities. “Our educational trust doesn’t intend to be an intermediary between a rich, established person and an economically disadvantaged student. Self-sustenance is the key. Momentarily providing money is not the answer. Teaching skills that will help one earn for a lifetime, is.”

Awareness on organic farming and basic farming methods is also on the agenda. The trust visited villages and co-operative banks, surveyed various accessible schemes with zero interest, and propagated awareness of low cost, high yield variety seeds among farmers. Ellorkum Ellam also worked with NABARD to establish Farmer’s Clubs in eight different villages. As of now, Seenuvasan intends on establishing a teaching institute at Mailam, his native village. 42 skills that will be taught at the institute are awaiting permission for certification at the village’s District Industrial Centre (DIC).

When asked if he scouts for donations, he answers, “We have made sure that we work with the resources that we have. That we don’t have to ask anyone for funds to run our trust. Hopefully, we will not require funding from external sources. However, many have suggested that we must be open to accepting donations and make an active effort to scout for them as we need to leave room for expansion in the future.” Seenuvasan is also dealing with the drawback of students readily assuming that their earning capacity nullifies their need to study, but keeping to the trust’s motto of employment with education, the trust collaborated with distance education institutions such as Prist University, Tamil Nadu Open University, CMT, Alagappa and Vinayaka Mission University to make sure the point of education isn’t lost. Regular or distance, mode doesn’t matter to him. “As long as they don’t abandon their education”, he reiterates.

As for the female demographic, many women students take an active interest in activities like basket-weaving, lovebird-rearing, mat-weaving and making items that beautify a

house. They are given the liberty of fixing their own rate and the products are then sold to residents and fellow students in the locality. A total of 17 women students are aided by the trust, and the number only seems to be growing by the day.

Relationships with family and friends assume dominance at this stage, and for many teenagers, the susceptibility of getting caught in a whirlwind of distractions increases. The likelihood of this throwing them off balance is countered with Seenuvasan’s timely intervention. His constant motivation and



unwavering attention to each student provides an impetus to work on oneself, realistically evaluate one’s priorities and take responsibility for one’s life.

“I place an immense amount of faith on my students. A couple of them have keys to the office and are welcome to work, rest or study here whenever they please. However, I make sure that they do not work during the time of examinations. Combining both work and exams can prove to be disastrous, as a student does justice to neither.” Many youth are recruited from this trust to service computers and provide technical assistance, and are paid an amount for their services. The option of donating a fraction of their earnings to the trust is never mandatory, but open. Not surprisingly, students choose to donate out of their own will. “I have never made it a necessity to donate money to our trust, if anything, I have only emphasised on the importance of donation by teaching a new skill or two to our students.” But recently, students have been donating an amount towards the trust from their earnings. “It is not the monetary returns that give me satisfaction, but their loyalty and trust in me that I see as

true gratitude.” Ultimately, their gratitude and solidarity are the real returns, and as he illustrates, can never be too difficult to earn. A student with a playful personality is hardly a deterrence for Seenuvasan, as he treats his students like his own children and combines a good dose of patience, assertiveness and dedication to drive the importance of education home.

The importance of good old struggle and hard-earned money serve as everyday reminders for these youth, along with bright posters brimming with positive one-liners plastered onto dull blue walls, quite a metaphor in its own right. Seenuvasan gives me a tour of the trust, and we enter a narrow, rectangular room that resembles a computer lab, where the hour-old memory of children huddled over a computer to learn a new programming language still lingers. He proudly explains that all the six CPUs in the computer lab have been built from scratch by his own students with scraps from at least 6-7 different systems. “I don’t believe in the word ‘waste’. Nothing is a waste. I make use of every resource available to prove that ‘waste’ can never exist.”

He then leads me to the entrance of his office where on either side lies a small typewriter at the corner, generously bathed in sunlight streaming through a window netted with cobwebs. “We are soon going to start typing classes, once I order three more typewriters from Panruti. I am currently arranging the money for the purchases and 40 students are expected to attend our class”, he says.

The gleam of zeal and enthusiasm in his eyes is a clear indicator that the road ahead for Ellorkum Ellam trust is that of a milestone filled one, and strong support is foreseeable for Seenuvasan’s passionate endeavour of reforming the youth.

—Divya Karthikeyan



Seenuvasan

**“I make sure that they do not work during the time of examinations. Combining both work and exams can prove to be disastrous, as a student does justice to neither.”**

# Pin down the culprit

Saloni Malhotra, one of the founders of Safecity.in, talks about the website's plans to track reports of harassment and abuse of women across the country

Saloni Malhotra, one of the founders of Safecity.in, talks about the website's plans to track reports of harassment and abuse of women across the country.

Saloni Malhotra (founder of DesiCrew), Surya Bansal (who works for a consultancy firm) and Elsa Marie D'Silva (aviation professional) met in 2012 at a management programme organised by the Swedish Institute. The three women were inspired to take up projects on women empowerment and mentoring and along with Aditya Kapoor, a technology enthusiast and entrepreneur, they started their first project, Safecity.in. The website tracks reports of harassment and abuse of women.

Based on an international model called Harassmap in Egypt, this website was launched on 25th December 2012 in response to the brutal rape and assault that took place in New Delhi. The website encourages citizens to actively be the eyes and ears of society by reporting all incidents of abuse and harassment. Within the first 23 days of operations, the site had 12,000 unique visitors, 42,000 page views, and 113 pins from all over India. It has visitors from 57 countries and volunteers from Brazil and Pakistan who want to replicate this initiative in their countries. It also has volunteers from all parts of the country who help with its skill sets like legal work, website design, marketing materials, social media campaigns on Facebook and Twitter and so on.

*Saloni Malhotra talks to The Smart CEO on how Safecity.in works and what it aims to achieve.*

#### How does Safecity.in work?

Safecity.in is an online platform created to map areas of sexual abuse like comments, physical abuse and rape. One just needs to fill a simple form about the location where the abuse occurred and the category of abuse (it can be filled anonymously as well). This gets plotted on a map and in time will create "hotspots" or unsafe areas of a city.

As the number of pins grow, this converts into a hotspot. The larger the number of pins, the more prominent the hotspot is. This information can be used by individuals to check potential safe and unsafe areas, by the law enforcement agencies to increase security measures in unsafe areas and by local businesses in the hotspots to be more aware and help change the situation.



***“According to the Government of India, there is a rape committed every 20 minutes, and not all rapes are reported.”***

We have seen that many a time, people want to talk about what happened but are too ashamed to do so. Our informal, anonymous reporting system helps overcome this.

Anonymous and informal reporting is critical as the knowledge of the instance is more important than the name of the

person. Also, the reality is that there is shame associated with some of this and anonymity allows the person to at least come forward and report and make others aware. If the person feels the need to make a formal report, their name and identity would be registered as per the procedure of law. We are more interested in tracking the trends that emerge to change the mindset.

#### How do you plan to increase awareness about your website across the country?

Several plans are underway which include partnerships with NGOs, youth organisations, schools, colleges and corporates amongst others. Social media and traditional media will play a very important role as well.

#### Do you plan to convert the reports on your website into actionables?

Safecity.in is an informal reporting system and the reports are valuable in several ways. To begin with, reporting is poor in India and that is the first step that needs to be fixed. According to the Government of India there is a rape

committed every 20 minutes and not all rapes are reported. Can we begin to imagine the statistic on the harassment? But, not all harassment can be reported formally due to several reasons. Hence, we need an informal reporting system to aggregate the data and look at the statistical trends, dig deeper and then begin solving this problem.

We have also seen that many a time people want to talk about what happened but are too ashamed to talk about it. In an informal and anonymous reporting system this can be overcome. It has a therapeutic value as it helps people find a release after what has taken place.

We are working with the police in some states to see how these reports can be made actionable. Also, sometimes it may be more important to work with departments such as transport and the municipal corporation amongst others to improve the situation. For example, if there are more instances due to poor lighting issues in an area then the police can do little.

The purpose of 'Safecity Sundays' ("feet on the ground" campaign where we will meet with like-minded individuals and use data reported on the site to make our cities safer) is to ensure that local chapters are created to solve local problems.

#### Are you planning to increase your offerings in any other way?

We are in the process of introducing new features on the website, building an extensive knowledge section and commencing an offline programme through Safecity Sunday in addition to integrating with the police amongst several other initiatives that make Safecity.in a destination on safety in India.

—Poornima Kavlekar

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

**Editorial**

**Latha Suresh  
Marie Banu**



Rajamanickam



Chezhiyan



Sornalatha



# Sadguru Gnanananda National Fellowship Awards 2013

The annual Sadguru Gnanananda National Fellowship Awards 2013 was organized on 26th April at Raj Bhavan, Chennai. Presenting the awards launched by Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani, Governor K. Rosaiah lauded the efforts of social workers in the remote areas of our country.

The recipients of this year's awards were K. Rajamanickam, Founder, Action for Rural Upliftment and Leadership Foundation, Soorankottai, Ramanathapuram; S. Chezhiyan, Founder, Mercy Charitable Trust, Kadaladi Village, Tiruvannamalai district; and M. Sornalatha, Founder, Adviasi Social Service Educational Trust, Sembakkam, Kancheepuram. Shri. Chandrasekaran, Group Chief Executive, Technology and

Opertions, Cognizant Technology Solutions was the Guest of honor for the event and Swami Nityanandagiri of Tapovanam extended his blessings.

Three publications were released by His Excellency, Dr. K. Rosaiah at the time of the event. They were:

Unsung Beacons – Volume 3, is a collection of inspiring stories of social change agents that have been published in the tabloid, Conversations, during the year 2012. The stories reflect the passion of individuals who have addressed varied social issues. It also features interviews with celebrities who are into social work.

Thannaravu Thondu Niruvanangallukana Satta Villaka Kaiyedu is the first handbook for NGO registration in Tamil. It details the legal formalities required to start a Non-profit organisation in

India. It has been compiled by Mr.C. Sridar, a lawyer and a student of CSIM, Chennai.

The Hindu way of Life authored by Dr. C.K. Gariyali, IAS (Retd.), is an attempt to document and preserve the body of knowledge about traditions, rituals, and practices in simple words for the posterity. Hindu society hitherto rooted in most ancient traditions is now in a state of transition and much of this knowledge is getting eroded. This book is an attempt by the author to document how Hindus have been living for millennium, trying to connect their mundane lives with the divine.

*If you wish to procure a copy of these publications, please contact 044-42805365 or 9884700029 or write to [chennai@csim.in](mailto:chennai@csim.in).*



# Before and After

In 2000, Rafi established Anbagam Rehabilitation Centre at Thirunilai, and housed 30 inmates to start with. Today, this home provides care and shelter for 100 persons (74 men and 26 women) who suffer from mental illness.



Photos: Marie Banu



Rafi



*"I convinced my wife; shifted my family to the first floor; and set up a home for the mentally ill in the ground floor."*



Gemini fly over, an iconic landmark in Chennai City, has been the bridge for several abandoned mentally ill persons to reach Rafi's home.

When Rafi was returning after work one day, he noticed a man in soiled clothes taking food from a trash bin. This happened the next day, and even the day after. "I first thought that he was poor and abandoned. It was only after a few days did I realize that he was also mentally ill. I then took him to Karunai Illam, an orphanage," said Rafi.

Rafi began referring people whom he found on the streets to orphanages and homes for the mentally ill, and was happy to see most of them recover and

reunite with their families. When one of the orphanage coordinators asked him to establish a home of his own, Rafi decided to set forth this idea.

"I started looking around for rented premises, but none were willing to offer me space as I told them that it was meant for the mentally ill. I was living at Periana Mudali Street near Stanley Medical college, and had two guest rooms in the first floor that was vacant. I convinced my wife; shifted my family to the first floor; and set up a home for the mentally ill in the ground floor," said Rafi.

From 5 the number of inmates grew to 20, and it was getting difficult for Rafi and his spouse to manage their

neighbours who complained of noise. He therefore moved his family to Kerala and started to manage the home on his own.

"One of my donors, the Managing Director of The Chennai Silks, visited my home to share a festive gift with the inmates. Sensing my difficulties, he offered to buy land to construct a home. This is how we purchased the 1.69 acre plot at Thirunilai, a Village in Ponneri Taluk in Thiruvallur District in Tamil Nadu," said Rafi.

In 2000, Rafi established Anbagam Rehabilitation Centre at Thirunilai, and housed 30 inmates to start with. Today, this home provides care and shelter for 100 persons (74 men and 26 women)

who suffer from mental illness. Till date, 950 persons have been rescued from street's and highway's, and 750 have been reunited with their families. "We do our best in reuniting the inmates with their families," said Rafi sharing an album with pictures of the inmates before they arrived at Anbagam, and after they have been reunited with their families. Some of the pictures were a striking contrast though.

The trustees of Anbagam hail from seven different states of India and represent all religions in our country. The block for women inmates was inaugurated on April 28th at Anbagam. "We now have room for 24 more women here," said Rafiya, Rafi's daughter who

now manages the women's block.

"Housing 100 inmates in the home does involve a lot of costs. So, how do you manage these expenses," I asked.

"We have several donors who support us. For instance, Mr. Mahadevan of Hot Breads provides us with medicines; and Chennai Silks regularly donates 10,000 rupees a month," explains Rafi.

Walking around the premise, I noticed a few men relaxing in the tiffin shed. Bobby was overwhelmingly excited when he saw me click pictures, but the others seemed least disturbed by my presence.

The cows and bulls were grazing in the front yard, and few men were drawing water from the hand pump. The

kitchen was in action as the lunch time neared, and few inmates, both men and women, were assisting the cook. The store room was stocked with provisions and there was a repetition of *Ram nam* in the background.

The few hours that I spent at Anbagam, felt like being in paradise as I sensed only love and care here.

—Marie Banu

*If you wish to support Anbagam Rehabilitation Centre, please contact Mr. Rafi at 9444009988 or write to [anbaham.org@gmail.com](mailto:anbaham.org@gmail.com) For more information, visit [anbaham.org](http://anbaham.org)*

# Blue-collar recruitment company Babajob to introduce 'Polly': an Instagram for voice

Babajob's pilot, will debut in Karnataka in April, and depending on the quality of response, it may soon find its way to other states.

Sean Blagsvedt, co-founder and CEO of blue-collar job company Babajob is always on the lookout for new ideas, and not afraid to throw out old ones to make way for new. For example, in 2009-10, 75 per cent of new job registrations were mobile driven. Realizing the dangers of being too dependent on big telecom players, Blagsvedt switched strategies to be more aggressive on the web. The result? Registrations on the web went from 2500 to 250,000 by 2011-12. "A great focus on ensuring we had relevant jobs wherever job seekers were searching and a significant web redesign that made searching and applying for jobs much easier," answers Blagsvedt, on being asked, about how he managed the switch.

Now he has a glint in his eye when he talks about Babajob's exciting new initiative that could revolutionize the way interactive voice response (IVR) systems are used in India. Say hello to Polly. A voice based telephone system that lets users record and send messages using a voice filter, which became wildly popular in Pakistan after the second version debuted in May last year. "Its sort of like an 'Instagram' for voice, we should be rolling out a pilot in Karnataka soon," says Blagsvedt, obviously excited about Polly's potential to make Babajob viral. Developed as a game by researchers at Carnegie Mellon University and Pakistan's Lahore University of Management Sciences, Polly was soon used for practical purposes. Researchers scanned Pakistani newspapers blue-collar jobs, recorded them in Urdu, and uploaded them, where they could be browsed as a voice message. In less than a year, job postings have been listened to 372,151 times, and also been forwarded to potential job seekers. Overall, to date, Polly has snapped up 158,055 users, with an

cumulative call volume of 2,394,005 calls.

Babajob's pilot, will debut in Karnataka in April, and depending on the quality of response, it may soon find its way to other states. While Blagsvedt won't comment on it, if Polly is a success, it could bring down the cost of new user acquisition and promoting jobs for Babajob because the heavy lifting is taken care of by users, for free. There are approximately 370 million blue-collar workers in India and most of them possess a mobile phone. Finding a cost effective way to reach them, which isn't high touch and scales fast is a big problem for companies like Babajob. Polly could become the audio Facebook meets LinkedIn for blue-collar jobs. Like Babajob before, new companies that target blue-collar workers are looking to use

expected salary, category and education. The insights he is privy to gives him answers to various questions. Why will somebody work for nearly half the money at a Café Coffee Day rather than be a live-in maid? If you are a maid why does it make sense to look for a job near Bangalore's Diamond District than any other locality? Why do the mothers of security guards prefer them to work at a software park than an apartment complex? These are bamboozling questions, worthy of a column by Steven Levitt and Stephen J Dubner, of Freakonomics fame. These insights he feeds to employers, who use it to tailor make job descriptions, salary and benefits. He uses employer insights to inform candidates on how they can spruce up

listed. "The videos will inform users how best to use Babajob, tips to prepare for the interview, Learning a language is tough, but learning a new skill is tough. Video can help in this," adds Blagsvedt. All these initiatives, he hopes, will make Babajob an authority in the blue-collar recruitment world.

Small epiphanies could lead to big changes.

After all, one small insight was what got Blagsvedt inspired to co-found Babajob in 2007 with his step-father Ira Weise and Microsoft Research colleague Vibhore Goyal. He was a researcher at Microsoft Research's Technology for Emerging Markets arm, when he discovered that there were discrepancies in salaries of maids with similar levels of competence, after stumbling upon research conducted by Duke University economist, Anirudh Krishna. And much like the white-collar world, where who you know contributes to success as much (or even more) than what you know, it had to do with knowing the 'right' people. His insight was that most maids are not socially mobile and have no contacts in upper class households, thereby their chances of earning a higher income was limited to the households that they already worked at. It has been six years since Babajob started as an experimental project. Currently, it processes 150,000 applications a month and has had marquee VCs like Vinod Khosla and Gray Ghost Ventures invest in his company.

For Blagsvedt, he's just scratched the surface, there are more ideas sloshing around in head waiting to be implemented. One of them is a new approach to education, which uses the www.khanacademy.org platform, to get children to learn and take tests. He's not ready to talk about it, at least, not just yet.

—Nelson Moses

*There are approximately 370 million blue-collar workers in India, and most of them possess a mobile phone.*

mobile, like CanvasM's (owned by Tech Mahindra) Saral Rozgar that tied up with Airtel to launch a new service. Blue-collar workers can dial 54141 on their Airtel numbers and register or apply for a job.

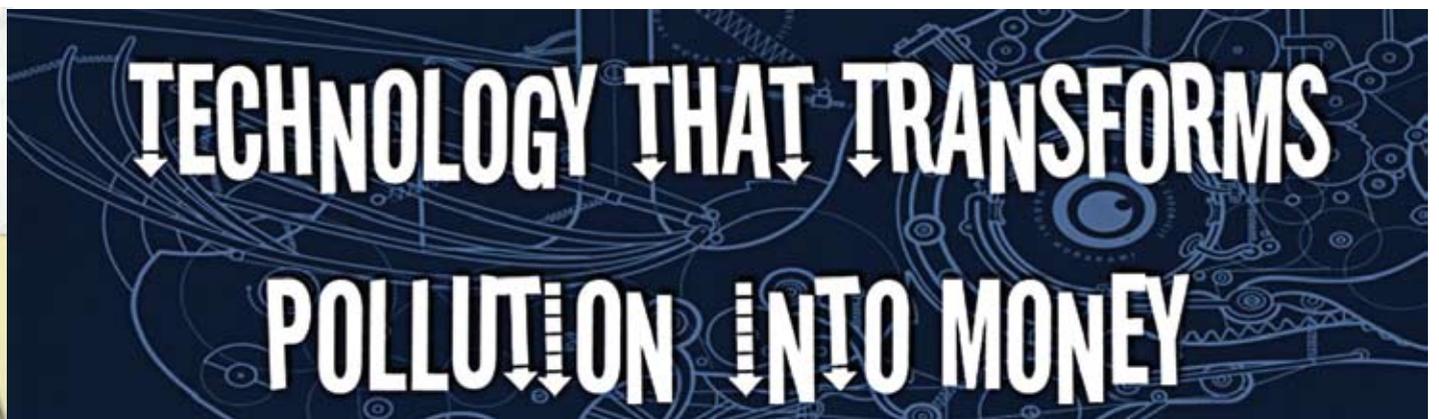
While Blagsvedt is not thinking of new initiatives like Polly, he obsesses over how data can help improve his original vision of democratizing the blue-collar job industry. He's digging deep to understand the needs, behaviors and aspirations of blue-collar workers by studying the data gleaned from the 150,000 applications that Babajob processes every month. Data points that his team tracks of candidates include city, state, language, gender,

their resume and interview skills.

In the short-term he plans to roll out initiatives that ensure employees get fair wages, create visualizations like skill demand maps, boost awareness of their legal rights and health and accident insurance for job seekers. Keeping this in mind and other ways to create awareness and education on resume and interview etiquette Babajob is rolling out a series of educational videos soon. For example, a video could talk about why its important to add multiple details to a candidate's resume. Data suggests that a candidate's chances of being shortlisted for an interview go up from 9 per cent to 55 per cent if the name, number and photo are



Pic courtesy: Billionbulbs



## Scavenging Through An Undermined Goldmine—Arul

The war against caste in the diversity-rich country that is India, is silently annihilating the livelihoods of many hardworking and perseverant men, women and their children. This war makes national news almost everyday, however, the little-known battles that are quietly being fought in small towns and villages go unrecognised. The usual order of the day involves sifting through occurrences that make it to the speeches of deafening political rallies. But Rajamanickam, a man who aims to bridge the chasm of caste division, with innocence that guilts, asks me, “Why doesn’t the media want to cover important issues like these? Aren’t they as important as any other national problem? Just because we belong to a small district, does that mean our struggles are any lesser?” Rajamanickam is referring to the issue of manual scavenging which plagues the Arunthathiyar community, and despite a law being passed in Parliament, still continues.

ARUL, an acronym for Action for Rural Upliftment and Leadership, was founded by Mr. K Rajamanickam in Soorankottai, Ramanathapuram along with 7 trustees in 2008. The organisation focuses on rehabilitating manual scavengers in villages of Ramanathapuram district by providing alternative employment and education for their children. On asking them about their work, a plethora of experiences flood the discussion. Most of these experiences reflect the sheer discrimination faced by and the de-humanisation of the community. “The occupation itself is a huge disrespect to human life. Manual scavengers are reduced to mechanical beings with no integrity by both the higher caste communities and the government. There are rising cases of suicide due to low pay, lack of medical treatment and drinking problems.” Many health problems are involved due of the risk of contracting skin diseases when working in septic tanks. The government hospitals which are supposedly free for all, ask for a fee when they treat manual scavengers. Rajamanickam agrees that lack of mechanisation is what drives the business of manual scavenging, but doesn’t whole-heartedly concur. “Mechanisation is possible, but the amount of money allocated for sanitation by the government is so little, that it doesn’t even suffice for basic sanitation facilities. People of higher communities make sure that the generations of manual scavengers are ‘put in their place’ and never take any other occupation up.” So, is it a legal problem or a money problem? “A caste problem is what it is and we must see it as that. The government is intentionally holding back funding and modern machinery to feed their oppressive mindsets.” Despite the



existing Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993 law which punishes the act of employing manual scavengers with a fine of Rs.2,000, the police fail to enforce the law and no FIRs have been filed against those who employ manual scavengers. The other angle of monetary issues is also instrumental but not the main reason behind the existence of the occupation. “So much is put aside for an upcoming wine shop, but the government doesn’t care about the issue of manual scavenging. In fact, they prefer we are there. To pay them a menial Rs.50-70 for several hours of work benefits them more than having to pay Rs.2,000 of electricity charges for using machines to clean the sewer. In other developed countries, work determines wages; in our country, caste determines wages.” The vortex of selfishness doesn’t seem to end. Rajamanickam further expands on how future generations of these scavengers are gradually trapped in this vortex, leaving them with no other option but to camouflage themselves in this caste-shaming society by taking to their fathers’ professions. “Children of manual scavengers are discouraged from pursuing a good education and their path towards this inhumane occupation is pre-planned. The idea that children from this particular community are only deserving of menial work and meagre pay and not a proper education is damaging to both them and the country’s future.”

So where does ARUL come in?

*“A young boy who has a Bachelors in Chemistry was interested in Sanitation, so we helped him get a diploma and sanitation and is currently trying to get a job as a sanitation inspector.”*

“We’ve observed that children who get a 10th Standard education are least likely to go back to the profession than other children with lower education. So we have put to use a Central Government scheme for economically backward children that provides them scholarships to study in schools. Many headmasters ward us away, but on showing them a copy of the Government Order, they admit the children into their institutions.”

ARUL has helped 500 children study at schools and colleges of their choice. The children also receive encouragement from their own parents to study. But when it comes to doubts and clarifications in their homework or even career path confusion, they cannot turn to their parents for the right guidance. For this reason, ARUL runs a tuition centre where they provide free guidance and encourage the spirit of inquiry. They also provide career counselling and advice for those on the crossroads. Rajamanickam recollects an incident. “A young boy who has a Bachelors in Chemistry was interested in Sanitation, so we helped him get a diploma and sanitation and is currently trying to get a job as a sanitation inspector.” But,

Rajamanickam intends for the boy to get promoted as a district officer to prove the point that even a manual scavenger’s son can make it to the top.

“Generations have been subject to such de-humanisation, but we want to help uplift the current and future generations so this does not continue.” With regard to rehabilitation by employment, ARUL has helped scavengers get promotions to posts of. Some hold jobs as drivers. Women scavengers work as housemaids and typists. Currently 320 people are members of the association and 500 scavengers have been successfully rehabilitated through ARUL. Future plans involve starting a co-operative bank of their own in order to provide hassle-free loans that no scavenger has to bribe his way through. Rajamanickam keeps a triumphant face on and concludes, “We will get through this. With the support and strength of the community, we will eradicate this inhuman practice. Because every life matters, and no one has the right to devalue a fellow human being on any basis.”

—Divya Karthikeyan

## Literal Translation Of Namdev's "Philosophy Of The Divine Name."

**I.** The Name permeates densely the sky and the lowest regions and the entire universe. Who can tell to what depths in the nether regions and to what height in the heavens It extends? The ignorant undergo the eighty-four lakhs of species of births, not knowing the essence of things. Namdev says the Name is immortal. Forms are innumerable, but the Name is all that.

**II.** The Name itself is form; and form itself is Name. There is no distinction between Name and form. God became manifest and assumed Name and form. Hence the Name the Vedas have established. Beware, there is no mantra beyond the Name. Those who say otherwise are ignorant. Namdev says the Name is Keshava Himself. This is known only to the loving devotees of the Lord.

**III.** The all-pervading nature of the Name can only be understood when one recognises his 'I'. When one's own name

is not recognised, it is impossible to get the all-pervading Name. When one knows oneself, then one finds the Name everywhere. To see the Name as different from the Named creates illusion. Namdev says, "Ask the Saints."

**IV.** None can realise the Name by practice of knowledge, meditation or austerity. Surrender yourself first at the feet of the Guru and learn to know that 'I' myself is that Name. After finding the source of that 'I', merge your individuality in that one-ness, which is Self-existent and devoid of all duality. That which pervades beyond *dwaita* and *dwaitatita*, that Name has come into the three worlds. The Name is Para Brahman itself, where there is no action arising out of duality. When Sri Bhagavan had read this, a certain musician came into the hall and began to sing Tyagaraja *Kirtanas* in Telugu. One of them says: "Find the source of the sound which is transcendental (*mooladhara sabda*) by

diving deep like a pearl-diver diving for pearls." Then again another song was: "For a man who has controlled his mind where is the use of *tapasya*? Give up 'I-am-the-body' idea and realise 'I am not; Thou art all'." This song was translated to Mr. G. D. who was then in the hall.

**Mr. G. D. asked:** Is it necessary to control one's breath? What becomes of the man who has not practised breath-control?

**M.:** Breath-control is only an aid for diving deep. One may as well dive down by control of mind. On the mind being controlled, the breath becomes controlled automatically. One need not attempt breathcontrol; mind-control is enough. Breath-control is recommended for the man who cannot control his mind straightaway.

*Naham* - I am not this - corresponds to *rechaka*.

*Koham* - Who am I? (search for the I) - corresponds to *puraka*.

*Soham* - He am I; (The Self alone) - corresponds to *kumbhaka*.

So these are the functions of *pranayama*.

Again the three formulae are: *Na - Aham* (Not - I); *Ka - Aham* (Who - I); and *.Sa - Aham* (He - I). Delete the prefixes and hold on to the common factor in all of them. That is *Aham*- 'I', that is the gist of the whole matter.

Later on Sri Bhagavan referred to the songs and said: Tyagaraja says well. The mind should be controlled. The question arises "What is mind?" He himself answers in the next couplet, saying that it is the "I-am-the-body" idea. The next question is how the control is effected. He answers again, saying "By complete surrender. Realise that I am not and that all is He." The song is fine and compact. He also mentions the other method, namely, control of breath.

—Excerpted from *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*

## Belongingness Dimensions – Sustainability through 'Quality'

**W**hile the Vision and ownership seem to be strong drivers in most social organizations, the main issues that sap the energy of the organization are the orientation towards systems and processes; rewards and recognition; alignment of values; and learning and development. These are issues many a time because of the myths that surround corporate and management. Many of these myths are not questioned in depth with experimentation and exploration. Therefore, they engage the organization in a whirlwind of issues and over a period of time, it becomes a part of the organization culture. While with constrained resources and limited time, the functioning of the organization should be extremely sharp and lean with highest level of quality, it is many times suffers from chaos and sub stranded quality.

For ages now there is usually the confusion of whether a social organization should be seen as business or philanthropy? For long social entrepreneurs have focused on the vision and paid less attention in the initial years to formulate strong systems and processes. Therefore when the need to institutionalize happens it becomes very challenging. By then the work processes become adhoc and change management itself becomes challenging. In the initial stages taking the idea off the ground and finding funding and acceptance becomes key activities. Along with these, the value of quality as a way of life needs to be instilled right from the beginning. The main driver for organizational growth and furtherance of vision lies in 'quality' in every walk of the organization.

From Second World War, the concept of quality has gained ground steadily and in the last decade has knocked the doors of social organizations strongly. The myth that 'quality' is closely connected to



'manufacturing' and works with reduction of defects have been long dispelled. One of the most endearing meanings of quality is: 'Quality is the ongoing process of building and sustaining relationships by assessing, anticipating, and fulfilling stated and implied needs.' (Winder, Richard E. and Judd, Daniel K., 1996 Quality digest 11/01/2001). According to Dr. Garvin [1988] of Harvard Business School, quality can be defined in terms of eight dimensions like performance, features, reliability, conformance, durability, serviceability, aesthetics, and perceived quality. Quality means not just meeting customer's expectations but exceeding it, this is also what belongingness is all about – exceeding expectations.

By these definitions it is clear that when social organizations serve people and exist for the people, by the people and of the people, they need to clearly have set processes that will identify the customer's

expectations; address with clarity their needs; map the intention and action by aligning them and finally exceed their expectations if possible. When this is done automatically the credibility is enhanced leading to customers supporting the cause of the social organization. This undoubtedly establishes that Quality is second nature for the sustainability of the social organization and its noble intention.

Social organizations serve both internal and external customers, mapping their requirements both internally and externally for the movement of the idea to action is the first step. This can be done through well thought out research survey, field study; both qualitative and quantitative that will form the baseline. In order to reach out with passion and conviction many social entrepreneurs sacrifice the baseline study. Therefore after working for a year or two when they need to sustain and approach funding agencies or government the need to tap the impact of the idea arises and without baseline no impact can be shown objectively. This would be a costly mistake and not in the best interest of the noble intent.

Further, the two tools that will help bring clarity of thought and action are

- the enquiry tool 5W1H (What - Where - Why - When - Who and How) and
- the clarity 6 Why test (ask Why - why to that Why - Why to that answer and go on till 6 times 'why' has been asked and answered)

These would enable the people working on the idea to gain clarity and charter the path clearly from the beginning to the possible end. This clarity will enable any change of course easily when the extraneous factors randomly change. This exercise is also essential when the project timelines and resources are stringent and

requires high grade resource utilization.

After chartering the course for engineering the operations, W. Edwards Deming, Joseph M. Juran, and Armand V. Feigenbaum jointly developed the concept of total quality management and gave a simple PDCA - Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle. This is universally applicable. Whether a social entrepreneur is an activist or philanthropist this PDCA cycle comes handy. Each activity that is mapped in the course needs to go through this cycle. It is interesting how many a time lack of resources and funding has been used as crutches to sacrifice time and effort to work on these quality processes and set fool proof systems that will sustain and grow the social idea.

In the current times with technology being the main driver of connectivity to the external world and also speed up the pace of work, investing, learning, using technology is imperative to sustainability of organization and the noble intent. It's time that social organizations resolved the never ending debate on aversion towards the so called corporate words like profitability, business, customer satisfaction, return on investment and so on. If the social organizations have to grow, sustain and become prime drivers in nation building activity, they have no choice but to live Quality.

### Reflections:

1. What extent of focus on systems and processes do I have in my organization?
2. To what extent is Quality a way of life with the members of the organization?
3. To what extent do I do I have clarity on baseline, actions and impact of my project?

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath, PhD.

# Charity begins at home



Standard 8th Students who attended a basic course on computers

Renovated washrooms funded by Trust.

St. Lazarus Middle School, R.A. Puram.

When media entrepreneur Vincent D'Souza launched his brainchild Mylapore Times, in the mid-1990s, not many knew that the micro-local newspaper would soon become one with a difference. Over the next decade-and-a-half, the paper has transformed to one that walks the talk and goes the extra mile in making a difference at the grass-root level. Vincent's approach was simple: as cities expanded, there was an urgent need to introduce several microscopes to explore news stories at the grass-root level — the everyday occurrences in urban pockets and the events that transpired within their many neighborhoods. "What kept us going was a professional outlook," says Vincent, "Any media company, big or small, succeeds or fails based on how well its people respect and understand the area and the people in it. That's when we decided that a newspaper for the neighbourhood was the need of the hour." However, if you thought Vincent's only claim to fame was running a well-ready weekly, think again, for just two years after the paper's launch, Vincent announced the launch of an initiative with whose help he hoped to do his bit for society. This was how the Mylapore Times Charitable Trust came to be.

With rich experience in covering news across beats for The Indian Express and The Week, Vincent's stature as a seasoned reporter was well-known when he began Mylapore Times. In due course, launches of Adyar Times and the Arcot Road Times

**When the Mylapore Times Charitable Trust was inaugurated in 1996, it was an addition to the good work that the Mylapore Times set out to do.**

followed. He continues to edit all three micro-local newspapers today. Over the last decade-and-a-half, the papers have transformed the landscape of the neighbourhoods where they circulate. This, even as Vincent's Midas touch in terms of quality control has played a stellar role in maintaining the high editorial quality that the newspapers have established for themselves. When the Mylapore Times Charitable Trust was inaugurated in 1996, it was an addition to the good work that the Mylapore Times set out to do. "In a sense, it was an extension of the philosophy of our newspaper," says

Vincent, "It is nothing more than a small attempt at doing our bit for society, at making a small difference." The trust began by offering a pro-bono platform to aspiring journalists before it went on to distribute a few scholarships to deserving students. With these small-scale projects up and running, the trust began embarking on what it originally set out to do — make a small but significant difference to society.

"As time went by, we decided that it was important that we direct our focus towards one organisation, and not merely go about distributing scholarships far and wide," says Vincent. That was how the Trust zeroed in on the Lazarus Middle School in the neighbourhood, run by a congregation of Roman Catholic nuns. The Mylapore Times Charitable Trust began by distributing a hundred notebooks to children of the school. Gradually, it went the extra mile to open a computer laboratory on the premises for Class 8 students. "It was important that we take this step," says Vincent, "We realized that opening a computer laboratory for students would do a lot more than merely make these children IT-savvy. Learning to use a computer is today regarded as a step towards becoming confident and industry-ready, especially for a child. It was a step towards making them feel good about themselves."

This summer, the trust has directed its attention towards constructing washrooms at the school. "Needless to say, hygiene is one of the more important aspects of

everyday life that must be paid attention to," says Vincent. The washrooms will be constructed at a cost of Rs 3 lakh. The trust itself functions thanks to the contributions from good Samaritans even as a small portion of the newspapers' revenue goes into its funding. "The entire process is extremely transparent, and we do our best to ensure that it stays that way," says Vincent. Then there are stories of certain contributions that are nothing short of miraculous and others that allude to a manna-from-the-sky scenario — like an email that Vincent got one morning from a gentleman who wanted to make a contribution to the trust. "How does someone wake up one morning and decide that he would make a contribution to our trust," says Vincent, "It is thanks to people like these that we continue the good work that we do. They sometimes request that we don't mention names."

Before the commencement of every academic year, the trust provides scholarships to five students, which goes a long way in enabling them to continue their education till Class 12. "We also undertake small projects like classroom renovations, funding for students who need to buy uniforms," says Vincent, "We provide small meals to students twice a week; we are currently looking at doing that five times a week now. We're not very ambitious. We are a small trust and have decided to focus our attention to doing small things, one good deed at a time. In everything we do, we ensure that we do it to the best of our ability."

# If I am what I am, it is nothing unique. This is how a normal human being is supposed to be.

**Dr. Christodas Gandhi, IAS** tells **Marie Banu** about his passion for the scheduled caste communities.

**D**r. Christodas Gandhi, IAS (Retd.) is a true follower of our Great Leader Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. During his tenure as an Administrator, he did an excellent awakening service in ameliorating the poor scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes, more particularly the entrepreneurial youths and budding youngsters.

He has held several portfolios, including that of Additional Chief Secretary/ Development Commissioner, Planning and Development Department; Collector of Erode District; and Chairman and Managing Director of Tamil Nadu Energy Development Agency.

*In an exclusive interview with Marie Banu, Dr. Christodas Gandhi IAS talks about his passion for the scheduled caste communities.*

**A senior IAS officer, you have been known as a very honest and simple person. Who is your role model?**

My father, Thiru. M. Ramdas (Retd. Superintendent of Police), Vallalar, Valluvar, and my wife Tmt. Qudsia Begum influenced my simplicity, while being majestic. For my father's stature, he could have admitted his children in any big convent. But, three of us studied in Trichy Seva Sangam School, an institution run for orphans. We had fantastic teachers and teaching was under thatched roof in the company of a peer group that consisted of all sections of people. My wife, Qudsia, gave me all practical lessons of Islamic equity. Humility in high stature is what I imbibed from these personalities.

My father taught me how to treat all people equal. He taught us what needed to be taught; not academics, but human values and human rights. My wife taught me how to

treat servants as family members. My intense interaction with schedule caste communities and other deprived communities, and human rights NGOs might have also taught me how to be upright and establish people's rights. I owe my thanks to each one of them.

If I am what I am, it is nothing unique. This is how a normal human being is supposed to be. Abnormalities only need special acculturation.

**Can you please share a memorable incident during your tenure as Collector of Erode District with our readers?**

During my tenure as Collector of Erode District, there was an issue related to land allocation for construction of 60 group houses for the scheduled caste families in Chennimalai. When I visited the selected site, I found the land to be low-lying and situated near a lake, whereas there was 10 acres of *poromboake* land available in an elevated area in the adjoining location. I realized that the local caste forces did not want the scheduled caste community members to be allocated a place that is of higher worth.

I insisted that the elevated land be allocated for construction and returned to office.

The very next day, all the 60 beneficiaries visited my office

and requested me to allow them construct their homes in the low-lying land. But, I stood firm in my decision, and told the beneficiaries to go in confidence and construct the homes in the allocated piece of land.

Now, they have constructed their homes and are living better lives here.

**Being a socially conscious person, what are the issues that you are concerned of?**

I am concerned about the schedule caste communities. I feel that the only social problem that hinders growth, creates discriminating attitude in the community,

and leads to violence is—the discrimination shown against schedule castes. The others are only matters of differences, like for instance, between a man and a woman; disabled and normal; and elderly and young - for which there are sympathetic takers.

If our country learns to provision equity to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, then we will know how to deal with other social problems. Else, we will only be indulging in slurry of table-dressing for any other social issues.

Constitutionally, discrimination has been abolished. But, bureaucracy needs to do more proactive deeds and enforce constitutional mandates.

Even officers belonging to the scheduled caste are afraid of taking up this issue as they feel weak, and fear of being victimized.

This is a challenging subject for any bureaucrat.

**The Tribal communities have been living a hard way of life over the years. When do**

**you see their lives progressing?**

Since 1996, I have been visiting remote tribal places in Tamil Nadu that were far away from civilization. They lived a self-contained and dignified life; a life of their own. What they lost was education, which was one of the reasons for them to be pushed behind.

Tribals are peace loving and confident people. They are the most hospitable people and not hostile to anyone. The introduction of Forest Act and other forest regulations have totally alienated tribals from their homesteads and their free lifestyle. This forced bondage over them for over a century without caring for their livelihood had caused severe problems.

70,000 to 1 lakh acres of land need to be restored to tribals under the Scheduled Tribes Forest Rights Act 2006.

However, I am happy to find tremendous change and prosperity coming into their life in the last ten years or so. What they need more is self-determination and autonomy of growth. I am confident that tribals in Tamil Nadu will become the richest in the neighbourhoods in the near future. Irulars have a special place in my heart.

