

Conversations Today

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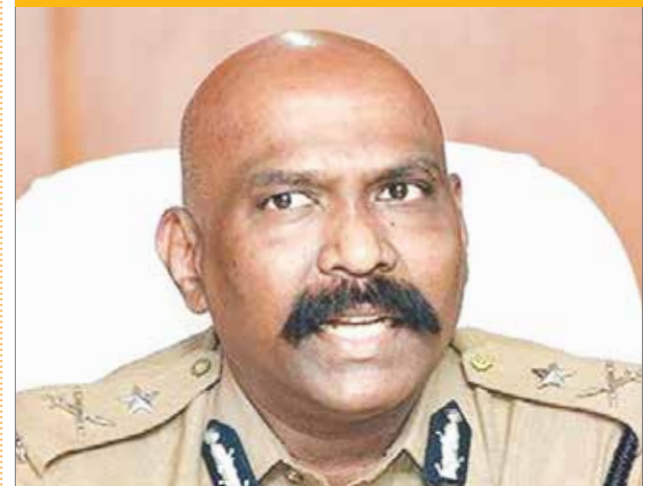


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FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

Have you ever noticed how you feel when you give? The Joy of giving just cannot be put into any words but only felt. It is a greater feeling than what you feel while receiving a gift.

Giving could be either in the form of money or time. Some people find great pleasures in caring for others. A simple gesture of kindness matters most for those who need it.

The pandemic has made us realise how fragile life really is and how appreciative we are for every day we have. It's important to remember that we'll eventually get through these times and that when we do, we'll be much stronger for it.

With the pandemic now fully into a second wave, the need for 'giving' is greater than ever to support others. Charitable organizations need more than money to meet the needs of this moment.

It is refreshing to see many initiatives being rolled out and many fundraising events conducted this year. One such is the Battle of the Buffet event which is planned on 12th and 13th of December 2020. This annual fundraiser has brought several grassroot NGOs to the limelight. Since 2009, it has raised over 30 crores of rupees benefitting hundreds of NGOs. This year, the event is being conducted virtually, and has raised over 1.5 crore rupees benefitting 55 NGOs.

We salute each donor for supporting the cause of these organisations and putting people's needs first.

While giving does not always have to be a gift, offering a kind word or a friendly smile goes a long way.

So, let's give!

Marie Banu

EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu

ATTITUDE OF GIVING

Giving is not only material or money. Giving is also your Time, Talent, Treasure, and Trust. These four 'T's are abundantly available with us any time. You should be willing to give your Time – which is in your control – systematically to a cause; whether for an individual, cause, community, or campaign. When you give Time, you will not be consuming the energy of others; you will be contributing energy.

When you give your Time with care and share, the value is more for the receiver. You will also see the results of the society awakening and will feel good to see the substantial gains to all the people around. So, there is no shortage for giving, or rather, no results are short for giving.

When I say, give 'little of your little', I essentially mean material and money. You need not have to be a rich man to give; instead you should have the mind and attitude to give. You have to give 1 out of the 10 rupees you have in your pocket. It might be small, but the power of giving makes it big. This is because people will like the concept and there will be a big bandwagon behind you.

Giving is an attitude and not a resource. So, I always found that it is always possible to give one thing at a time or certain things at a time, all the time.

Age is not an important factor for giving. The donor can also be a child. I would like to share a story with you. At Shiva Shakthi Kakkum Karangal, we had a couple who used to bring their daughter to play with the inmates here whenever they brought food. They did this repeatedly and this created an impact on the girl. The parents at one point in time found their daughter more interested in social work, and were worried that her studies may suffer. They therefore told their daughter that they will restrict the visits to the Home once in three months. This incident upset the girl. But, she did not deter. She saved her pocket money that her parents gave in a hundi and emptied it at the Home when she visited. By doing this, she exhibited what was possible within her limits and displayed her qualities of giving. This proves that when you inculcate giving as a habit in childhood, it remains. Nothing can be taught. It should come from within!

This is the philosophy of Dal, Oil, and Sugar (DOS) programme coordinated by Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani Trust that encourages voluntary giving of materials that are required by charitable institutions to keep the kitchen full of nutrients. Although the contribution may be small, it is substantial. It is similar to the concept launched by Kanchi Paramacharya which is called Pidi Arisi Thittam, where housewives while cooking food for the family set aside a fistful of rice in another vessel. This rice is donated once in a month to a poor person. This act of charity becomes a repetitive behaviour and ingrains in the mind of the father, mother, children, relatives, and visitors.

The family is a place where character is built, because the child see their parents practicing giving.

There is no age for giving. Even at a time when you are close to one foot in the grave, you can write off all your wealth for a cause.

The children, who otherwise fear of losing their share of the property, should be trained in a family where giving is practiced so that they will never object to bequeaths or legacies. Such children will encourage their parents to give. Thus, the seed for giving while young should come from the family.

If one does not have money, he can give his Time and Talent. For example, in DOS programme, we give material and volunteers contribute their time



to collect these materials and distribute them to charitable institutions.

Charitable organisations should involve their neighbourhood first. But, in reality, most of them shy away from their neighbours and go to distant pastures to contribute. This takes a long time, because 'seeing is believing'. For example, Shiva Shakti Kaakum Karangal, a home for the mentally challenged children in Chennai, has the neighbourhood support. They involve them in the day to day activities and the children create a bondage with them.

Charities think that the neighbourhood would be critical and therefore avoid interacting with them. It might be so in the initial stages, but over time they realize the important role you play in the community and would want to partake in your activities.

Most of the philanthropists have the money, but do not have the time to listen, feel, and experience. Such philanthropists do not sustain. Time is essential for all philanthropists; else it would be one-off and impulsive.

There should be a healthy mix of philanthropists – both young and old. I plan to launch a Bequeather's Club, where members would leave behind part of their wealth for community causes. The club would be managed entirely by bequeathers' themselves. People who are mentally inclined and also have the support of their family will give 5 to 10 percent of their wealth for a good cause. This initiative would be easy to translate charity into action plans.

Attitude of giving

There is a constant struggle between the heart and mind. This starts when the life is created and ends when life is ended. That is the journey! The heart says: "give unconditional love and compassion" while the mind says: "what is in it for me?" This is the constant struggle and where does it belong on a zero to hundred scale? It depends on what influences the mind, either internal or external.

If parents encourage giving, then their children will give. Thus, the environment which you create in the society will encourage giving. Heart more than mind is a primary social work factor. How many people will be able to generate this attitude? It can be vaguely compared as you are the society's face in the mirror.

P.N. Devarajan

CARE AND WELL-BEING

Health is a state of physical, psychological and social well-being. The evolution of health care in a developing country like India clearly underscores all the intimidating factors that define health as a social outcome. This is undeniable in the case of tertiary diseases like Cancer and HIV/AIDS. “I started my work when there was little attention given to children affected by HIV infected parents or family members. The disease completely shattered families’ socio-economic support systems. I genuinely felt the need to protect next generation from the social consequences of this dangerous disease,” says Mr G Senthil Kumar, Founder of CHILD Trust in Chennai.

Senthil graduated in Rural Development Science and spent a lot of time with farmers while engaging in part-time jobs. Interested in serving them, he made an earnest effort in understanding their lives and cycles of farm production. Wanting to do more, he pursued his Masters in Social Work. Soon after, he came to Chennai to find a job, but an advertisement from CSIM in a local daily changed his life for the better. “I had not even imagined social entrepreneurship then and I was intrigued. CSIM opened a new world of opportunities for me by making me realise the challenges and changing roles of a social worker,” he recalls.

“I came from a completely different background yet learned to be enterprising. The faculty at CSIM make sure that you begin to see the social value in everything you do. Now when I look back at what I do, I see it as a reflection of what I learnt at CSIM,” says Senthil.

His experience in tele-counselling for HIV positive patients (and their families) and association with an NGO working for street children exposed him to the social aspects of health. “I personally saw how social taboos easily eliminated the needy from the social system. I also saw how stigma worked at a family level and affected every prospect of their family members. Here, stigma is not only about the disease but also about the way it spreads. Being HIV positive casts a heavy weight on their identities and all that they were or could become was over shadowed by this new identity of being infected or affected persons. Let us not even delve into gender discrimination yet. I often wonder if we, as a society, have got used to leaving out and ignoring the needy,” shares Senthil.

Completely aware of the transformation in medical treatment

available for the disease, he was disheartened to see children (infected and affected) giving up their aspirations. He feels that lack of awareness and misinformation change the very course of their lives. “They suddenly lose their right to a normal childhood only because their parent or family member carried the disease,” he laments.

Senthil founded the CHILD Trust to protect the rights of these children and provide for all their fundamental needs and education. CHILD’s home for HIV affected children was established in 2005 in a rented house with only three children. As resources grew and more support came in, Senthil and team gradually built their own space. Today, the Home can accommodate over thirty boys and ensures their well-being.

The residential centre caters to every need – basic amenities, health, education, extra-curricular activities, sports, evening classes, computer classes and life skills education. Senthil wants to make sure that these children



donors and girl children on a one-to-one basis. Each donor gets to support the specific needs of one girl child identified by CHILD. A baseline survey in 2015 estimated around 2000 girls in Thiruvallur district were either infected by HIV or affected or completely abandoned due to the disease.

With donor support, CHILD is slowly increasing the number of girls under its care. Currently 120 girls are supported under this project. “The donors know which girl child they are supporting, hence their contribution also becomes specific. All bills like school fee and medical expenses are paid through cheques and CHILD’s transparent system of accounting to donors make them take special interest in every child’s specific needs. We facilitate, and we do that efficiently,” adds Senthil.

Shanmuga Priya. T

get as much voice in their choices as would happen if they lived with their families. “More than 20 boys have passed out and are working in big companies. Their achievement and independence inspires us to continue,” he says. After almost 10 years, CHILD decided to focus on girl children as well. CLAPS project was initiated in 2016 to provide computer classes for children studying in government and government aided schools. Benefitting more than 900 children in the secondary level, this project has helped CHILD widen its base to reach out to more children in need.

ISAG – ‘I Support A Girl’ project was initiated in 2015 to bring together

COVID-19 AFFECT ON POVERTY

Poverty can be defined as a state of in which an individual or community is deprived of basic necessities essential for minimal living standard. Poverty may look simple, but is a complex subject, mainly due to its numerous dependent variables. In general, poverty is seen as a relative measure using standard poverty line set by World Bank, different countries see their percentage of population below set poverty line and decided about their economic wellbeing. All development programs try to design and implement programs/projects to pull communities above specific poverty line. These poverty lines are finalised on the basis of average cost of essential resources required by an individual (adult), it can also be represented in terms of income per day by an individual or household. The international poverty line, currently set at \$1.90 a day (Rs. 150 per day), is the universal standard for measuring global poverty line. This line helps measure the number of individuals living in extreme poverty and helps compare poverty levels among countries, larger the population percentage below this line indicates higher inequality and non-inclusive development of country.

Records show that during last twenty five years, number of people living below poverty line has come down by substantial number, but rising inequality, global debt, non-inclusive growth and now this pandemic made a visible dent to many achievements boasted by international development community. The fact that development agencies, governments and communities were not ready for pandemic or any other similar event is now well accepted. Only between 2015 and 2017, number of people living below poverty line has been reduced from 741 million to 689 million. Although number looks fine, but rate of poverty reduction kept on decreasing during past few years. All these numbers together indicate that achieving SDG goal of bring poverty below 3%

by 2030 is already at risk, even before the start of pandemic. New estimates from PSPR2020 show that pandemic may add 88 to 115 million individuals below US\$ 1.90-a-day mark.

Other poverty lines added by WB in 2018 at US\$3.20 (for lower middle income economies) and US\$5.50 (for upper middle income economies) also give greater insights in assessing resilience level of development efforts in handling Covid-19 or other similar condition. Developing economies have reported loss of jobs in urban centres and increase in number of urban poor; affecting the overall inequality and hence hampering inclusive growth efforts.

Status of Global Poverty During COVID-19 Pandemic

Poverty is multi-dimensional and need a sustainable and inclusive approach to handle the situation in developing economies, especially in Africa and South Asia where development indexes are low in comparison to global averages. During pandemic countries have observed sudden operational stagnation of development projects related to health, education, infrastructure, finance, trade and so on; bring development outcomes back to where it started and in worse cases even below the point of reference. Middle East and North Africa have also seen increase in extreme poverty rate, reasons being conflicts in some countries. Development policies and recommendations rely on quality of data being collected, in past few years large resources have been provisioned by international development agencies and governments to bring quality data for better analysis. The pandemic left little room for conducting field survey and measure real-time impact; leaving development practitioners, government think tanks and development agencies blind on quality of data. Poor data quality leads to less efficient policies and hence agencies remain



clueless on how to handle the current and post pandemic situations.

Way Forward

Governments around the world have taken best possible measures to contain effects of pandemic, although in most of the cases those remained insufficient. Countries with best health service infrastructure and the ones with tattered primary health facility (mostly dependent upon donations and kind giving) were treated at par with this crisis. We have seen largest medical work force struggling to attend Corona cases and most expensive research labs relentlessly working to find vaccine for past 9 months.

Covid-19 made us realised that positive returns of planned development efforts cannot withhold similar global catastrophe. Climate change is next big issue, capable enough to ingest positive outcomes of MDGs and SDGs till date. Development agencies and governments around the world need to understand and literally mean true sense of Growth and Shared Prosperity. Bringing large population data sets on real time analytical platform can be one of the potential solutions, as it entails high probability of better data collection and more effective crisis management. This also holds true for better design of public policies.

At the end, we must admit that better solutions can be designed only when we define our problems strategically.

Dr. Agyeya Trippathi



Centre for Social Initiative and Management

Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) is a unit of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani (MSDS). It is a learning centre that promotes the concept of social entrepreneurship.

CSIM offers training and consultancy to social enterprises – for-profits and non-profits to facilitate them to apply successful business practices and yet retain their social mission. It also offers training and hand holding support to prospective social entrepreneurs and enable them to launch their social initiatives. www.csim.in

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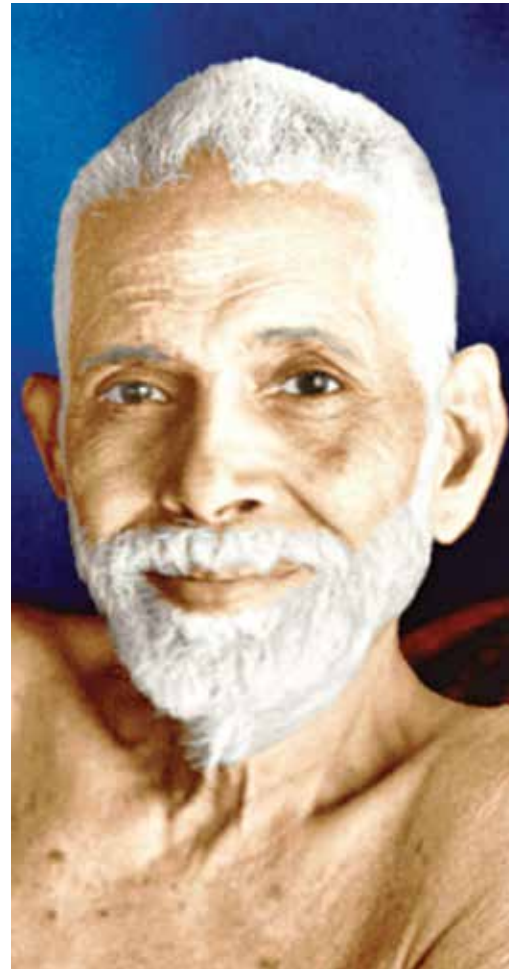
Conversations with Shri Ramana Maharishi

It is enough that one surrenders oneself. Surrender is to give oneself up to the original cause of one's being. Do not delude yourself by imagining such source to be some God outside you. One's source is within yourself. Give yourself up to it. That means that you should seek the source and merge in it. Because you imagine yourself to be out of it, you raise the question "Where is the source?" Some contend that the sugar cannot taste its own sweetness and that a taster must taste and enjoy it. Similarly, an individual cannot be the Supreme and enjoy the Bliss of that state; therefore the individuality must be maintained on the one hand and God-head on the other so that enjoyment may result! Is God insentient like sugar? How can one surrender oneself and yet retain one's individuality for supreme enjoyment? Furthermore they say also that the soul, reaching the divine region and remaining there, serves the Supreme Being. Can the sound of the word "service" deceive the Lord? Does He not know? Is He waiting for these people's service? Would not He - the Pure Consciousness - ask in turn: "Who are you apart from Me that presume to serve Me?"

Still more, they assume that the individual soul becomes pure by being divested of the ego and fit for being the body of the Lord. Thus the Lord is the Spirit and the purified souls constitute

His body and limbs! Can there be a soul for the souls? How many souls are there? The answer must be, "There are many individual souls and One Supreme Soul." What is soul in that case? It cannot be the body, etc. What remains over after all these are eliminated must be said to be the soul. Thus even after realising the soul as that which cannot be discarded, the Supreme Soul must be known to exist. In that case, how was the soul realised to be the ultimate reality after discarding all that was alien to it? Should this be right, the soul which was described as that inalienable reality is not the true soul. All such confusion is due to the word 'soul' (atma). The same word atma is used to signify the body, the senses, the mind, the vital principle, the individual soul and the Supreme Being. This wide application of the word has given rise to the idea that the individual soul (jivatma), goes to constitute the body of the Supreme (Paramatma). "I, O Arjuna! am the Self, seated in the heart of all beings; ..." (Bhagavad Gita, X-20).

The stanza shows that the Lord is the Atma (Self) of all beings. Does it say, "the Self of the selves"? If, on the other hand, you merge in the Self there will be no individuality left. You will become the Source itself. In that case what is surrender? Who is to surrender what and to whom? This



constitutes devotion, wisdom, and investigation.

Among the Vaishnavites too, Saint Nammalvar says, "I was in a maze, sticking to 'I' and 'mine'; I wandered without knowing my Self. On realising my Self I understand that I myself am You and that 'mine' (i.e., my possessions) is only You."

Thus - you see - Devotion is nothing more than knowing oneself. The school of Qualified Monism also admits it. Still, adhering to their traditional doctrine, they persist in affirming that the individuals are part of the Supreme - his limbs as it were. Their traditional doctrine says also that the individual soul should be made pure and then surrendered to the Supreme; then the ego is lost and one goes to the regions of Vishnu after one's death; then finally there is the enjoyment of the Supreme (or the Infinite)!

To say that one is apart from the Primal Source is itself a pretension; to add that one divested of the ego becomes pure and yet retains individuality only to enjoy or serve the Supreme, is a deceitful stratagem. What duplicity is this - first to appropriate what is really His, and then pretend to experience or serve Him! Is not all this already known to Him?

Source: Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi

Faith



Once a man was about to cross the sea. A saint wrote 'Have Faith' on a leaf, tied it to a corner of the man's linen which he wore on his shoulder and told him: "Don't be afraid. Have faith and walk on the water. But the moment you lose faith, you will drown."

The man was walking easily on the water. Suddenly he had an intense desire to see what was tied in his linen. He opened it and found only a leaf with the words 'Have Faith.'

"What is this?" he thought. "Just the words 'Have Faith'?" And as soon as doubt crept into his mind, he sank into the depths of the sea.

 Explicit Learning

- Faith once lost is lost forever.
- Our faith in what we do gives us strength.
- Doubt drowns us.

 Introspective Learning

- What makes me lose faith?
- How do I respond when someone places faith in me?
- What is the nature of 'Faith'?

THE RIGHT TO PLAY



Over the years, we have been acquainted by several rights that were not enshrined as fundamental rights in the Indian constitution, but soon became part and parcel of everyday life. The Right to Information (RTI) is one of them; the Right to Education (RTE) soon joined that list. However, when SK Thanigai Velan founded Victory Sports Foundation in 2007, his idea was simple: the Right to Play should also be top priority for the children of the country. There was just one problem that continues to make sporadic appearances today: affordability.

"Affordability is one of the major impediments to a child's right to play. Many talented and aspiring wards never get a chance to prove their ability because many sports have become the prerogative of the affluent," says Thanigai Velan, "Sports as a culture should reach all deserving and capable aspirants in India."

From unavailability of open spaces to general physical upkeep and socio-economic parameters within the country, there were many other factors contributing towards poor progress of sports among the children and youth in India. "In our city, most of the public grounds are utilized for dumping garbage, vehicle maintenance, metro-rail projects and parking lots," says Thanigai Velan, "Children, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds like those from slums, for

instance, are unable to come out and play."

Then, there's the age old grouse with Indian education — that the school system in India is obsessed with rote learning and traditional curriculum, with no focus on sport. "Most Government schools focus only on academic progress," Thanigai Velan adds, "They under-utilize playgrounds available to them. Schools do not even spend a thousand rupees per month towards sport and recreation." He also points out that even if corporation playgrounds exist, they suffer from lack of maintenance, and are overcrowded with adults intruding on spaces meant for children to play. "Children wanting to play or learn other sports do not even get access to these facilities," Thanigai Velan says.

Then, there's the other extreme — that of government-owned sports infrastructure being available only to professional sportspersons representing individual districts or states, and not members of the general public. "These facilities do not encourage normal people to make use of them, and are partial to only national-level players, in some cases, by letting them make use of them."

It was this long list of grouses with the system, which caused Thanigai Velan to start Victory Sports Foundation, which believes in providing

opportunities. "Our vision is simple," Thanigai Velan says, "We create space for sports in slums, village schools and communities, we employ certified coaches to train children in these communities and government schools free of charge, we maintain grounds and provide sports equipment, we work with various government and social bodies to improve the existing situation."

However, this doesn't end here. Victory Sports Foundation also identifies deserving government schools and communities from the point of view of sports enablement, provides coaches to these institutions on a regular basis, monitors day-to-day activity through qualified expert teams, carries out a period assessment of participating athletes, creates many playing opportunities for these children free of charge, engages these children in various community activities and social schemes to inculcate a sense of "social consciousness", and finally grooms them to become disciplined, honest and responsible citizens through regular and structured life-skill sessions using professional volunteers.

"Our goals include reaching health and education to as many children as possible, especially those deprived of it, creating space for encouraging gender equality, creating conscious and engaging in environmentally relevant projects using its members,

extending sports and social training to generate livelihood," says Thanigai Velan.

Victory Sports Foundation is known for its holistic approach to social wellbeing. "Sports is a great vehicle to drive, in order to embark on this journey," he adds. Some of the organization's major projects are Play For Health, Sports For All, Play for India, and Sports 4 Girls. The organization presently focuses on football and athletic, but hopes to foray into boxing and other sports. Its operations are spread over five districts: Chennai, Thiruvallur, Thiruvanamalai, Thirupathur and Krishnagiri.

Thanigai Velan firmly believes encouraging sport is a great employment-driver too. "Most of our coaches have been our trainees. They are now qualified and certified," he says, "We have been a platform for many of our alumni to clear disaggrees such as B PED and take on careers in physical training at schools we are associated with, or even schools of their own choosing."

Many of Victory Sports Foundation's trainees find employment in premier sports teams across the country, with some members having participated and won national and international-level competitions, and going on to secure employment through sports quotas at government-owned enterprises. "We also support our members through scholarships, in order to make their college education happen, thereby leading them on the path of other career opportunities," says Thanigai Velan.

There's no doubt that over the last decade and a half, Victory Sports Foundation has taken a giant leap towards building a healthier world for children and youth, thanks to its almost obsessive focus on sports and building infrastructure surrounding the same. By way of this focus and goal, the organization has also provided employment opportunities for many a youth, even as it has helped win laurels through sporting success.

Should this dream and vision continue, there's every indication that a new India can and will be born, where every child grows up knowing they have the right to play, and where sports can and will become an integral part of school curriculum.



Sports as a culture should reach all deserving and capable aspirants in India

THE HEART AT PLAY TAKES PLAY TO HEART

Children with intellectual disabilities in Manila move physical and social barriers through dance

Instructions come fast and furious over blaring music. “Raise your arms. Stretch them to your left and right.” “Step forward.” “Don’t forget to smile.”

Patricia Rivera is leading some 30 students in dance movement therapy (DMT) classes with The Heart at Play Foundation (THP). The free, weekly two-hour sessions in Manila, Philippines, are for children born with intellectual disabilities from marginalised families. The participants don’t break a sweat; an intense look of concentration on their faces. They move to the thumping beat, holding onto a piece of rope decorated with brightly coloured flags. Each child is flanked by a volunteer or caregiver, who is without a disability.

Patricia started teaching the classes in 2011, after being inspired by her mother Ana Rivera, a dance specialist, who recognised the therapeutic quality of dance.

Together, they co-founded the NGO to eliminate the stigma and stereotypes surrounding people with special needs (PWSN), who are often discriminated against and excluded from mainstream society.

THE ROPE OF HOPE AGAINST STIGMA

Every Saturday, children with different conditions, such as Down syndrome, cerebral palsy and autism, gather with caregivers and volunteers in a hall on the grounds of a church in Quezon City to practise their moves.

Says the co-director, “[My mum and I] were able to devise [an intervention] tool we called, Rope of Hope, or in Tagalog, ‘lubid ng pag-asa’. “The Rope of Hope connects our beneficiaries to the healing impact of dance movement therapy with volunteers from the [non-disabled] community.”

And even if their attention wanders, Patricia explains, “as long as they are holding on to the rope for the duration of the session, they can be participative. We have captured their attention, and the behaviour leads them to learn the dance.”

According to her, combining the use of the patented Rope of Hope and DMT offers a holistic form of healing that merges the artistic form of dance with behavioural and cognitive sciences.

HEALING THROUGH DANCE

And the results speak for themselves. Long-time participants have started to develop life skills that encourage independent living, like dressing themselves or helping out at home. Learning the dance movements has also developed self-confidence, agility and physical co-ordination. While mothers say their children have become more sociable and responsive.

THP has made an impact in other powerful ways too, like creating a safe and supportive community for these families and their children. Patricia says caregivers even call each other if they need

help with child-sitting or to run errands. “We are grateful, because we are like a family who help each other. If not for [The Heart at Play Foundation], we would just be staying at home,” says Marie Tan, whose son, Hart attends the classes.

When the DMT session ends, a queue forms for a delicious lunch that THP provides and the mothers help to cook each week.

Six-year-old Hart, who lives with Down syndrome, bounces up, a cheeky grin spread across his cherub face. He bursts into song and performs a few hip hop moves, ending with his arms crossed over his chest, head tilted back, his chin held high.

Marie says Hart wasn’t always so convivial: “He was not that friendly and was shy. His balance was poor, so he couldn’t raise his foot... and when he runs, he looks like he will stumble.”

“I heard about Heart at Play from a friend,” says Marie. “We tried it since Hart likes to dance. At first, he was shocked to see so many people, and he had to learn dance movements immediately.”

According to the Down Syndrome Association of the Philippines, Inc, a Filipino is born with Down syndrome every four hours. This works out to more than 100,000 families in the country living with a person with Down syndrome. The life-long condition causes physical and mental delays, and sometimes chronic health issues.

For instance, Hart’s eyesight, hearing and thyroid have been affected. And he was also born with a hole in his heart, which closed when he was two years old. Another participant, 16-year-old Angela, has global development delay. It is a term used to describe children who take longer to develop in certain areas, including learning to walk and talk, relating to people, and intellectual functioning. Angela’s mother, Mel Galano, says her daughter enjoyed the sessions when they joined, and so they stayed. Their perseverance has paid off.

“Before Angela couldn’t grip objects, because her hands were too weak. Even holding a pencil was hard for her,” explains Mel. “Now, she can write on her own. Her penmanship is beautiful. Her self-confidence was boosted and she is not afraid of people anymore.”

MOVING TO THE BEAT OF CHANGE

On this particular day, there is a heightened buzz in the air. The children are rehearsing for an upcoming public performance. The benefit concert will help raise funds to pay for operational costs of the DMT classes. THP also gives families a transport stipend so they don’t miss sessions if they cannot pay for travel. Marie exclaims with excitement, “Hart is performing on his own. Before it used to be the both of us. He is confident he can do it. He no longer fears people watching him. He became a happier kid.”

For the long-term, Patricia says the goal is to hire more staff, including professional specialists for PWSN. For now, though, THP continues to raise the (musical) bar on the power of dance to touch the lives of disadvantaged families. For Jeanne Barretto, it has meant hearing her 16-year-old daughter Ariane, who has Down syndrome, speak for the first time. “Patty [Patricia] asked if there is something we wish for Ariane to do,” recalls Jeanne. “I told her if I can hear Ariane say, ‘Mama, I love you,’ that will bring joy to me.”

“A month ago, Ariane was able to say, ‘Papa, Mama, I love you.’ My husband and I are so happy that Ariane was able to talk, finally.”

LET’S TALK ABOUT IT:

How can we better integrate people with special needs into society and create a more inclusive community for them and their families?

ABOUT THE HEART AT PLAY FOUNDATION

The Heart at Play Foundation (THP) is a non-government organisation based in Manila, Philippines, that has been promoting dance movement therapy, or DMT, to people with special needs (PWSN), since 2011. By bringing marginalised families who have children with intellectual disabilities together with non-disabled volunteers, THP aims to upend stigmas and stereotypes of PWSN, and create a more inclusive and accepting society.

*A story by Our Better World
(the digital storytelling initiative of the
Singapore International Foundation
(www.ourbetterworld.org))*



A PLACE TO CALL HOME



Isolation is an unfortunate reality of old age. It takes a toll on a person's physical and mental wellbeing. A 2011 study by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (GOI) found that the size of the elderly population (aged 60 years and above) in India is growing at a great pace and is taking up a higher share of the total population of the country. While 85% of the elderly are currently supported by their immediate family members, that still leaves out a fairly large no. of elderly who are financially insecure, living in sub-par conditions, and in considerable distress. Sadly, destitution is a possibility for some of the elderly today. Akshaya Trust, a Chennai based NGO runs homes for the elderly in three different locations in Chennai- Mudichur, Pallikaranai and Valasaravakkam. The organization was started in 2001 by G. Gopalan, an entrepreneur with a keen eye for environmental consciousness as well as other social-issues.

Upon successfully selling his eco-friendly water-treatment business to an MNC, Gopalan decided to dedicate his life to the care of the elderly.

Starting with just one elderly person, Akshaya Trust now is home to 120 residents across its three homes. Residents live here free of cost, as the organization is financially supported by individual donors. The homes are all equipped with comfortable furnishings and recreational facilities. Aside from having healthy, nutritious food and a neat, dormitory-style space to live in, the residents also have access to a TV, audio system, newspapers, magazines and other recreational devices.

Shanthi Raghupati of Akshaya Trust says, "We are very particular about creating a family-like atmosphere at our homes. We want all of our residents to be well looked after and happy. We have cooks who make wholesome meals, house-keeping staff to do the cleaning and care-givers for those who are sick and/or bed-ridden". Doctors make regular visits to the homes to check up on the health of the residents. A physiotherapy lab has been built to take care of their motor-movements. The trust is working towards building a palliative care unit for the seriously ill residents. The local Lions Club also regularly conducts medical camps here.

Occasionally, some residents might have a courtesy visit from their family members. These are sporadic, says Shanthi. However, there is no dearth of volunteers who visit the elderly and spend quality time with them. They organize games, music, and engage in conversations with the residents. Many visitors choose to spend their birthdays or anniversaries at the homes, sharing food and entertainment with the residents. While the trust depends on donations from its well-wishers, it is the time and effort spent having one-on-one interactions with the residents that prove most effective, in keeping them in good spirits.

Shanthi explains that the trust has a well thought out process for the residents who pass away. She says that the trust gets in touch with the family of the deceased, observes their specific religious customs and in most cases, even takes up the responsibility of completing the final rites of the deceased.

Often Akshaya Trust receives new residents who either do not have children to look after them, or have been abandoned by their families/relatives in their old age. Some of them are as young 60+ years old, while some others arrive here at the grand old age of 90 years and above. They come in with great distress and a sense of hopelessness. For Kamala, a septuagenarian, her own relatives refused to share their home with her. She came into the home saying that she wanted to die. However, at Akshaya Trust she not only found that she was not alone, but also developed friendships with people her age. She now leads a much better quality of life than she would have, at her family home.

The positive impact that Akshaya Trust making reaps rewards in the most wholesome and unusual ways. Last year, Kutti Ammal, an 86 year-old flower vendor in Chennai, decided to donate her lifetime savings of INR 90,000/- to Akshaya Trust. Having nobody to call her own, she had been living in one of the homes run by the trust for the past three years. Moved by the work of the organization, she decided to give away her hard-earned wealth and pay it forward.

Apart from the old age homes, the organization also runs a financial assistance program for underprivileged youth. Sponsorships are given out to select individuals to pursue schooling or college education. These beneficiaries are also provided with soft skill courses which helps them develop time-management, public-speaking and personal-effectiveness skills. Each beneficiary is encouraged to give back

to the organization either by way of repaying through small instalments or by helping another deserving candidate in their personal capacity. Founder Gopalan believes, "When one person supports another, it leads to a chain of growth that benefits a large number of people in the long run".

The effects of the ongoing pandemic is painfully visible for this organization. Says Shanthi, "Due to the pandemic, visitors have stopped visiting our homes, for obvious reasons. The supports that our elderly would normally get, are now reduced as well. For instance, we have strict restrictions on how many people can visit our homes. We used to have volunteers who would serve food with special care to our residents. Now we have had to stop that temporarily. Our hope is that this situation will improve, soon".

Plans are currently underway for a fourth home to be opened in Chennai, sometime soon. Shanthi says that a bigger facility with a capacity to house 500 residents and above, is being planned to be constructed outside of Chennai. This will help them manage the increasing demand in recent times.

Akshaya Trust wishes to expand its services to persons with disabilities. Helping people with blindness, physical and development disabilities is on the cards in the near future. At present however, they are fully focused on helping the elderly overcome the adversities of ageing, one individual at a time.

Archanaa Ramesh

The Purpose, Power and Potential of Social Intrapreneurs

Corporate professionals with a passion for social change and an entrepreneurial mindset are creating solutions to complex social problems

In September of 2020, the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, a leading global platform that accelerates outstanding models of social innovation, announced its list of 23 Social Innovation Awardees for the year. Among them was Prashant Mehra, Vice-President, Social Inclusion, at the \$1.09 bn Mindtree Ltd, who received the award under the 'corporate social intrapreneur' category.

Mindtree is a global technology services and digital transformation company. Prashant received this prestigious recognition for building open access digital platforms for the informal sector to positively impact lives and livelihoods in the areas of waste management, education, small holder farming, grassroots skilling & employment and engaging communities in problem solving. Presently over 4 million farmers, waste-pickers, primary school students, volunteers, job seekers, employers, and buyers conduct their operations on the 'Commons Platform'.

Schwab has also recognized the contributions of 3 other global corporate social intrapreneurs in: Corinne Bazina of Danone, who through Danone Communities brings together resources to support social entrepreneurs develop solutions for malnutrition, access to water and poverty alleviation; Nikola Gallombik of Yellowwoods Holdings for driving sustainability and inclusive economy through multi-sector partnerships; Hadi Wibowo of PT Bank BTPN Syariah Tbk, working to bring financial literacy and services to Indonesia's marginalized communities.

The changemakers from within

Social Intrapreneurs like Prashant, Corinne, Nikola and Hadi are changemakers within large business organizations who innovate for solutions to address large-scale social and environmental challenges. It takes strong passion for social good and an entrepreneurial mindset for social intrapreneurs to be able to pitch for and execute innovative ideas for social impact, within a business ecosystem that is geared towards maximizing profits and shareholder returns.



Corporate professionals with a passion for social change and an entrepreneurial mindset are creating solutions to complex social problems

Reframing a problem as an opportunity

It is the social intrapreneur's ability to reframe a social or environmental problem as an opportunity for creating innovative solutions for positive change, then sets them apart. A very well-known example is FMCG giant ITC's innovative e-choupal initiative. The idea of setting up rural internet kiosks to provide farmers with crop management knowledge, real time weather information, and facilitate price discovery came 2 decades ago from S. Sivakumar, then a manager in the company's agro-products division. The initiative has evolved significantly over the years and is benefitting over 4 million farmers in 35000 villages across 10 states today, by enabling better productivity and higher price realizations. In an interview published online, Sivakumar, now Group Head, Agri and IT Business, ITC, says the poverty he saw in rural India and the fact that despite the entrepreneurial energy, there was no wealth creation, motivated him to work for rural upliftment.

Globally, Gib Bulloch one of the most celebrated Social Intrapreneurs discovered that he wanted to work for purpose, as a volunteer with VSO international at strife ridden Kosovo. This experience led him to set up Accenture Development Partnerships - a corporate social enterprise that provides development sector organisations access to Accenture's top people, knowledge and assets on a not-for-profit basis, and which delivered quarter of a billion dollars' worth of services across 70 countries in its first decade.

"Purpose is not a mere tagline or marketing campaign; it is a company's fundamental reason for being – what it does every day to create value for its stakeholders. Purpose is not the sole pursuit of profits but the animating force for achieving them. Profits are in no way inconsistent with purpose – in fact, profits and purpose are inextricably linked."

Larry Fink, CEO of Blackrock
(an investment management corporation)

SIs in the Decade of Action

In companies, large and small, across sectors, many more Social Intrapreneurs are making their presence felt through their impactful and inspirational actions. There is a changemaker in the HR manager who initiates hiring of persons with disability and creates an inclusive workplace; in the product manager who proposes the inclusion of an affordable product line to cater to the needs of the bottom of the pyramid, in the procurement in-charge who sources products from marginalized communities, and many others. While the scale of impact may yet be small in some cases, they have begun to demonstrate the possibilities of aligning business and social goals.

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Larry Fink, CEO of Blackrock (an investment management corporation)

This is happening at a time when there is growing demand for businesses to contribute to solving social and environmental challenges from all important stakeholders, including investors, consumers, employees, communities and governments. The first year of the decade of ambitious action for achieving the UN's sustainable development goals is drawing to a close. The pandemic has resulted in significant set-backs to the progress made to achieving the goals. The crisis has also reemphasised the need for galvanized action by individuals, institutions, civil society organizations, governments and businesses.

In such a scenario, Social Intrapreneurship as force for good is gathering momentum. There are global networks of Social Intrapreneurs emerging as platforms for sharing ideas and strategies. The power and potential of social intrapreneurs are being discovered & acknowledged by domestic and global corporations and recognized & celebrated by the development and the corporate sectors.

Usha Ravi

"The challenge I set before anyone who condemns private-sector business is this: If you are a socially conscious person, why don't you run your business in a way that will help achieve social objectives?" –

Mohammed Yunus
Founder Grameen Bank and Nobel Peace Prize Winner

Are social intrapreneurs outliers within the companies they work for, who find it necessary to question profit-centric strategies? Not quite. They are, generally, outstanding performers in their job roles. They also possess some conspicuous qualities like creative problem-solving skills, risk-taking abilities, a collaborative approach, empathetic listening and an inclusive mindset. Their heightened awareness of environmental, social and community issues helps them bring wider perspectives into discussions and demonstrate courage in decision-making.

Battle of the Buffet 2020

GSIM CHENNAI MISSION

PRESENTS

BATTLE OF THE BUFFET 2020
Triggering social appetite

DONATE RS 300*
To buy donor passes for virtual event

DONATE RS 5000
To enjoy dinner delivered at home

DONATE NOW

*Exclusive link will be sent by mail

MANO LIVE WITH

THE SUNSHINE ORCHESTRA

12 DEC, 2020
7 PM ONWARDS

TM Krishna

13 DEC, 2020
7 PM ONWARDS

A quick chat with our co-organisers



MR. TARUN MAHADEVAN, TRUSTEE, CHENNAI MISSION

What are the highlights of the 12th edition of BoB?

Considering the ongoing pandemic, it was a hard decision for us to proceed with BoB. However, with most of our NGO partners usual funding channels being stopped due to the wider economic impact of the pandemic, they needed our support more now than before. Hence, considering the safety and wellbeing of all our stakeholders, we decided to go ahead with a virtual concert to entertain the donors and their families/colleagues.

The tricky part is that BoB is not BoB without the food! Thus, we had to step up our game and deliver the food to donor's residences to enjoy a mini spread. This will be the first time such a large delivery will be taking place as we deliver food to over 150 locations in Chennai.

Do you think a virtual event this time would have as much impact as the earlier events had?

I think it definitely will. Impact is often time centric, and with the current times being tough, a virtual event will deliver the required impact. BoB's fundamentals are championing social cause, with its motto "Triggering Social appetite". The virtual event is only a medium to trigger that appetite. The medium being used is not necessarily to be of great importance as long as the message/ethos of the concept is being conveyed.

From a donor perspective, what would be the key take-aways from BoB this year?

I think the biggest takeaway will be that when times are okay, everyone is happy to support and donate towards good causes. However, this year, with everyone knowing that times have been tough, donors will realize it is all the more important to support and extend a helping hand to the various NGO's. Through thick and thin I suppose!

PRASANNA, DIRECTOR, ARAM PORUL

What are the processes followed to enroll NGOs for BoB each year?

We start the NGO enrolment process from the month of May each year. A mailer is coordinated to all the NGOs in our database inviting them to be part of the BOB event. Those with 12A and 80G certificates alone are eligible to apply. Our team conducts due-diligence on those who have expressed interest to participate in the BOB, after which the selected NGOs are onboarded for the BOB event. We have networked with Give India, online donation platform to ease the donation process. The selected NGO shares with Give India the details of project for which they are raising funds.

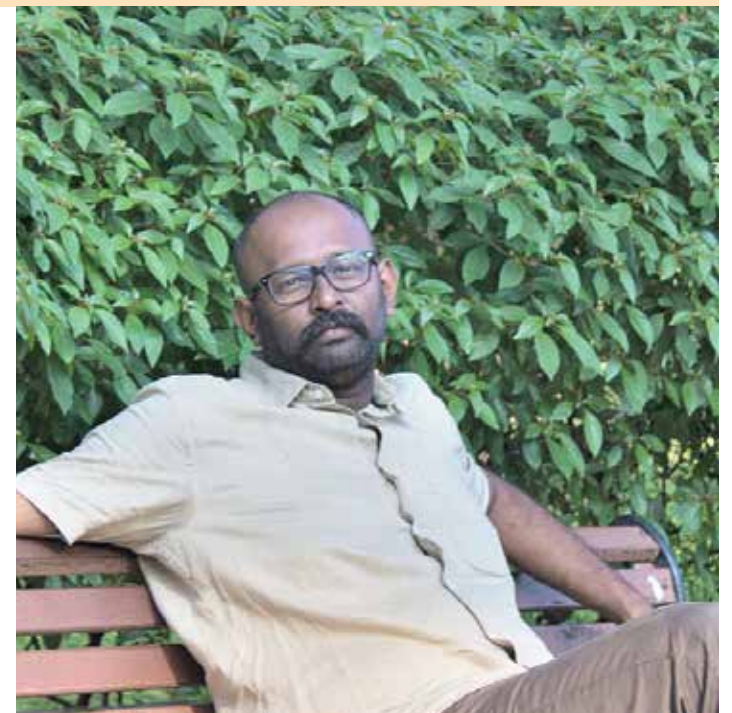
Has this event brought in the lesser known NGOs to manifold?

Of course! We have provided visibility to grassroot NGOs as well as lesser known NGOs through the BoB event. Our Project bank has been an attractive proposition for NGOs to participate as it gives them opportunity for them to reach out to many individual donors as well as corporate donors.

About the common pool and how this is shared with the participating NGOs?

Apart from NGOs raising funds through the Give India platform, the BoB organisers raise funds through their network. This feeds into a 'Common Pool' fund, that has been created with an intention to share funds to NGOs who need the most. We have corporate houses contributing to this Common Pool fund.

The Grants committee selects the NGOs based on their project proposal and after a thorough due diligence process the funds are disbursed. Periodic monitoring of these projects are also carried out.



“Those who have a passion to be part of nation building and have an attitude and desire to serve the people should join the Civil Services.”

Shri. S. Davidson Devasirvatham IPS shares with Marie Banu his journey as an IPS officer

Shri. S. Davidson Devasirvatham is a 1995 batch IPS officer in Tamil Nadu cadre. He presently serves as ADGP – Technical Services. Prior to this, he held the position of Police commissioner of Madurai city and as Inspector General of Police, West Zone in Tamil Nadu.

In an exclusive interview, Shri Davidson Devasirvatham IPS shares with Marie Banu his journey as an IPS officer.

What was your inspiration to join Indian Police Service?

I joined Loyola College at Chennai and pursued my under graduation degree in History. One of my uncle noticing my interest in current national and international affairs and social sciences motivated me to pursue the civil services examinations.

I was active in both NCC and Volleyball at college. Seeing the bright prospects in NCC, I focused only on NCC and was selected as the Best Cadet in the state. I was adjudged the second best cadet in the NCC Republic Day camp, 1988 at New Delhi and was sent for a Youth Exchange Programme to Alberta in Canada for three months. As part of this programme, I also spent three months along with a Canadian team in a village near Coimbatore in Tamilnadu. My outlook completely changed and my personality skills were sharpened during this time.

After graduating in History from Loyola college, I joined for Masters Degree in Sociology at JNU, New Delhi as I had already planned to take History and Sociology as my optional papers for the Civil Services Examination. In 1991, I made my first attempt in the Civil Services Examination while I was pursuing MPhil. I cleared the preliminary examination and discontinued my MPhil course and made up my mind to pursue only Civil Services and not academics.

I returned to Chennai and wrote the Mains examinations. I missed the Mains cut off by three marks and got very dejected on seeing the results. I did not qualify the mains in the second attempt too! Then, I decided to take a year off. My father advised me to take up a job and attempt the civil service examination again later. I wrote the Staff Selection Commission Exam for Central Excise and Customs and Income Tax and I got a job in Central Excise, Tuticorin as Inspector.

I joined duties and started preparing for my third attempt. This time, I was selected and got into Indian Police Service. It was a big relief as I was passionate to join the Civil Services and to serve the people.

Your initial days as an IPS officer?

I was trained in Dharmapuri and my first posting was as Subdivisional Police officer at Paramakudi. Paramakudi sub division was vulnerable to caste riots. My focus was on restoring normalcy in riot affected areas and to ensure that riots do not erupt again. It required a lot of vigil, continuous patrolling to villages, and quickly solving community issues.

When the Coimbatore bomb blast took place, I was asked if I was willing to join the new team of officers there, and I concurred. In May 1998, I joined as Assistant Commissioner of Police and later in 1999, I got promoted as Deputy Commissioner of Police, Law & Order Coimbatore City.

After the blast and a series of incidents that had happened in late 80's and early 90's, the city had gone through a lot of turmoil. Hence, our job was mainly to restore normalcy and ensure communal harmony.

Mr.K. Radhakrishnan IPS of 1983 batch was then the Commissioner of Police. He handpicked a team to work

towards this mission. Mr.Kannappan IPS and myself along with other officers joined the team and worked for over two years. It was a fantastic learning experience to see the way in which Mr. Radhakrishnan and Mr. Kannappan were handling the different situations in policing as I was a greenhorn in the service, with just six months as an independent officer.

In 2000, when Cuddalore witnessed a lot of caste and political violence I was posted as District Superintendent of Police (DSP). I joined with a lot of anxiety as I was not familiar with the terrain and much of the issues here. Now, I would say that it has been the best tenure in my entire 25 years of service as it involved a lot of interaction with the public at the village level.

There was lot of positive policing as well as aggressive policing, because we had to be firm and bold on many occasions when people were mindless in committing violence, arson, assaulting people, and all that. We also took prompt and immediate action after registration of cases, and arrested a record number of people who were indulging in violence. In two years' time, the district completely transformed and we could also put an end to the liquor issue and also the road roko culture which was very prominent here.

About your stint with Intelligence Department?

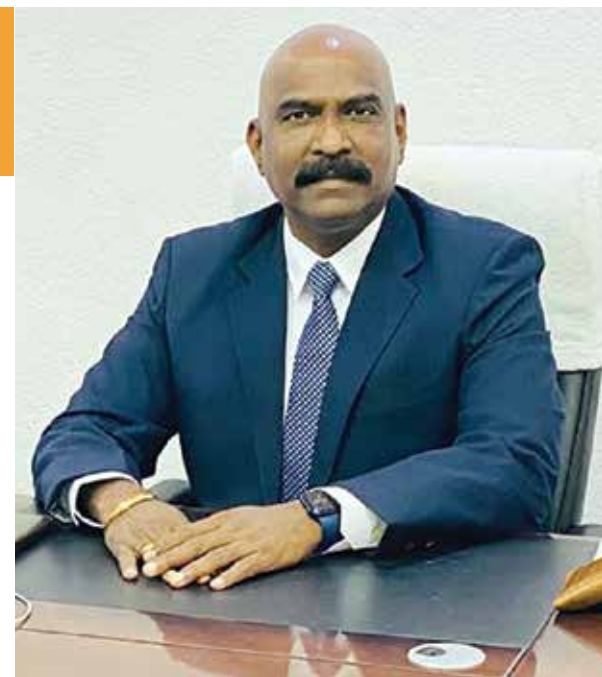
I have always considered myself to be a field oriented officer, and never thought I would get an opportunity to work in the Intelligence department. I have done about four tenures in the Intelligence department. After my Cuddalore posting, I joined as SP, Special Branch in Intelligence wing, and later as SP in Q branch. I also served as DIG Intelligence, and as IG Intelligence in 2015. It was a great opportunity to have served in different capacities in the intelligence department.

Though, it's more of a desk job, it is tough as it requires a lot of alertness and sharp thinking capabilities. You need to keep your eyes and ears open for information and intelligence; communicate faster to the police authorities and government. It is a difficult job, and we have done a lot of interesting operations in terms of busting small terror modules; catching rocket launchers; and handling the LTTE accused. This gave me an excellent exposure to understand and study the internal security situation.

Your experience as Zonal Director of Narcotic Control Bureau?

The Narcotic Control Bureau is a fantastic organisation that came into being in the late 80's. Originally, it was under the Ministry of Finance, Department of Revenue. When I joined, it was completely brought under the Ministry of Home Affairs. I was posted as the Zonal Director in Chennai, looking after the four southern states and Union Territory of Puducherry and Lakshadweep. So, you get to do a lot of operations against domestic and international drug trafficking and act against the traffickers –from collecting intelligence, registering cases, investigating and prosecuting them. I had this composite policing opportunity for five years, and even travelled to other countries to attend international seminars and conferences.

I attended a training organised by the Drug Enforcement Administration, United States for about 3 weeks in Florida and also few conferences organised by the UN. This gave me an international exposure about how drug trafficking is happening across the world and how the countries are responding to this global problem. Having served in a UN peacekeeping mission in Kosovo during 2003-2004, this tenure in NCB also gave me a good exposure to international policing organisations.



In your current portfolio as ADGP – Technical Services, what are your plans to augment usage of technology in crime prevention?

I took charge of this department in July 2020, and there are a lot of projects which are going on, mostly with installation of CCTV camera in all police stations. We have also been procuring drones for surveillance and public order management. This project is being done in partnership with Anna University and is nearing the stage of completion.

We have been working on communication technology for police officers in the field, mostly to do with wireless communication (conversion from analog communication to digital communication). We are also procuring body-worn cameras for police personnel who are deployed in field and have been standardising all the equipment in the police stations and also district units.

Over the years, we have been procuring a lot of equipment and gadgets to enhance policing capabilities. Now, we are looking into areas that have shortage and need our intervention so that it would enhance our investigation skills. This could be cyber-related, security-related, audio-visual or road safety equipment etc.

Your advice for aspiring civil servants?

It is a dream to begin with. Once you feel that dream, it is essential that you feel the burning desire and urge to fulfil that dream. This is priority number one!

Secondly, the number of hours we spend on studying a book differs from person to person. Some may take less time to study, but understand faster. I belong to a category that understands very slowly, as I get distracted very fast. Hence, I required 12 to 16 hours of study in a day. My friends who were academically good and focused on studies used to spend around 7 to 8 hours per day to prepare for the examination.

So, it all depends on the quality and extent of your reading and writing abilities, because this exam is all about reading, writing skills and analytical abilities. One needs to have an in-depth study of the syllabus and previous years question papers to understand the pattern of the examination. It's also important to indulge in both extensive and intensive reading on each topic prescribed in the syllabus and gain maximum knowledge about each topic.

There are many opportunities outside Civil Services today in both public and private sector. However, for those who have a passion to be part of nation building and have an attitude and desire to serve the people should aim at joining the Civil Services.