



# LOVE ALL SERVE ALL

## Sevalaya's News Letter

**July - 2004**

Dear Friends,

Like every year, this year also saw too many people applying for admission in Sevalaya's school and hostel. As the school has shown 100% results, there was no question about the quality of education. Added to this, there is no fee to be paid, school will provide uniforms, books, note books, pens, pencil, etc. all free of cost. No doubt such schools will attract many. But our job was to ensure that we select the poorest of the poor so that the free education goes to the really needy people. We had many well to do people approaching us, even offering to pay fee. But we had to gently send them back, as serving them is not part of our job. Sevalaya's doors are open only to those, who cannot pay any fee. We had many people coming to us with political influence. As Sevalaya does not get any government grant, it was very easy for us to say no to such people. We also had cases referred by some of our donors. As we had space only in Balwadi (class zero) and plus one, (11<sup>th</sup> standard) we had to say no to many people. Wherever we could accommodate, we have taken in people, if they were poor and deserving. Hope our donors will understand. As we provide everything free, there is a cost to each admission we make. Unless we are sure that we will be able bear this cost for the rest of the year, we will be making a mistake if we take in lot of students, just because donors or political leaders referred them.

The candidates were asked to fill-in an application form (mostly our staff helped them to fill, as the parents or guardians were illiterates), one of our staff members visited their house to personally verify the details, and then they were asked to appear for an interview with the trustees and the headmaster. In the interview we checked the

poverty level only in case of Balwadi admissions and poverty and merit in case of plus one admission. Most of the parents were agricultural coolies or in some cases there was only single parent alive, without any definite job. There was one case, where the grandmother was taking care of the child; her son has deserted the family after the death of his wife. She has no clue where her son lives, but the grandson had become her responsibility. She was very old and said that she lives just on some money given by villagers and sometimes by her daughters, who themselves were poor. I immediately offered her a place in our old age home. But she politely refused. The reason- "in case my daughters come home to see me, I must have a house to receive them. I can't deprive my daughters the privilege of visiting mother's home, once in a while". Another lady came and straight fell at my feet. I was too embarrassed. She said that her husband died in a hit and run road accident and she has no breadwinner in her family anymore. Her daughter was studying in a different school, where she had to pay for her education. If Sevalaya does not give her admission, her daughter will have to discontinue the studies at a very young age. We had many such cases, and we were able admit most of them. Many students who applied for plus one class, had scored 80% or above, from such low income or in some cases, no income groups. But for Sevalaya, they would have discontinued studies after 10<sup>th</sup> standard.

I only feel that we should have much more resources available to Sevalaya, so that we need not turn back even one deserving case.

Thanks & Regards

Murali



### Study Circle Meetings

Date	: 12/06/2004
Book	: Mahakavi Bharathiyar
Author	: Va. Ra
Speaker	: V.Muralidharan
Venue	: Sevalaya Campus
Date	: 19/06/2004
Book	: Buddha & Ambedkar
Author	: T.Rajagopalan
Speaker	: T.Nagarajan
Venue	: Sevalaya Campus
Date	: 26/06/2004
Book	: Unforgettable Persons
Author	: P.S.Acharya
Speaker	: K.J.Geetha
Venue	: Sevalaya Administrative office

### Events

On 13/06/2004, Chellammal Bharathi Guest House was inaugurated at Sevalaya campus. The building was sponsored by Yoga vereinigung Rajagopalan e.V., of Germany. Sevalaya has been receiving volunteers from overseas who stay in the campus for a few months and volunteer their services. This guesthouse was constructed to provide accommodation to such volunteers.

The life of Chellammal, the wife of Mahakavi Bharathiyar is one of great sacrifice. Being the wife of one of the greatest poets and visionaries whose focus was on creating awareness among the fellow countrymen through his fiery poems, who had a spiritual thirst and who was a powerful personality with many dimensions,



the lot of managing the day to day affairs of the family fell on the shoulders of the young woman. The family was in dire poverty. Bharathi, the poet had a steady stream of admirers and friends visiting him. Despite the poverty, Chellammal managed to extend a warm welcome, fed them and made the visitors feel at home. We felt that it was only apt that our guesthouse should be named after such a hospitable person. All Bharathi lovers appreciated this gesture. Sage T.G.Narayanaswami, the practical philosopher, commended us for the choice of this name. Ms. Lalitha Bharathi, the grand daughter of the great poet also conveyed her happiness and blessings.

The 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Day of Sevalaya was celebrated on 19/06/2004. Dr. R.Kausalya Devi, Managing Trustee, Gandhigram Trust presided over the function. Mr. S.K.Sahu, Commissioner of Income Tax (Exemptions) was our Chief Guest and released the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Report. Ms. Savithri Vaithi, Chairperson, Vishranthi Charitable Trust received the first copy. Mr. Sriram Vaitheeswaran of Scope International, distributed textbooks to students of classes VI to X. MS. Sunithi Simon and Ms. Vaitheeswaran of TCS Maitree Chennai chapter distributed free notebooks to the children. Certificates were distributed to those who completed the free summer camp in computer training and the free tailoring training provided by Sevalaya. The children of Sevalaya presented a cultural programme. The visitors were all praise for the services rendered by the institution.

On 21/06/2004 the Thiruninravur Jain Sangh invited our children and senior citizens for the 114<sup>th</sup> Birth Day Celebrations of their Guruji. They provided breakfast. New sets of clothes were given to all the





senior citizens. Uniform materials were provided to the children on the occasion.

Tata Consultancy Services, Sholinganallur hosted a lunch for the X std Students (presently in +1) who secured 100% results in the Public Examination in April 2004 and the teachers at the TCS office complex at Sholinganallur. Mr. A. Srinivasan, Delivery Centre Head of TCS Sholinganallur and other officials joined the children for lunch. The students enjoyed the sumptuous lunch and buffet was a novel experience for them. The students were taken on a tour of the office complex. They saw the IBM Mainframe computer and the official there kindly explained to them in simple terms about its functioning. They also saw the various facilities in the complex like the Gym, the volleyball court, the jogging track and the indoor games areas. Some of them were inspired by the sophisticated and hi tech atmosphere that they expressed their desire to study well and one day probably work there. They also saw a short film on the Tata business empire, how it touches the day-to-day life of a man right from making the alarm clock, which wakes him up in the morning to the safe home protected by Tata AIG Insurance where he sleeps at night peacefully.

On 24/06/2004, the Children's Film Society of India screened the award winning film "Kutti" for the children at our campus.

#### **External Interface:**

The Managing Trustee, V.Muralidharan was one of the Chief guests of the function organized by poor Children's Education Fund, CVRDE, Avadi on 06/06/2004.

The Managing Trustee V.Muralidharan and the Hony. Correspondent Ms. Bhuvaneswari Muralidharan were among the Chief Guests for the Annual Day Celebrations of Coastal and Rural Development Trust, Kovalam.

#### **Training and Development:**

The orientation programme for staff



at the beginning of every academic year was conducted this year from 01/06/2004 to 04/06/2004. V.Muralidharan spoke to the new staff about origin and history of Sevalaya. There were sessions on Mahatma Gandhiji, Mahakavi Bharathiyar and Swami Vivekananda for the staff who joined Sevalaya this year. The sessions were conducted by Trustee Mr. K.Mohan., the Hony. correspondent, Ms. Bhuvaneswari Muralidharan and the Hony. Coordinator Mr. T.S.Venkataramani. All the staff and trustees were asked to fix three types of goals: personal goal for their self-improvement, goal for improving the unit they belong to i.e hostel, school, office, goshala, craft center etc., and overall goal for improvement of Sevalaya as a whole unit. The Annual Plan for Sevalaya was drawn up based on the inputs received from the students, staff, trustees, donors and well-wishers. The annual calendar of events for Sevalaya was also drawn up during the programme. The new staff were given orientation on the self evaluation process followed at Sevalaya where the staff evaluates their performance on a monthly basis as against the goals they have set for themselves. On 05/06/2004 the staff were taken on a picnic to Vellore and Kancheepuram.

Mr. P.Selvam attended the Comprehensive Training for Paper and Paper products at Small Industries Service Institute (SISI) from 24/05/2004 to 28/05 / 2004. The participants were given training on making paper and paper products like paper bags, covers, envelopes etc.

They were also given training on marketing the paper products. On the last the trainees were taken on an Industrial visit to Sri Kanchi Industries and Kumarappa Seva Sangham.

#### **Hobby Club:**

Mr. Vijay Kriplani and Mr. Ramakrishnan, volunteers of Tamilnadu Science Forum visited Sevalaya on 22/05/2004 and helped the children form a Hobby Club. The children were helped to learn many basic concepts of science and engineering through assembling many educational toys sets and play materials.





## ERADICATING A BLEMISH

Indian society had suffered from one very serious blemish for centuries. It is the curse of 'untouchability' we are talking of. As is well known, large sections of the Indian society were called as 'untouchables', and

were treated as such for centuries. They were at the lowest rung of the caste hierarchy, and were abused and ill-treated. None but the most degrading of occupations were open to them, and they were condemned to lives of extreme poverty. Many social reformers tried to change the system, but most were helpless against the prejudices deep-rooted in the society.

Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and Mahakavi Subramania Bharati, our three guiding lights of Sevalaya, were among the reformers who achieved very large measures of success in their endeavors to eradicate the curse of 'untouchability' from Indian society. All of them had risen above the ideas of caste and creed; and they were particularly incensed against the cruelty of 'untouchability'. It is due to the seeds sown by them that the curse has largely vanished from Indian society today.

An incident that happened in the early days after he had taken sannyasa, opened up Swami Vivekananda's eyes to the ill treatment meted out to the 'untouchables'. It was the year 1883, and Swamiji was then a penniless, wandering monk. One evening he was feeling very tired after walking miles and miles, when he saw a man smoking tobacco using what is called a chillum. It was a manner of smoking tobacco that was common at that time. Smoke would be drawn through a water-filled jar, using a long hose with a mouthpiece. Normally a group of people would sit around a chillum, and take turns drawing puffs, using the same mouthpiece. Swamiji was accustomed to smoking a chillum in his young days. In his tired condition at that time he felt like having a puff. He asked the smoker whether he could have a puff. The man shrank back and blurted out, "Sir, I am a Bhangi (sweeper). Smoking my pipe would defile you". Hearing this Swamiji insisted on smoking the pipe, his purpose

now being more to remove the sense of inferiority from the man's mind than having a puff.

Swamiji used to recall the incident whenever he talked of treatment of

the lower castes in India. Years later, when Swamiji started the Ramakrishna Mission as a social service organisation to serve the poor and needy, he made service to the so-called 'untouchables' an essential part of the Mission's activities

Mahatma Gandhi's love and sympathy for the 'untouchables' (whom he called 'Harijans', meaning God's Children) is well known. He worked untiringly for their upliftment. He took them as inmates of his ashrams, had the Hindu temples opened to them for worship, had schools opened to their children and had avenues of employment in various trades and crafts opened to them. When attempts were made by the British rulers to separate Harijans from the main stream Hindus by having a separate electorate for them, Gandhiji went on a fast, and was willing to face death than to yield to the craftiness of the British. Men like Thakar Bapa, Vaidhyanatha Iyer, Acharya Vinoba Bhave were his lieutenants in his battle for the advancement of Harijans. It is as a tribute to Gandhiji that the Constitution of free India specifically bans the practice of untouchability.

For Subramania Bharati, removal of caste distinctions and advancement of the 'untouchables' was as much a passion as was his passion for freedom for India from foreign rule. Indeed he has equated the two in one of his popular songs titled "Vidudhalai ! Vidudhalai !!" meaning "Freedom ! Freedom !!". Singing of freedom for India in that song he specifically lists the names of the Harijan castes and the names of nomadic tribes, and says that it is freedom for them that is the freedom of India. He goes on:

***Poor by caste or slaves by caste***

***Of that we have none!***

***No men of inferior status reside***

***In this India of ours!!***

***For Free Circulation :***

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