



LOVE ALL SERVE ALL

Sevalaya's News Letter

MAY - 2003

Dear Friends,

SARS is the new killer disease, which is threatening the world today. They say that it started in China and has slowly spread all over the Southeast Asia. In India, we heard of a few cases in Kolkata, then in Delhi, then in Mumbai, in Pune and also a case in Vellore in Tamil Nadu. The modern science tries to eradicate some diseases and at the same time also produces some other new killer diseases. This goes on and on. With lot of international travel, any such disease spreads very easily.

A virus or a bacteria, travels from person to person, through air or water or any other contact, and such disease spreads in no time. I wonder why good things don't spread at this speed. What is wrong? Always the bad things on earth have better speed, they are more attractive, more tasty and what not? All that is good is not so attractive to start with, has no speed when it has to spread, and has horrible taste when it comes to health foods! If bitter gourd is so good for health, why God has not created it with good taste? If garlic is very good for heart ailments, why does it have such a bad odour? Is there no process improvement cycles in these production lines? Is there no Quality control in heaven?

We have always seen that bad people are more organised and they work together more closely, and spread their wings across continents, in no time, like SARS. How do we learn the trick of the trade from them and duplicate the same process so that good things can also spread quickly? What does the virus do? Does it hesitate to attack anyone? It just happily catches onto anyone and everyone it gets in contact with. It does not wait to

understand the person, it does not care if the person will catch SARS or not, it does not judge if the person is 'like minded' or not, it does not expect the person to take the initiative and catch the virus, it does not worry about the caste or religion of the person, it does not worry if the person is poor or rich, it does not care what the person will think about the virus, etc. Do we have a lesson here to learn from the virus?

When we try to approach someone, if at all we do, for any good cause, how many hesitations we have? We are so worried about the reaction of the other person, that we don't take even the first step of 'asking'. In a recently conducted seminar by GE Elfun, on NGO leadership, where two of Sevalaya's representatives participated, it was said that people donate because they were asked. This is a result of a scientific survey. Asking help for a good cause is a powerful tool we have in our hand. If we ask without any hesitation, like the SARS virus, we can also spread with great speed.

In the past fifteen years, Sevalaya has been spreading the message of Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and Mahakavi Bharathi in the villages and schools around Sevalaya. Today any visitor coming to Sevalaya is very happy to note the knowledge about the life and teachings of these three great leaders among our students. It is a result of this constant 'virus' attack that we are doing there for the past fifteen years. All good work should learn a lesson from this SARS virus.

Thanks & Regards
Murali

Study Circle Meetings

Date : 5.4.2003
Speaker : K.R.Vijaya
Book : My Pages (Tamil)
Author : Erwadi Radhakrishnan

Date : 12.4.2003
Speaker : N.Annapoorna
Books : The power and use of Thought
& Our relation to Children
Author : C.W.Leadbeater

Date : 19.4.2003
Speaker : P.Selvam
Book : Day dreaming (Tamil)
Author : Jijubai Bageka

Date : 26.4.2003
Speaker : T.Easwaran
Book : The best methods of bringing
up children (Tamil)
Author : Nagula Sivanathan

Training and Development.

Our HRD exercise this month was extended to the grass root level workers in the hostel and the kitchen. The training programme was conducted, at Thakkar Bapa Vidyalaya premises at Chennai, in a relaxed atmosphere away from the din and bustle of the hurried schedule at the workspot. The programme included the Raison d'être of our organization, neatness of kitchen and the persons working at the catering, timely serving of quality food, and the spirit of love and affection to the



Hon'ble Minister Sri. D. JEYAKUMAR distributes the Note Books and Uniforms.

inmates. The participants were taken to Sri Ramakrishna Students' Home where the functioning of their hostel and catering was explained to them.

On 18th, 19th and 20th April 2003 GE Elfun organized a 3-day seminar on NGO Leadership at New Delhi. Mr. G.Ram Mohan, Trustee, Sevalaya and Mr. S.Saravanan one of the leaders in Sevalaya campus attended the seminar.

Events Galore

On April 12th and 13th, as usual the sports meet for the village youth and children was conducted at our campus. There was enthusiastic participation, and the prize distribution function held on 13th April was very well attended. Mr.A.Krishnaswami, M.P. presided over the function and gave away the prizes. He lauded the services that Sevalaya is rendering to the cause of educating the rural youth. He exhorted the children to make the best use of the opportunity and become worthy citizens. Mr. V.S.Shanmugam, an opinion maker in the area, and a well wisher of Sevalaya felicitated



the participants. Mr.T.Thyagaraj, Assistant Educational Officer also spoke appreciating the services of Sevalaya's Mahakavi Bharathiyar High School.

Mahavir Jayanthi

Mahavir is one of those great souls who inspired Mahatma Gandhi in his incessant search of Truth and Ahimsa. Sevalaya celebrated Mahavir Jayanthi in a befitting manner on 15th April. Mr. Goutham Chand Jain, President, Sri Varthaman Navyug Mandal, presiding over the function, spoke on the life and teachings of Mahavir. Mr.Bhagchand Jain, Secretary of the association also spoke on the occasion.

Rama Navami Celebration

Sri Rama Navami Celebrated at our Campus on 18th April. Kavimamani Ilayavan spoke to our children, staff, senior citizens and the villagers on Sri Rama, the Apostle of Love and Truth.

Educational Camp at Tonakela

Educational Camp, as usual, was conducted for our children for three days on 23rd, 24th, and 25th of April at Camp Tonakela, with fun filled edutainment programmes like sports, drama, Nila Mutram, competitions, quiz programmes etc. Each day was dedicated to one guiding star of Sevalaya. On 23rd, Mr. Maheswaran of Thakkar Bapa Vidyala I.T.I. spoke on Gandhi. On 24th the speech was by Mr. Mu.Srinivasan, a Bharathi Scholar and author. Ms. Bhooma a teacher from Sri Ramakrishna Mission Matriculation School delivered the final day's talk on Swami Vivekananda. On all the days the speeches were followed by a quiz on the various points covered in the talks. The participation by the students was so impressive. The speakers uniformly marveled at the way in which the children had observed and absorbed the subject.

Sports meet for orphanages

With a view to promoting amity amongst the inmates and workers of the different institutions serving the cause of deprived children, a Sports Meet was organized by Sevalaya on 28th and 29th of April, at Sri Rama Krishna School Grounds at T.Nagar. There was good participation, and a spirit of camaraderie has been developed amongst the children, thus fulfilling the main objective of the event. Lion.K.V.Ramani, of Lions club of Guindy, inaugurated the event. Rtn. Mangalam Balasubramanian, of Rotary Club of Fort Chennai delivered the valedictory speech and distributed the prizes.



Visit to Chennai

The inmates of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Old Age Home were taken to Sri Kapaleeswarar Temple at Mylapore and Sri Parthasarathy Temple at Thiruvallikkeni on 24th April 2003. The elders were very satisfied with the good Dharshan they had on that day.

EMPATHY WITH THE POOR

Recently two of us from Sevalaya management attended a conference of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) from all over India, held in New Delhi. The conference provided a forum for the participating NGOs, all charity organizations, to share their knowledge and experience. 'Serving the poor should be our passion, and to live that passion empathy with the poor is an essential requirement'. That was the message of the conference.

To us at Sevalaya such a message was only a reiteration of our own basic faith. It forms the core of the teachings of the three guiding spirits of Sevalaya, namely Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and Mahakavi Subramania Bharathi. All of them had first hand knowledge of the condition of the poor in India, and had worked tirelessly for their advancement. Each in his own way has shown us how to serve the poor.

Swami Vivekananda was born in an affluent family, and grew up under very comfortable circumstances. But then he became a sannyasi and voluntarily embraced poverty. He led the life of a wandering monk for over three years between 1890 and '93, wandering all over India and living on alms. He suffered hunger and indescribable physical hardships. And it gave him a taste of the life that millions of his poor countrymen had to endure. He also saw during the wanderings the degradations wrought by their poverty. Speaking of India's poor, Swamiji said: "Practical patriotism means not a mere sentiment or emotion of love of the Motherland but a passion to serve our fellow countrymen. I have gone all over India on foot and have seen with my own eyes the ignorance, misery and squalor of our people. I am burning with a fierce passion to change such evil conditions. To reach Narayana you must serve the Daridra Narayanas—the starving millions of India". To that end Swamiji started the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897. It is well known that today the Ramakrishna Mission is an organization that renders great service on many fronts to the poor in India.

It may be hard to believe, but Mahatma Gandhi was a very wealthy man at one point in his life. Within a few years of his going to South Africa he became one of the leading lawyers in that country and was earning five to six thousand pounds a year—the equivalent of, may be, Rs.Half-a-crore in today's money. In Durban he lived in a beautiful English villa on the seafront. Photographs taken during this time show him in fine European style suits, Kasturba in rich silk saris, and their children in fashionable knee-length coats and long trousers. But soon his empathy with the poor Indians gripped him, and he changed his lifestyle. He founded ashrams where he lived as an equal with the other inmates. On his return to India he totally identified himself with the poor and fought for India's freedom so that the poor would be freed from an exploitative colonial rule that had impoverished them.

Mahakavi Bharathi did not embrace poverty voluntarily. A vengeful colonial government thrust it on him by hounding him out of his job and his livelihood. He was forced to leave Madras and take refuge in Pondicherry. He and Chellammal suffered extreme poverty. But the suffering honed his genius; and he wrote some of his most hauntingly beautiful songs during that period. The songs live on and inspire us to serve the poor.

*Feed the empty stomachs of the poor
of this land,*

*Teach them many skills and elevate this
our country*

and

*One man robbing another of food, can
this custom last?*

*One man watching another suffer, can
such life survive?*

*Lovely gardens, spacious fields
innumerable enrich this land!*

*Fruits and tubers and grains in plenty,
immeasurably it yields!*

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