

Virtuous and Victorious - Always



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- ALWAYS



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© For anyone interested in the welfare of the younger generation

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Publishing Editor's Note: Entertain only noble thoughts!

Sevalaya has been providing free food and shelter to the destitute and high quality education for free to poor children for the past twenty six years. This yeomen service has been made possible thanks to the contributions in all forms and scales from interested and philanthropic-minded individuals and organizations.

In this endeavor, we collect – used and new -- dress and articles, cash, cheques and whatever can benefit the orphans and destitute senior citizens. While looking for employees who can carry out this noble but strenuous task of collection of items from donors from all corners Chennai city and its suburbs, I asked our driver: “Can you find someone who can go and collect cash, cheques and dress from donors and bring them to Sevalaya?” He said, “Sure sir, please tell me what he should have studied or what his academic qualification is required to be”. I said, “Oh, the educational qualifications are secondary; it is more important to find an honest and committed person as we want this person to get cash and other valuable items”. To which he replied, “Oh sir, just tell what qualifications are expected and what his assigned tasks would be. You cannot expect things like honesty and integrity. Who can guarantee honesty and integrity and straightforwardness in this day and age?”

This set us thinking on some fundamental questions: Is there no correlation between educational or academic qualifications and good qualities like honesty and integrity? Is it futile to expect basic – and human -- traits like honesty, truthfulness, sincerity, integrity, punctuality and social consciousness? Is our so-called “education” focusing only on superficial things instead of imbibing human and social values? Is it possible to make sure that our education system not only caters to producing academically successful students, but also ensures that these students come out as good global citizens, ethical, value driven, conscious of the environment and society?

Given the pressure on the vastness of syllabus of regular subjects and the pressure on maximizing marks and the paucity of time these create, most schools have abandoned the concept of “moral education”. But, for several years, we have been running a “Moral Science” program for all the children at Sevalaya’s school. This program is based on the principles of the Holy Trinity of Mahakavi Bharathiyar, Mahatma Gandhiji and Swami Vivekananda (fondly called “BGV”) who have been the inspiration for starting Sevalaya and who continue to be the guiding lights for all the operations of Sevalaya in the past 26 years. We have been using anecdotes and episodes from the lives of Holy Trinity to imbibe some of the required

good qualities into the minds of the children, from very young age and keep reinforcing these values through their impressionable age.

We thought about the possibility of packaging this content in the form of a book. This was motivated by a couple of incidents that happened a few years ago. There was an announcement for an award for “Innovation in education”. Close to 25,000 schools (including our school) applied for this award. Our school was one of the eight to make it to the final round. Our School’s principal who was there to take part in the final interview called me with a sense of urgency and despair and told in a voice full of disappointment “Sir, I am afraid we will not get the award”. When I asked the reason for his despair, he said “The other seven schools have brought presentations on swanky laptops and are presenting about innovations in English, Mathematics and Science. No one knows even the name of the village school from where we come.”

The organization which was giving the award said “We appreciate the 25,000 schools that have attempted innovations in education in areas that can bring in immediate financial rewards. But, in recognition of the very unique and laudable program of imparting value education based on the teachings of Bharathiyar, Gandhiji and Vivekananda, we present the award to Sevalaya”

Soon after this, Former Director General of Police asked us “Would you be able to package the content for the benefit of the prisoners?” Acceding to this request, Sevalaya teachers spoke at the prisons of Thirunelveli, Palaynkottai, Coimbatore, Trichy, Salem and Puzhal (Chennai) on the values of truth and non-violence as propounded by Gandhiji and others. So many people in the audience were moved and became emotional. One of them told “I have become old and my time is up. Please make sure you teach these in my child’s school.” Another said “I am sentenced for life. I have never participated in any of the Republic Day or Independence Day celebrations. But after listening to these lessons, for the first time, I went near our national flag and saluted it in reverence. “

In particular, there were two prisoners convicted for murder who were sitting in the front row during the lecture. As the teachers went through their lecture, these two had tears rolling uncontrollably down their eyes and cheeks. Their thought process was going through a significant change for the better. The prison officer mentioned after a few days, “After the classes, the prisoners are more disciplined and there is significantly reduced violence”.

It is then that we decided that we will do our bit to change the prevailing perception of “There is no connection between ethical value systems and formal education. It is not in the ambit of formal education to instill such values”. We decided to encapsulate the teachings and examples of Mahakavi Bharatiyaar, Mahatma Gandhiji and Swami Vivekananda in a way that can not only be *taught* easily to students but also can be *caught* by the students.

We bring out this book with absolutely no commercial motive. Anyone can download this book from the Sevalaya web site www.sevalaya.org and use the material to teach these values in their curriculum. We do not retain any copyright for this material. Rather, in this age obsessed with copyright, we are happy to give everyone a “right to copy” this book! Our vision is that

the next generations should benefit by knowing, understanding and implementing the great teachings and value systems of the Holy Trinity of BGV.

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From the Editor's Desk...

Containing a Good Genie in a Small Lamp!

For the past twenty five years and more, Sevalaya has been rendering yeomen service by providing quality education completely free of cost to more than 1925 economically disadvantaged, first generation learners, providing free food, shelter and education to 150 orphan children and taking care of 70 destitute senior citizens by providing them with shelter, food and a homely atmosphere. Sevalaya has transformed the landscape of the villages near Thirunindravur, 41 km from Chennai, from a child-labor intensive population mainly engaged in working in brick kilns with no exposure to education or even literacy to a vibrant rural area of children who not only achieve academic distinction in a competitive world, but also develop into socially conscious, environmentally responsible, successful citizens, with a global recognition.

The success of Sevalaya is built upon the values of three great visionaries of India – Mahakavi Bharathiyar, the great Tamil poet who kindled the spirit of nationalism in India and identified education as key to India's future, Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation who advocated village development and Swami Vivekananda, who highlighted the importance of feeding the poor. These three guiding lights are fondly and respectfully referred to as BGV or Holy Trinity at Sevalaya. Every student of Sevalaya school goes through a moral education class imbibing the teachings of BGV. With the noble intent of widening the reach of this Holy Trinity to other schools in Tamil Nadu, Sevalaya conducts essay and oratorical contests on topics focused on BGV. Over 200 schools from across the state participate in these contests. To facilitate them to learn about BGV, Sevalaya sends them several books free of cost. Most students say they do not find time to read these books. This set us thinking on some key questions: Can we capture the essence of BGV's teaching in a small, concise book? Can we distribute these in an environmentally-friendly and yet economical method? The e-book you are reading is the culmination of months of work to provide a viable solution to these questions.

When we embarked on this seemingly daunting task, we faced several more questions: First, given the wealth of highly relevant teachings of BGV, how do we decide what to include and what to exclude? Even when we narrow down what we want to include, how do we use a style that can easily and naturally reach out to the young readers? Third, since our goal is to make the readers apply what they learn, how do we express the learning to be something actionable that the reader can go and take the baby steps in practicing the important preaching of BGV? We decided on the following approach:

- Out of all the teachings of BGV, we chose eleven essential values that we believe are crucial for our students to internalize and practice. These eleven values are not only the

crux of BGV's preaching, but also enshrined in other related work like Thirukkural and Aathi Chuvadi.

- We decided to use a simple, easy to understand language style. We also started with a Tamil version of the book so as to maximize the reach to rural schools. This Tamil book which was freely downloadable from the Sevalaya website attracted the attention of several readers from India and abroad. Their stated need of an English translation set us in the quest for this English version.
- These eleven values are not just theoretical concepts, but have been practically demonstrated by BGV in their lives. BGV have been role models who have practiced what they preached
- In order to drive home the point that these values are applicable and practicable not only to the era of BGV, but also to the current age and times, we have shown how at Sevalaya these values have been consistently practiced, resulting in sustained success for more than 26 years.
- Finally, we do not want the student (or for that matter any other reader) to simply use this book as a quick read like a short novel. He or she should be able to practically start applying the principles and values to real life. For this, at the end of each chapter, we have given some simple tips that they can start practicing right away. By this, they can gain confidence and consistency in application to make this a habit.

Another very notable aspect of this book is that the drawings for the book are done by Abhirami, a student who grew up at Sevalaya from a tender age, now completed her graduation in fine arts, and is currently working in Lionbridge Technologies. She understood the context of each of the anecdotes in the chapters and produced an apt drawing that brings to life that anecdote in picturesque detail.

There is a Chinese proverb which says "Tell me, I will forget; show me, I will understand; involve me, I will learn". By showing the values that BGV demonstrated and Sevalaya ardently follows and by involving the students to practically apply the concepts and values learnt, we are confident that the students will not only enjoy this book, but also derive practical value that can have a lasting and permanent benefit in their lives.

Happy reading and successful practice of the value systems and principles of the Holy Trinity of BGV.

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Acknowledgements

The principles and teachings Mahakavi Bharathiyar, Mahatma Gandhiji and Swami Vivekananda – our Holy Trinity – have been our guiding light. These are being taught to the children of Sevalaya for the last 26 years. The children of Sevalaya have also internalized these teachings. The teachers at Sevalaya who have done a yeomen service in achieving this deserve our most heartfelt thanks. Their work forms the seed for this book. In particular, we would like to acknowledge with gratitude the contributions of B. Nirmala, Headmistress in Sevalaya’s school and Anu Priya Suresh, the Campus Co-ordinator

Swami Vimoorthanandaji Maharaj of Ramakrishna Misson, Chennai, Isaikkavi Ramanan and Shri. Annamalai of Gandhi Study Centre have helped us by thoroughly examining and validating the anecdotes and the style and substance of the book. Without their support, the book would not have achieved the form it has achieved. We express our heartfelt gratitude to them.

The anecdotes in the lives of the Holy Trinity have been brought to life by the wonderful drawings of S. Abhirami. We are proud to say that she was brought up in Sevalaya, completed her schooling in Sevalaya’s school, where her artistic talents were identified and nurtured. She is now working in Lionbridge Technologies, after completing her graduation in Fine Arts. We express our sincere thanks to her for contributing her artistic talent to this book.

We would like to thank the Drawing Master in our school, C. Andrews Jesudoss for the lively and colorful cover page.

We would like to thank Tamil University, Thanjavur for the book “Bharathi Patalkal” which they have published that helped us provide English translations of some of Bharathiyar’s timeless odes.

We would also like to thank Mini Philip, Head – Content Operations, Lionbridge Technologies for helping us with copy editing the manuscript.

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Gandhiji said that the value of a product is only when there are consumers who appreciate the product. This book would not have been possible but for the keen encouragement that the students gave in learning, applying and internalizing the principles and practices of the Holy Trinity that have been enshrined in this book. Words fail us when we want to express our gratitude to these children. The only way we can express this gratitude is to dedicate this book to all the young children of this society. By providing the English translation of the original Tamil book, we dedicate this book to the children of the entire world to benefit from the teachings of the Holy Trinity.

A Brief Biography of Mahakavi Bharathiyaar

Mahakavi Bharathiyaar was born on 11 December 1882 in the Ettayapuram province in Thirunelveli District. His parents were Shri.Chinnaswamy Iyer and Smt Lakshmi Ammal.

Bharathiyaar's actual name was Subramanian. All his relatives affectionately called him "Subbiah". Chinnaswamy Iyer was held in high esteem in the court of the King of the Ettayapuram province. Subbiah's initial education started under his father. Chinnaswamy Iyer possessed exquisite skills in English, Tamil and Mathematics. He wanted his son to become an expert in English and Mathematics. But Subbiah's inclination and aptitude was in Tamil poetry.

Tragedy struck Subbiah when he was five years old, when he lost his mother. Because of this he had to be brought up in the house of his maternal grandfather. His innate talent first became visible at the age of seven when he started composing his first poems. The learned people around him, impressed with his poetry, called him "Bharathi". Bharathi is another name for Saraswathi, the Goddess of Learning. True to this name, Subbiah became the standing example for poetic talent.

Even though Chinnaswamy Iyer was happy that learned poets acknowledged and recognized the young son with a prestigious title of "Bharathi", he still desired his son to get more formal education and qualifications. Hence, in the year 1894, he enrolled his son to Thirunelveli Hindu School. Subbiah studied there till 1897. On 27 June 1897, at the age of 15, Subbiah got married to Chellamma who was seven years old at that time. But Subbiah lost his father. When thus reduced to being without any support, his aunt Kuppammal who was living in Varanasi came to his help.

Subbiah resumed his studies at Varanasi. He learnt Hindi and Sanskrit there. It was there that he developed the moustache and the "*katchaiveshti*" and turban attire that he became so famous for later in his life.

In one of the events in Varanasi, the King of the Ettayapuram Province met him and asked him to come to Ettayapuram. In the year 1903, Bharathiyaar¹ returned to Ettayapuram from Varanasi. His job was to read the magazines and books to the king and to carry out research in Vedanta and Tamil literature. But at that time Bharathiyaar was deeply impressed with India's independence movement that was blossoming. He felt like a bird with wings clipped and did not relish the job he had in the king's court. Hence he quit this job in 1904.

¹From now on we will refer to Subbiah by his reverential name of Bharathiyar.

Bharathiyar's first poem "*Thanimai Irakkam*" meaning "The Melancholy of Solitude" hit the press in the magazine called "*Viveka Bhanu*" published by Poet Kandaswamy in Madurai. After that, Bharathiyar worked as a Tamil teacher in Sethupathi High School. Even this did not last for more than three months. After that, he went full time into writing poetry.

*"Namakku Thozhil Kavithai, Naattukku Uzhaithal
Imai Pozhuthum Sora Thiruthal"*

Meaning "My work is to compose poetry, work for the country and not take a moment's rest" Bharathiyar's first real foray into the freedom struggle was made possible by the newspaper "*Swadesa Mitran*". From 1904 to 1906, he wrote a number of poems that stirred the nationalistic passion in this magazine. In order to give vent to the relentless flow of nationalist emotions that was encompassing him, Bharathiyar started a magazine called "India" in 1906, with the help of one Thirumalachariya.

In January, 1908, Bharathiyar independently published a book called "*Sudesa Geethangal*" (meaning "Songs of self-rule") which contained 14 songs of poetic and nationalist fervour. But because of the autocratic British rule, the India magazine was banned. An arrest warrant was issued to arrest Bharathiyar. Under these circumstances, his friends convinced Bharathiyar to flee to Pondicherry which was under French rule and not under British domination. After reaching Pondicherry in September, 1908, Bharathiyar resumed the "India" magazine and continued it for one and a half years. He also released a magazine called "Vijaya" in 1909. He garnered and sent resources for the cause of the South African Netal Tamil Sangam. He started again working for *Swadesa Mitran* in 1915. From 1909 to 1913, he wrote many poems and did many translations which made him famous.

When Bharathiyar left Pondicherry in 1918, he was immediately arrested by the British. After a 22 day imprisonment, Bharathiyar was released. In March, 1919, Bharathiyar came to Madras (now Chennai). He met Gandhiji and started delivering many patriotism-awakening lectures. Ironically, the last lecture he delivered was entitled "*Manithanakku Maranamillai*". ("Man is immortal")

Bharathiyar was very devoted to God and spiritually inclined. Every day he used to go to Sri Parthasarathy Temple in Triplicane, in Madras and pray. He used to be very friendly with the temple elephant. But once the elephant got wild. Not heeding to others' warnings, Bharathiyar went near the elephant to feed it. The mad elephant lifted him with its trunk and threw him down. Bharathiyar's very intimate friend Kuvaiyur Krishnamachariar rescued and took good care of the unconscious and badly hurt Bharathiyar. Even though Bharathiyar recovered from the shock of being thrown down by the elephant, his physical health never really improved. His health took a turn for the worse in September 1921. Just past midnight of 11 September, 1921, Bharathiyar lost his life.

Bharathiyar lived in this planet for a fleeting short 39 years, but in this short period, he has achieved what people do not achieve in a century of life time.

The poet that lit up the world with his poetic skills, the great soul that stirred up the nationalist sentiments attained immortality.

A Brief Biography of Mahatma Gandhi

The person whom the whole world reveres as “Mahatma” (or “Great Soul”) was born as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in 1869 at Porbunder. His father, Karamchand Gandhi, was a Diwan in the province of Porbunder. He was well known for his honesty, integrity and determination. Mohandas’s mother, Putlibai, was spiritual and religious minded with a sharp intellect. Mohandas was the fourth child of these parents.

The foundation for Mohandas becoming Mahatma was laid very early in his life. He saw a play on the mythological character Harischandra. This etched the importance of truth firmly in the young boy’s mind. Another play of another mythological character Sravan impressed him with the importance of being respectful to parents. Once, because of the misleading path shown by some of his class mates, Mohandas got involved in eating meat, smoking and stealing. Soon, he realized he was straying from the path of virtue. Feeling really ashamed, he wrote a confessional letter to his father, accepting any punishment that may be meted out. But his father, without uttering a word, tore the letter, displaying his sadness on his face, shed tears. This really touched Mohandas and he broke down crying. This was the first exposure to non-violence that Mohandas had and it left a lasting impression on him.

In keeping with the traditions and practices prevailing at that time, Mohandas got married at a very young age. His wife, Kasturba, was an ideal wife, who stood by him in thick and thin, even undergoing some imprisonments and finally passed away in 1944.

His desire to pursue his higher studies in law in London met with stiff opposition from the society as well as faced serious financial hurdles. More than everything else, his mother was very concerned that her son would succumb to the temptations of western life and fall a prey to undesirable habits. The promise he made his mother at that time that he will not touch wine and women and will not eat meat was kept up not only during the trip but also throughout his life.

After finishing his Barrister study in London, Mohandas returned to India and stayed for a brief while. After that, in 1893 he left for South Africa in connection with the law suit of one Dhadha Abdullah. His train journey when he traveled in first class with a valid ticket and was thrown out just because he was an Indian started a great transformation in him. He became more acutely aware of the plight faced by the discrimination arising out of apartheid policies against Indians. At the young age of 24 years, he shouldered the responsibility of fighting for their cause. The unique method of “satyagraha” was born and resulted in the establishment of several ashrams – a practice that continued well into the freedom struggle in India. What was intended to be a

short trip of a few weeks, turned out to be a stay of 21 long years which catapulted Gandhi to be a leader of eminence. Mohandas Gandhi had been transformed into Mahatma Gandhi – or Gandhiji.

In 1914, Gandhiji returned to India. Heeding to the advice of Shri. Gopalakrishna Gokhale, he travelled the length and breadth of the country in train in third class so as to mingle with the common man and understand the pulse of the nation.

He transformed the Indian National Congress from an organization which was simply congregating once a year and submitting petitions to Government to a vibrant, nationalistic, people-centered organization. He started to dress like a common man in white dhoti and a towel. He started the practice of satyagraha which he so successfully deployed in South Africa. This was implemented successfully in Sambharan in 1917, Ahmedabad in 1918 and Geda in 1918. In the euphoria that followed very successful peaceful protests, in one remote place, violence broke out. Even though it was a stray incidence, Gandhiji took moral responsibility for the violence and withdrew the entire protests. In addition to withdrawing the protests, he even publicly admitted that it was “his Himalayan mistake” to start the satyagraha method when the people were not ready to follow this unique ahimsa model.

In 1930, Gandhi launched his epoch making Salt Satyagraha. This was the zenith of the satyagraha. As the British Viceroy said at that time, this marked the beginning of the end of the inherent fear that Indians had for British. The “Quit India” (*“Vellaiyane Veliyeru”*) movement of 1942 was the last nail in the coffin of the British Rule. Gandhiji thought well beyond the freedom struggle to plan for the social welfare of people after independence. Key among these constructive action programmes were promoting communal harmony, abolishing of untouchability, ushering in total prohibition, use of handloom clothes (khadar) and basic education.

When India was celebrating independence and unfurling the Tri-color in Red Fort on 15 August, 1947, Gandhiji was undertaking a fast in Calcutta to control the Hindu-Muslim fights. Even at that advancing age, Gandhiji walked personally through the riot torn areas to usher in peace. This Navakaliyatra was etched in the annals of history forever.

It is unfortunate that no one understood Gandhiji’s noble intentions in the last days of his life. On 30 January 1948, Gandhiji fell a victim to the gunshot of a radical. Even at that juncture, noble thoughts did not desert him. He succumbed to the gun shot uttering the holy words “Hey Ram” and attained immortality.

A Brief Biography of Swami Vivekananda

On 12 January, 1863, Narendranath was born as the eldest son to Viswanatha Dutta and Bhuvaneshwari Devi in the city of Calcutta in West Bengal in the banks of River Hugli. Narendranath's mother was an ardent devotee of Lord Siva in the holy city of Varanasi. The Lord answered her prayers with the birth of Narendranath, who was later to become Swami Vivekananda, the force that will re-establish the glories of the Hindu religion and ignite the spark in the youth that led to the independence movement.

Narendranath started his education at the age of four. He was not only very smart in academic lessons, but was also very interested in physical activities, exercises and games. He excelled in high jump, running, boxing, and goli (marbles). He participated in all the sports activities in the court of the king. He had to discontinue studies for two years because of his father's job but came back with a bang and finished all the three years education in one year. After studying for a year in the state college, he moved to a college called General Assembly Institution. In 1884, he graduated with a B.A degree. He also learnt music formally and could play any musical instrument.

Even from a very young age, Narendranath displayed a keen interest and curiosity in spirituality and religion. He used to ask probing and thought provoking questions to people whom he met. One question that was uppermost in his mind that he was seeking answer to was "Is there a God? Has anyone seen Him?" In his incessant search for answer to this question, he met and talked to several people, but no one could answer the question to his satisfaction. It was at this juncture that he met Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Not only did he finally find the answer to his long pending question, but he also discovered someone who was going to have lifelong influence on him.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa said "All the devotees are like stars. But Naren (as Narendranath was fondly called) is like Sun among the stars. He is an enlightened soul born to help others" and "When I give up this mortal body (i.e., when I die), my soul will work with Naren to realize all my dreams. I believe Naren is the most qualified and exalted soul who is capable of achieving this"

Naren's life came under a storm when he was 21. In 1884, his father passed away. Being the eldest son, the responsibility of the family befell his young shoulders. In less than two years, on 16 August 1886, Naren's Guru and Guide Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa attained his heavenly abode. Both these made Naren feel like a rudderless ship and made him lead a detached life.

Within a couple of years of his Master's death, with the guidance of Holy Mother Sarada Devi, who was Sri Ramakrishna's wife and like a mother to all his disciples, Naren along with several disciples of Sri Ramakrishna formed the Ramakrishna Mission, chartered to realize all the dreams and vision of the Master.

In 1893, Naren – by that time better known as Swami Vivekananda in his ascetic life -- went to the US and delivered his epoch making lecture at the Parliament of Religions. This lecture starting with the powerfully emotional “My dear Sisters and Brothers of America” captivated everyone in the audience to a standing ovation and made people take note of him with a lot of respect and reverence. He gave lectures on six topics in this Parliament of Religions. “Hindu Religion”, “All religions are true”, “Hindu religion teaches acceptance and tolerance of all other religions” were some of the topics that enlightened the audience on the finer aspects of the Hindu religion.

Swami Vivekananda returned to India on January 15, 1897. He visited Chennai and stayed in a place called Ice House on the famous Marina Beach. This building is now called Vivekananda House and a cultural center is being planned. Swamiji stayed here for nine days and delivered thought provoking and absorbing lectures. Even today, the devotees from Madras (now Chennai) call this “Vivekananda Nava Rathri”. This was a golden period of Madras. Swami Vivekananda sent his close disciple Swami Ramakrishananda Maharaj to Madras and started the Ramakrishna Mission in Mylapore in Madras. Even today, this institution is a beacon of light rendering yeomen service to people in the areas of education, health care and other social causes.

Swami Vivekananda undertook one more foreign trip in 1889-1890. He spent his last days in the Belur Mutt that he founded . Until his last day, he continued his mission of educating and helping people. On July 4, 1902, he left this mortal body for the heavenly abode while meditating on his Guru, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

Even though Swami Vivekananda left this world at a young age of 39, he accomplished so much in this short life span. He has also left a wonderful legacy and an ecosystem for generations to continue his monumental work.

1 Belief in God and Self - Confidence

Swami Vivekananda was once climbing up a steep and long mountain path in the Himalayas. He saw an elderly person sitting under a tree looking very tired and worried. Concerned, Swamiji asked him what the matter was. The person replied “I am extremely tired. How am I going to scale the rest of the mountain path and reach my destination? I can’t move one more step. I am feeling so low.” Swamiji immediately understood that it was not physical weakness but mental weakness that was holding back the man. Swamiji said, “Look behind you – see the long and steep path behind. You have crossed all that and have come here. Your destination is just a short distance ahead. Once you reach there, even where you are now will appear behind you”. Encouraged and motivated by these invigorating and stimulating words, the old man found a spring in his feet and started sprinting towards the peak and scaled it quickly.



Often we face in life problems akin to this, that look insurmountable and we get dejected by the situation. Somehow when we cross the hurdle and look back, we will be pleasantly surprised – and even puzzled – on how we did it. How is this possible? In addition to our efforts, there is an unknown and invisible force that propels us to success. Where does this force come from? How do we get the extra energy and drive to scale new heights? In Physics, we know of the Law of Conservation of Energy which says energy can neither be created nor destroyed; it can only be converted from one form to another. Just like an electric fan converts electrical energy into mechanical energy and solar heaters convert solar energy to heat energy, there must be something that gives us that pep, or that energy boost just when we need it. Where does this energy, this power come from? It is the divine source.

Our wholehearted efforts are absolutely essential and necessary to achieve anything we

go after – but those efforts alone are not sufficient. We need to tap into an infinite energy source that is unseen but can be felt, sensed and relished. That energy source is the energy from the Divine. Once we develop that faith, we can draw energy from this Divine source anytime we want by means such as prayer, meditation. We will find that it adds an entirely new dimension to our self-confidence and self-belief. It further strengthens our belief and trust in the Divine force. Thus, self-confidence and faith in the Divine force are mutually reinforcing.

What we refer to as “Divinity” in this chapter transcends all religions and faiths. You can call the Divinity by any name you want – Rama, Krishna, Allah, Christ or Buddha or anything else. So long as you accept an infinite storehouse of energy superior to us and do not hesitate to bow down and draw energy from it, the name is only symbolic. With this acceptance, you will doubtless notice a significant increase in your self-confidence. It is only to remind us of this, that enlightened souls like Gandhiji, Swami Vivekananda and Bharathiyar were born in this planet.

Does it seem contradictory that having faith in a force higher than us – and perhaps unknown to us – increases our self-confidence? Far from it. The two viz., trust in a Divine force, and our self-confidence – are actually mutually reinforcing. A couple of anecdotes from the life of Gandhiji explain this succinctly:

When he was a young boy, Gandhiji used to be afraid of darkness because someone had told him that ghosts and demons usually dwell and revel in darkness. A servant maid in his house, seeing the scared young boy, advised him on the efficacy of constantly chanting the name of Lord Rama and how that would remove all fears and doubts that lurch around in one’s mind.

He used to tell his fellow residents in his ashram, “The river is always full of water. But if a man does not take his pot and go to the river giving an excuse that ‘I am afraid the water may be poisoned’, what can the river do? God is the infinite source of energy for all of us. What we have to do is to bow down and take the sip of energy we need from Him. When we don’t do that, we are engulfed with self-doubt, worries and unnecessary fears”. Gandhiji internalised this advice and demonstrated this strong faith in several occasions. Here is an example:

Once Gandhiji was visiting Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan who was popularly known as “Frontier Gandhi”. Gandhiji observed that the house was surrounded by gun-toting security guards. When Gandhiji enquired the reason for the presence of these guards, Frontier Gandhi replied, “Bapuji¹, there may be attempts to harm you; these guards are there to protect you from any such attacks”. Gandhiji, the very epitome of belief in Divinity and brimming with an equal measure of self-confidence, said “For someone who believes in a Divine Force above, where is the need for any other protection? Hence, please remove all the guns and weapons”. Everyone was amazed at Gandhiji’s great poise, self-confidence and his trust in the Divinity. True, how can fear even approach the leader who was a role model of values to our entire nation? Neither the power of the British governmental machinery nor the guns managed to scare him. Frequent imprisonment, fasting and near encounters with death never fazed him even one bit. How was this possible? Where did this courage come from?

¹ “Bapuji” was a term by which Gandhiji was reverentially and affectionately called by many people.

It is from the faith in Divinity, the fountain of infinite energy. It is not an exaggeration to say that this faith in the Divinity helped blossom his self-confidence and belief and conviction in the value systems that sowed the seeds of Indian independence movement.

Swami Vivekananda says “Whoever lacks self-confidence, he is a true atheist. Your self-confidence will manifest the divinity within you. You are capable of immense and infinite potential. Children of God! You are immortal, possessed with indestructible souls”

Enthusiasm, energy, fearlessness, endless passion, self-confidence, persistence, patience, strength – these are all hallmarks of a successful person. The foundation for all these lies in an unshakable faith in the Divinity.

Swamiji not only understood the correlation between faith in Divinity and self-confidence, he also recognized, preached and practiced the importance of dhyana or meditation as the essential means to bring to fore all the latent talents in a human being. He insisted that everyone in the Mutt should focus on dhyana. He never failed to recognize and applaud anyone who was engaged in dhyana. He did not hesitate to admonish anyone in the Mutt who did not follow the rules of meditation.

Every morning at 4AM, the meditation session would start in Mutt. The temple bells will chime precisely at 4AM and everyone was expected to be present within five minutes after that chime. Whoever failed to do so was denied food. One day, when Swamiji found very few people in the prayer session, he told the person in charge of kitchen “Give me the kitchen keys; tell everyone that there is no food”. Saying that, he took the keys and went to Kolkata (then Calcutta). Such was his faith in meditation, and Divine power. No wonder he was the personification of self-confidence that caused an awakening in India. In his short life-time, Swamiji not only achieved many things himself, he was also instrumental in starting Sri Ramakrishna Mission which has contributed in building many successful people with great self-confidence. What better endorsement or proof is needed to establish the strong connection between meditation, divinity, self-confidence and success in life?

Bharathiyar has also explained the strong inter-dependence between faith in Divinity and self-confidence in several of his poetic works. His song “*Achamillai, Achamillai*” brings out the importance of fearlessness succinctly. That is why we have made this the prayer song that children sing every day at Sevalaya. Self-confidence results in knowledge. In Bharathiyar’s views, belief in God does not end with just singing His praises. A true prayer should enhance knowledge. Knowledge and self-confidence are essential byproducts of faith in God. By his poems “*Asaivura Madhi Ketten*” (“I asked for a steady, non-vacillating mind”), “*Vazhvu Perukkum Madhiye Sakthi*” (“mind or knowledge that enhances life”) and “*Gnanam Ongi Valarndida Seyven*” (“will do what is needed to further knowledge”), Bharathiyar has established the inseparable links between faith in Divinity and self-confidence.

Your self-confidence is like the battery in your cell phone. This is what you use to motivate you to work towards success. There will be times when your battery may be down. This may result in your feeling low on energy or motivation. Divine power is like the source of power is available in your plug point. All you have to do is to recharge yourself – your battery – from the infinite source of energy.

SEVALAYA's EXPERIENCES

Mr. Malcolm Lane from the United Kingdom was one of Sevalaya's well-wishers. When he was diagnosed with cancer, he called his close friend and Sevalaya's managing trustee Muralidharan and informed him about this. The children of Sevalaya, who hold Mr. Lane with great love and esteem, conducted a heartfelt, mass prayer, praying for Mr. Lane's wellbeing. In addition, about seven hundred students signed a get-well card and sent it to the hospital in London where Mr. Lane was undergoing treatment.

When Mr. Lane recovered sufficiently, he flew to India, visited Sevalaya, held the get-well card high in the school assembly and said "The doctors had given up on me. But, thanks to your prayers and God's benevolence, I got touched and moved that so many people love me. This gave me a huge boost of self-confidence and helped me recover".

In 2013, Mr. Lane succumbed to cancer. But even four days before his death, from his death bed he donated to Sevalaya's cause from his laptop. Such was the effect of divinity on his poise, equanimity and courage.

GIVE IT A TRY

Every day identify one or two activities—however small they are—and completely accomplish them that day itself, without leaving any loose ends. Whether it is completing that day's homework or whether it is the task of cleaning up your room or clearing the questions your sibling or friend had. Do not procrastinate!

The feeling of accomplishing what you planned consistently will make it a habit for you to keep up your commitments and increase your self-confidence.

Write down your strengths and relish what you do well. Feel and enjoy a deep sense of pride about these. Look at the glass as half full and never as half empty.

Feel your self-confidence surging!

Complete your duty diligently without any expectations on results. Realize and accept that the results are only in the hands of the Divine force. You will feel a fountain of happiness, self-confidence and energy within you and feel less pressurized.

Devote at least ten minutes for prayers and meditation. Thank that Divine force for giving us this life and for being the infinite source of energy from which we draw inspiration as and when we need it. This is the least we can do for the divine force.

2 Dream and Have a Vision!

A few years ago, our erstwhile President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam created a fresh awakening among our youth with his concept of “Vision 2020”. What is visioning? How does an individual and the society around him benefit from visioning? Let us see what our Holy Trinity says about it.



When you leave home every day, do you just go without a target and take a random walk? Do you get into the first bus that comes along and go wherever that bus takes you? Will a person rowing a boat just leave the boat to follow the currents? Most certainly not! If we have to know our destination for just a single, short journey, does it make sense to go on in our lives without a clear target or a goal? We will wholeheartedly agree that it is not right. But the fact of the matter is that most people do not put the required time, energy and commitment to develop this long term target (also called vision) and work towards achieving it.

So what is this concept of “dreaming” or “visioning”? What are its characteristics? Here are a few:

You should be able to express your vision succinctly and in a nutshell: Swami

Vivekananda expresses his vision like this: “I need just a few words to express my vision: To make every human being realize the divinity within them and to help them manifest this divinity in every action. Whatever man has achieved in the fields of art, science, technology or social work is all manifestations of this divinity”. What a crystal clear articulation of Swamiji’s goal of making everyone see divinity in the work they do!

A good vision is not just about the end destination, but also about the means to reach that destination: Gandhiji was not only clear that his goal was independence for India, but was equally clear and firm that non-violence (“ahimsa”) was a non-negotiable part of achieving his vision. If the vision is only about the end without including the means, then there

is every likelihood and temptation of cutting corners and using unethical means to reach the goal.

Effective visioning requires a visualization of imagining that we have indeed achieved the target: When we have a dream in our mind, it is essential to picture how it would be when we actually reach that goal. (Note that we say “when” and not “if”). For instance, Mahakavi Bharathiyar passed away in 1921. India became independent a full twenty six years after that. Yet, look at Bharathiyar’s powerful lyrics:

*Aaduvome Pallu Paaduvome
Ananda Sudandiram Adainthu Vittomendru*

This means “Let us sing and dance merrily that we have got our joyous independence”. When we envision and imagine how it would be when we achieve our target and relish this happy thought, it will inject new energy and make the dream a reality. Bharathiyar is a great example of this, when he envisioned – and celebrated – independence a full quarter century before India actually became independent.

Anticipate obstacles in your path to the goal: Be prepared to tackle such obstacles with determination, perseverance and intelligence: How many obstacles did Gandhiji face in his quest for independence? Long spells of imprisonment; untold physical torture; trials and tribulations galore. But none could stop Gandhiji from achieving his goal of independence through non-violent means. Bharathiyar explains the importance of not abandoning our goal with these lines.

*Nalladhor Veenai Seydu Adhai
Nalam Keda Puzhuithiyil Erivathundo?*

This means “after building a beautiful veena (which produces melodious tunes), would you want to consign it to dirt?” Swami Vivekananda brings out this message in a very stimulating manner: “Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life – think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brains, nerves, muscles and every part of the body be full of that idea and just leave every other idea alone”. How powerful and inspiring!

A good vision should encompass public welfare: “I should be a millionaire in the next two years” does not qualify to be a good vision by itself. A vision that does not address public welfare is no more than a myopic, self-centered greed. The above target of becoming a millionaire will qualify for a good vision only when the wealth (or at least part of it) is channeled towards building schools, hospitals and so on. Our desire to serve should transcend our selfish needs and the needs of the immediate family, and should extend to our extended families, the society in which we live - helping the temples and places of worship in our neighborhood and contributing to build schools and hospitals that help uplift the society.

Take for example Gandhiji’s goal of independence and Swami Vivekananda’s goal of making everyone realize the divinity within. How well they meet the criteria set forth above!

Bharathiyar brings out these traits of the lofty end goal in his characteristically crisp manner:

Oorukku Nallathu Solven
Enakkunmai Therindadhu Solven

and

Dhanamum Inbamum Vendum –
Dharaniyile Perumai Vendum

Which means “I will tell what I know and what is good for the society” and “let the world be filled with wealth, happiness and pride”.

He also articulates the process of achieving such goals by the following verses:

Arivile Thelivu Vendum, Nenjile Urudhi Vendum,
Agathile Anbu vendum”

“(To achieve the goals), you need to have clarity in your thought process, strength in your mind and kindness in your heart”

He even goes down to the next level of detail:

Manathil Urudhi Vendum
Vakkinile Inimai Vendum
Ninaivu Nallathu Vendum
Nerungina Porul Kaippada Vendum
Kanavu Meyppada vendum
Kaivasamaavadhu Viraivil Vendum
Dhanamum Inbamum Vendum
Dharaniyile Perumai Vendum
Kann Thirandida Vendum
Kaariyathil Urudhi Vendum
Penn Viduthalai Vendum
Periya Kadavul Kakka Vendum
Mann Payanura Vendum
Vaanagam Ingu Then Pada Vendum
Unmai Nindruda Vendum
Om Om Om!

“You need determination in your mind,
Sweetness in your words
Think only of good things,
Achieve your goals,
Realize your dreams,
And achieve them quickly,
Let us all achieve wealth and happiness
Let the world be filled with pride,
Let there be enlightenment
Let there be determination (to achieve the goals),

Let women be empowered
Let the Supreme Power protect us,
Let Mother Earth benefit,
Let us realize the heavens here (on this Earth),
Let Truth prevail

Om, Om, Om (peace)

These words uttered almost a century ago, continue to inspire generations!

SEVALAYA's EXPERIENCES

The teachings of the holy trinity of Bharathiyaar, Gandhiji and Swami Vivekananda sowed the seeds of the dream and vision of a young boy. The unrelenting pursuit of this dream has resulted in the colossal banyan tree of Sevalaya that provides education, food and shelter to so many underprivileged people today and will continue to be the fountain of hope for generations to come.

GIVE IT A TRY

Cultivate social-welfare based, long term and lofty targets, dreams and visions. Nurture, pursue and develop such dreams and you will see that they blossom from tiny seeds to gigantic trees. You will start experiencing a new and invigorating flow of energy and enthusiasm that will add a new zest to your life.

Write down your dreams and visions in paper (or on the computer if you are tech-savvy!) Revisit this document at least once a month and ask yourself whether you are making progress to achieve these goals. If you feel you are not making progress, think of and implement any corrective actions right away to get you on track to achieve the goals.

True to the adage, “where there is a will, there is a way”, take a page out of the examples and sayings of our Holy Trinity, dream big and achieve your dreams!

3. Selfless Service is Important

All through our life – from birth through youth and adulthood to our twilight years – we enjoy several benefits from the society and the environment around us. It is our bounden duty to repay this to the maximum extent possible. Simply being at the receiving end of all benefits without doing our bit to give back something amounts to nothing less than daylight robbery. Social service and giving back to the society and environment is as important as breathing and eating and drinking water.

Poet Thiruvalluvar has underscored the importance of social service by dedicating one full “adhikara” of ten couplets to this topic. Here is one such couplet.

*Otha Tharivaan Uyirvaazhvaan Matraiyaal
Seththaarul Vaikkap Padum*

which means:

“Who knows what’s human life’s befitting grace, he lives; the rest should be considered to be amongst the dead”.

In other words, the great poet equates those who don’t discharge their social service responsibilities to dead bodies.

The path of righteousness (called “dharma”) and the mindset for social service is a tradition that is deep rooted in the culture and tradition of Tamilnadu, nay, of entire India. Protecting and continuing this rich tradition, especially in these days of mechanical, self-centered life, is of paramount importance to today’s youth. In this chapter we will see how our Holy Trinity of BGV preach and practice this important adage and how we can implement this in our lives.

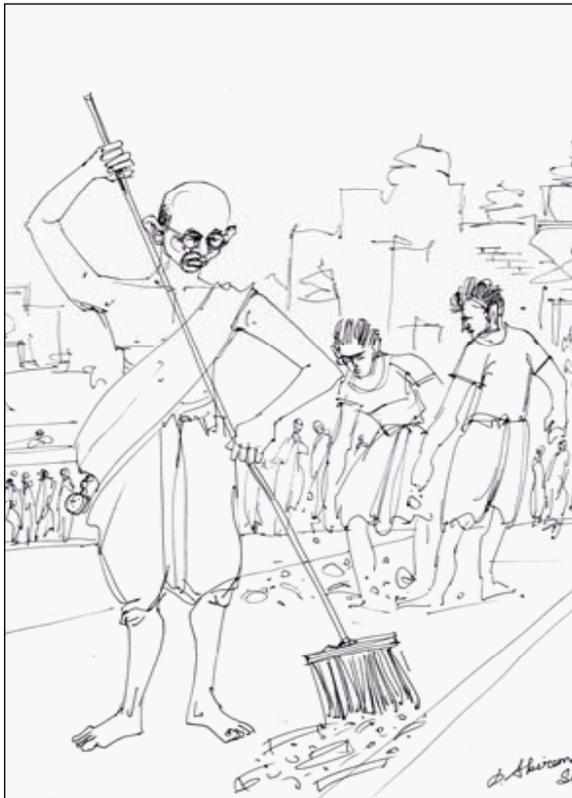
Social service means making sure we make available to the needy what would benefit them in a timely manner: For a hungry man, it is important to feed him first. Instead if we play melodious music, he would not be able to enjoy it. Similarly, giving appropriate medicines to a sick person at the right time is an example of a good social service. Swami Vivekananda extols true social service in simple language: “There are lots of people around you who are mired in poverty and suffering. You reach out to them, instill your happiness and enthusiasm in them and serve them; shower on them your full attention, give them necessary medicines; give food to the hungry; impart education to the extent possible to the ones needing it; When you wholeheartedly serve your brethren around you, you will feel a sense of peace and tranquility in you”

Social service is enhancing people’s knowledge and making them self-reliant, standing on their own legs: Helping others in the society does not mean that the recipients should be made to feel subservient or like beggars. Instead, they should be made self-reliant and be able to independently stand on their own feet. This can make them self-confident and in turn make them further agents of change in the quest for social service and welfare. This can further accelerate the accrual of benefits to the society at large. Bharathiyaar captures the essence of this message in his beautiful verse:

*Innurungani Cholaigal Seythal
Iniya Neerthan Sunaigal Iyatral
Anna Chathiram Aayiram Vaithal
Aalayam Padinaayiram Naattal
Pinnarulla Dharumangal Yaavum
Peyar Viangi Olira Niruthal
Anna Yaavinum Punniyam Kodi
Aangor Yezhaiku Ezhuthu Arivithal*

“Even if you build beautiful parks and gardens, dig more ponds and create drinking water and build rest houses and temples, none of these is as beneficial or meritorious as enlightening a poor child with valuable education”

Gandhiji also created a significant awareness about the need for independence in the minds of people. This sharpened their intellect and enabled them to better appreciate this need. This increased the effectiveness of their commitment to the cause.



Social service first, your personal needs later:

There is a misconception that we can help the society only after all our personal needs are met. This misconception has been refuted by the thought, words and deeds of our Holy Trinity. Bharathiyaar was offered the title of the “Court Poet” by the Ettayapuram province. This entitled him to a luxurious life. But he spurned the tempting offer and dedicated his life to writing poetry, participating in independence struggle and engaging in social service. This put him and his family to untold physical suffering to the extent that there were times when he did not have money to get medicines for his child and even to feed his family. Because of these sufferings, even though he died at a very young age, his works and legacy have become immortal.

Mahatma Gandhi too had options that were at his call for a luxurious and comfortable life

in South Africa. He had a comfortable home on the beach front, plenty of money and could literally have all materialistic needs satisfied. He gave up all these voluntarily and put service to the society and nation ahead of his personal needs. He even went to the extent of cleaning the streets and toilets as a part of his social service. Indeed Gandhiji was the epitome of social service – who can have such a long term vision and such an unparalleled care for the benefit of the society?

Swami Vivekananda also reinforces the importance of social service. “To put yourself and your needs ahead of the needs of the society is a cardinal sin. Whoever acts thinking he will have to have all the riches first and enjoy them is a very selfish person. As for myself, I don’t even care about going to heaven. If my going to hell can benefit my brethren here, I am ready to go to hell”.

Social service goes beyond helping human beings. It extends to helping other living beings as well as preserving the environment: All living organisms –water borne, living in land, birds, insects, plants, trees just to name a few – are all creations of God. They all have to be equally cared for. That is what true social service is about. An incident in Bharathiyaar’s life illustrates this: Bharathiyaar was living in utter poverty. In fact, his wife had to borrow rice from neighbors for their daily meal. That time, Bharathiyaar saw a lot of sparrows. Being compassionate to the tiny birds, he distributed the rice to them and took delight in seeing the little birds merrily peck at the rice. How many people have this broad mindedness and compassion towards birds and powerless creatures!

Service to the society is service to God: Swami Vivekananda says “Serve the children of God. If you get such an opportunity, by serving them, you are actually serving God. If God gives you the opportunity to serve any of his children, consider it a blessing, a privilege. Do not feel overly proud or arrogant. You are privileged and lucky to be the chosen one to get this opportunity. Hence, do this as a service to God.

You cannot help someone else, you can only serve them: Swami Vivekananda further says “Remove the word ‘help’ from your vocabulary and dictionary. You cannot ‘help’ anyone. If you have even a momentary illusion that you are ‘helping’ someone, you are insulting God. It is only on the divine will of God that you are here. You can only worship God by serving others. Even when you feed a crumb of bread to a dog, worship the dog as God. God is omnipresent and is present even in the dog.” Indeed this is crystal clear articulation of the principle of service to the society!

Social service should be done with utmost sincerity: Just because social service is done “for someone else”, we shouldn’t take a careless and lackadaisical approach. We should in fact put in several times more effort and sincerity in public service than what we put in for our own endeavors. An incident in Mahatma Gandhiji’s life amply illustrates this point. When Gandhiji was leaving South Africa, his well-wishers gave him a touching farewell party and gave him some expensive gifts like gold jewelry. But Gandhiji immediately created a charitable trust for the welfare of the poor and downtrodden in South Africa and donated all the gifts to this noble cause. When Kasturba asked “Aren’t these gifts symbolic of the deep love the people have for you? Is it fair for you not to accept these gifts yourself?”, Gandhiji’s reply was “When we are in public service, we should be doubly careful and doubly honest and transparent in everything

we do.” This far sighted vision and principle of Gandhiji is a valuable lesson for everyone in public service even today.

You will elevate yourself to a new level by social service: Barrister Mohandas Gandhi was traveling in a first class coach to Pretoria. In the Pietermaritzburg station, he was thrown out of the train. This resulted in a remarkable transformation. Barrister Mohandas Gandhi was at that time reborn as Mahatma Gandhiji. In this new avatar or incarnation, he whipped up the dormant nationalistic feelings in Indians, aroused their self-respect and dedicated his entire life to public service. Here is a stellar example that by dedicating yourself to public service, you not only benefit the society at large, but also elevate yourself to a new level.

SEVALAYA's EXPERIENCES

Each and every one of the points mentioned in this chapter has been in practice at Sevalaya for the past twenty six years. In fact, even the name “Sevalaya” means “temple of service”.

The teachers at Sevalaya’s school do not view their job as a mere means of working for their livelihood and their daily bread. They view their work as service and dedication to God. This sincerity and devotion has enabled them to invoke and encourage the enthusiasm and passion for learning in the students. The proof for this is that, thanks to this dedication of teachers and students, Sevalaya has been consistently achieving 100% results in the board exams for several years.

Sevalaya has been successful in making the students self-reliant and responsible citizens. The alumni have all been engaged in fruitful vocations and are successfully pursuing higher education and careers. One of them – Ilayaraja – who grew up in Sevalaya and completed his degree in Information Technology, is today a successful globetrotting software engineer.

What is even more interesting is that he is a Trustee in Sevalaya and makes sure he spends whatever time he gets in weekends and holidays in Sevalaya, rendering social service. Recently, fifty of the alumni of Sevalaya have started an initiative called “aalam vizhudu” (which means Banyan tree). Just like tiny figs of banyan trees grow big and become self-sustaining and give shade for generations to come, the Sevalaya alumni have taken it upon themselves to nurture future generations of the needy.

GIVE IT A TRY

Once or twice a week, try to teach the younger children in your school some subject or topics. See them realize their benefits and at the same time see how your own communication skills blossom!

Dedicate some time to clean up the environment in and around your school.

Try to help the elderly people in your street or in your neighborhood in whatever way you can.

4 Importance and Role of Money

Our literature and scriptures present seemingly very contradictory views about money or material wealth. While Thirukural extols the power of wealth by several couplets, like the one below,

Porulallavarip Porulaagach Cheyyum
Porulalla Thillai Porul

which means that besides wealth, nothing can change people of no importance to people of some importance. But we are also warned by other scriptures that

Madiyinil Ganam Irundhaalhan
Vazhiyil Bayam Irukkum

implying that possession of wealth causes fear (of loss), insecurity and lack of peace of mind.

These contradicting viewpoints can leave a young mind confused. Is it right to pursue accumulating wealth? Or should we forego pursuit of wealth?

Any tool can be put to use for good purposes or for bad purposes. The problem is not with the tool, but with the user's intention and the actual use to which he or she puts the tool to. Be it for the controversial nuclear energy or for money, this is indeed universally applicable.

Our Holy Trinity has illustrated the importance of earning money, and deploying it for noble causes, in a very unambiguous manner.

Bharathiyar says

Thaniyoru Manithanukku Unavu Illaiyinil
Jagathai Azhithiduvom

“If an individual does not get his daily bread (food), we will destroy the world”.

Now, if every individual in the world has to be fed, how is it possible without recourse to money? He also expounds:

Kai Vasamaavadhu Viraiivil Vendum
Dhanamum Inbamum Vendum

“Let the goals be achieved quickly and let there be wealth and happiness”.

Hence, it is obvious that it is neither wrong nor sinful to go after money. In order for happiness to co-exist with wealth, he gives an important advice: “*Mann Payanura Vendum*”, meaning let the earth (society) benefit from this. Thus, the conclusion one can draw from this is that, wealth begotten and channeled to public good can result in happiness and contentment.

Bharathiyaar also gives the way to accomplish this:

“Thirai Kadal Odiyum Thiraviyam Thedu”

which encourages trans-ocean trade. To further stress the importance of trade and commerce as a means to earn wealth, he further says

*Velli Pani Malaiyin Meethulavuvom -
Adi Melaik Kadal Muzhuthum Kappal Viduvom
Palli Thalam Anaithum Kovil Seiguvom
Engal Bharatha Desam Endru Thol Kottuvom
Ayudham Seivom – Nalla Kaagidam Seyvom
Aalaigal Vaippom Kalvi Chaalaigal Vaippom
Oyudhal Seiyyom Thalai Saayudhal Seyyom
Unmaigal Solvom Pala Vanmaigal Seivom*

”We will saunter over the silver-Himalayas
And sail our ships all over the Western main
We will make temples of our schools everywhere
And stroke our shoulders proclaiming ‘Bharat land’
We will make weapons and paper too
We will start factories as well as schools
We will not rest or droop our heads
We will speak truth and do benevolent deeds”



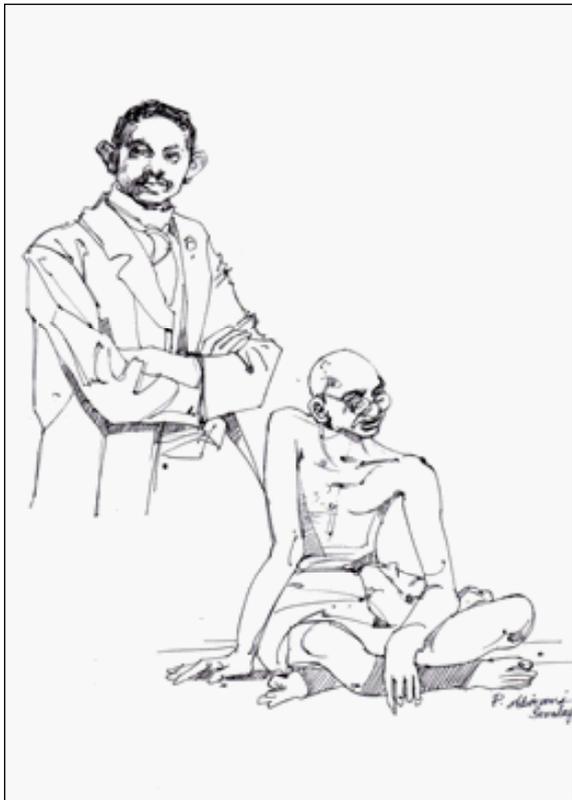
It is obvious money is necessary for accomplishing all these lofty goals. Without money, these goals will remain mere pipe dreams. Hence, it certainly is not sinful or wrong to go after money and wealth in order to realize these dreams. In fact, it is our beholden duty and responsibility to actually garner money and resources to achieve these visions.

Swami Vivekananda also emphasizes this point: “Poor people are suffering. What is the use of wearing this saffron if we cannot alleviate their suffering? We have to do what it takes to provide relief to these people. These people have not experienced any happiness in their lives. Sometimes I have felt that I should sell the Mutt and other resources we have and give the proceeds to these poor people”.

Here is an anecdote from Swamiji’s life that shows how he put this into action:

Swamiji and his disciples were rendering service in Kolkatta (then Calcutta). Even though it was taboo for hermits to garner wealth, there was a deep and fervent desire to build a temple for the Master, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Hence, Swamiji pleaded with various people and gathered rupee by rupee with great difficulty. Despite legal expenses, land possession hurdles and many such seemingly insurmountable obstacles, finally he managed to get a piece of land in Belur on the banks of River Ganges. Just at that time, Calcutta was struck by a severe epidemic of plague. As the intensity of the epidemic increased and people were losing their lives, Swamiji and his disciples embarked upon relief measures. Such a relief required a large amount of money. When the team was grappling with the problem of how to raise that quantum of money, Swamiji came with the solution that they should sell the piece of land in Belur that they had acquired. The disciples could not reconcile to this because of the enormous struggle that they had gone through to get the land. They argued that it is almost impossible to get the land again if they sell it and that they can never build their dream temple for Sri Ramakrishna. But Swamiji told unequivocally and eloquently “Service to people is more important than building a temple”. It so happened that not only Swamiji and his disciples garnered the resources necessary not only to help the society tide over the plague crisis, but also not have to sell off the Belur land. To date, the Ramakrishna Mission has its headquarters at Belur and continues to render unparalleled service to humanity.

This anecdote teaches us several important lessons:



- There is nothing wrong in trying to garner resources and money, so long as they are used for noble causes for the welfare of the society
- It is alright to redirect the resources earmarked for a particular cause, so long as the redirected cause provides better service to humanity
- Once the intent is noble, doors will open and the necessary resources will pour in. Obstacles will start vanishing when the objective is worthwhile and there are incessant and sincere efforts

If, on the other hand, we forsake the intent of public good and start accumulating wealth for either selfish ends or for pompous show off, it will only result in more difficulties. Gandhiji recounts his personal experience to demonstrate this point:

When Gandhiji was in London, he once yearned to learn dancing. He joined a class paying three

pounds (a small fortune those days!) This further developed into a desire to learn western music, to play violin and to learn English oratorical skills. The expenses mounted rapidly and

enormously. One of his friends, Mr. Bell, cautioned Gandhiji by saying “You are not going to be living in England permanently. Why are you wasting your money in all these?” This caused an awakening in Gandhiji’s mind.

He decided that as a student, his only goal was to finish his studies, qualify to be a Barrister as early as possible. He gave up all the ostentatious and pompous expenses and began to lead a simple – even frugal – life. Through this, Gandhiji has taught us an important lesson: Once you start spending on unnecessary things, your compulsion to earn more money will increase and this will dent your ability to do public service.

SEVALAYA's EXPERIENCES

The needs of the destitute residents of Sevalaya’s Children’s Home and Old Age Home are met fully from the donations of philanthropic minded donors. Some donors sponsor the entire amount required for a day to celebrate happy occasions like their birthdays and wedding anniversaries as well as to remember departed souls in their families. No amount of donation is considered small or insignificant. It is the collective power of multiple donations of varying extents that keeps these noble services going for such a long time.

It is indeed a monumental task that 1925 students have to be provided with free quality education that includes books, uniforms, transportation and to meet teachers’ salaries and the money required for running a large school. All this is made possible because of donors who earn money and deploy it for such a noble cause.

These value systems have been ingrained into the students of Sevalaya so well that after they complete their study and get employed and start earning, they take up activities like sponsoring the next generation of students and sponsoring food for residents.

GIVE IT A TRY

Before you spend money for any purpose, ask yourself three questions:

- Is there a *need* to spend the money for this purpose? If there is no real need, do not spend for that purpose
- Can you *afford* to spend money for this purpose? We should never live beyond our means. Even if you need something, if you cannot afford it, do not spend money on it
- Is it *worth* spending money for this? In other words, do you get the “bang for the buck”? if something can be got for say Rs. 100, it does not make sense to spend anything more

Remember this need-afford-worth mantra whenever you spend money – it will not only stand you in good stead but will also help you to channelize your money to causes that maximize benefits to the society.

So, in summary, do not feel guilty or shy to go after money. But make sure that the money so earned is spent on causes that benefit the society at large, instead of being spent on purely selfish causes.

5 Unity in Diversity

A flower garland derives its beauty from the multiple colours and patterns of flowers. A zoo will not be an entertaining or enjoyable place to visit if it had only all elephants or all lions, without any variety of animals. A multi-colour rangoli is always more pleasing to the eyes than a single colour rangoli.

“Diversity is the spice of life” is a well-known adage. Diversity refers to the inherent differences that exist between God’s creations. While we unanimously welcome diversity in the flowers, animals, birds and colors, do we welcome diversity with the same spontaneity and enthusiasm when it comes our fellow human beings? Don’t we try to discriminate among people, by favoring people “from our community”, “from our state” or “speaking our language”? Don’t we confine our relationships to such narrow circles?

What is the real meaning of “diversity”? What does the Holy Trinity of our guiding lights say and practice about diversity? We will explore these topics in this chapter.



Harmony of Religions

Our Holy Trinity held very firm belief that we are all children of the same God and thus are inherently brothers and sisters. To quote Gandhiji, “Our Hindu Dharma has a place for Jesus Christ as well as for Mohammed Nabi as well as for Parsi priests and Moses. All of them are guiding lights to reach the same Divinity. Just like multifarious flowers bloom in a garden, different religions adorn this world”.

“Castes Don’t Exist”

Saathigal Illaiyadi Paappaa, Kula Thaazhchi Uyarchi Sollal Paavam

so sang Mahakavi Bharathiyaar, meaning

“There is no such thing as caste-glory, make not castes great or low and sin”

Of all the banes afflicting our society, the worst

one is discrimination on the basis of caste. We saw in the chapter on Belief in God (Chapter 1) that there is only one Divinity, regardless of what name we call it. Similarly, it is equally important for us to realize that we are all children of the same God and there should be no discrimination.

Gandhiji spared no effort in fighting untouchability arising from discrimination based on caste and creed. He travelled the length and breadth of the country, collected funds and donated all personal gifts that he received to eliminate discrimination and untouchability. The fact that even several women and children participated in this noble cause is largely due to Gandhiji's purity of thought, determination in action and magnetic personality.

Dignity of labour

Gandhiji returned from South Africa to India in 1915 and set up the Sabarmati Ashram. Several youngsters from all over the country flocked the Ashram. Fully convinced that the genesis of purity of thought lies in cleanliness of the body and environment, he made sure that this message is fully ingrained in the minds of these youngsters. Everyone who came to Ashram had to first learn to clean the toilets and sweep and mop the houses and clear the garbage. This made sure the environment was clean. More importantly, this ensured that the youngsters understood the importance of dignity of labour and that no task is too menial for anyone. In addition, by this process, he made sure that everyone acquired the willingness and the skills to do any work.

Gandhiji firmly believed that whatever tasks one undertook, one should perform them with utmost faith, contentment and pride and that this is the path to self-actualization. Among the key tasks in the Ashram were taking care of the kitchen, cooking, serving the residents and washing the vessels. The rule that Gandhiji had set in the Ashram was that everyone without exception had to take turns to perform these tasks. Some of the educated graduates who were volunteering in the Ashram felt that this work was beneath their dignity and qualification. Sensing this, Gandhiji himself undertook the tasks in kitchen and executed them with utmost enthusiasm and thus set an ideal role model. To further reinforce the message of pride in work and dignity of labor, Gandhiji narrated the story of King Nala:

“Nala was a great king who was not only an efficient and effective ruler but also a great cook. Nala's cooking is so famous that any well cooked and delicious food is referred to as “Nala's Bhaga”. He used to take even greater pride in his culinary abilities than in his administrative acumen (which by itself was par excellence)”. By this Gandhiji reinforced that cooking is not a trivial task left to the less qualified, but rather something that even a great emperor would take pride in. The young graduates were ashamed of their attitude and from then on gave their full focus and attention to all the activities related to the kitchen and understood the importance of taking pride in their work and respecting the dignity of labour.

Each of us are endowed with special skills

Each of us is endowed with certain skills and certain aptitudes. It is imperative that we identify this spark in us and utilize that skill or spark for the benefit of the entire society. We should not have any false notions that one work is “superior” to another or that doing a particular task is

“beneath our dignity”. Each of us has a role to play and something to contribute to the society. Recognizing this and leveraging this for public good is essential.

Nowadays the term “differently abled” is gaining currency replacing the term “disabled”. This is indeed a very welcome move that recognizes the diversity inherent in God’s creations. “Disabled” has a very negative connotation and focuses on what a person *cannot* do. But “differently abled” focuses on what a person *can* do. Leveraging what a person can do without focusing on what he cannot do is a very significant part of understanding and appreciating diversity. An incident from Mahakavi Bharathiyar’s life illustrates this succinctly.

There was a mentally challenged individual who was ridiculed by everyone living in Bharathiyar’s neighborhood. But Bharathiyar spotted the goodness in him, showered kindness on him, gave him food and shelter and gave him words of encouragement and praise. This gave the young man a tremendous boost of self-confidence and self-belief. This resulted in his getting over his difficulties and eventually become successful in his life. This anecdote is a great example of the benefits that can accrue if we can identify and nurture the special talents of people who are differently abled.

God has created each of us with certain special talent. Some have phenomenal memory, some have extraordinary capabilities with numbers and mathematics, some are great at using computers, some are great poets and some are great painters and artists. It is imperative that efforts are taken to find this spark in each of us, ignite that spark for the benefit of the society. Swami Vivekananda put this very beautifully as “Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man”. It is the duty of each and every one of us to go the extra mile to identify the special skills of the differently abled around us and give them encouragement and motivation to leverage and nurture these skills for their as well as for society’s benefit.

Gender Equity

One of the evils that have been haunting humanity from time immemorial is inequality and discrimination based on gender. Our Holy Trinity has been uniformly and consistently unequivocal in their thought, word and deed that men and women should be given equal importance and recognition. Indeed, this is reinforcement of our Indian traditions and culture which has always given women great respect.

Bharathiyar strongly believed that a key enabler in women empowerment is to educate them and to encourage those women who want to be independent. Gandhiji also was vocal in his support for women empowerment. In fact, it was due to Gandhiji’s fervent encouragement that several women played key roles in India’s freedom struggle and the accompanying social revolution.

Swami Vivekananda maintained “We should not think that we are men and women, but only that we are human beings, born to cherish and to help one another.” A couple of other quotations from Swami Vivekananda that highlight his commitment to the cause of women empowerment are:

“God’s first manifestation is your mother who sang a lullaby for you in your cradle”

“The best thermometer to the progress of a nation is its treatment of its women.”

Had this Holy Trinity been alive today, they would have been immensely pleased with the enrollment of girl students in Sevalaya’s school! We believe that this topic is so important that we have dedicated the entire next chapter to exclusively focus on this.

So, how do we reconcile and appreciate the inherent diversity? Here is Gandhiji’s typically crystal clear example: “Just like there are several paths leading to a single destination, there are several religions that lead to the same destination (of Divinity). It does not matter which path you take – it is up to your convenience and aptitude. If you think about it, each human being is different. Even if two human beings belong the same religion, their beliefs and practices are bound to vary from one another. Hence, do not keep highlighting and focusing these differences.” What Gandhiji said about religions applies equally to other factors of discrimination like language, skills, type of work and gender.

Bharatiyaar said

Ondru Pattaal Undu Vaazhvu, Nammil Ottrumai Neengil Anaivarukkum Thaazhve

“We can prosper when we co-operate and co-exist

But if our unity is lost, we will be disgraced”

Do not focus on or discriminate on the basis of differences. Celebrate the diversity!

We will conclude this chapter with a one line summary:

“Uniformity is not important – unity is”



SEVALAYA's EXPERIENCES

Look at the painting at the entrance of Sevalaya's school. It proclaims "Please shed your preferences, prejudices, if any, on the basis of caste, color, creed, religion, language and nationality before entering". Inculcating the spirit of recognizing, appreciating and celebrating diversity on these different dimensions, we believe we are doing our duty in shaping the children of the school to be responsible citizens of the world

GIVE IT A TRY

Next time you go to another school or town for participating in any competition or sports events, do not confine yourself with just the folks from your own school. Mix with, converse with and become friends with children from other schools and other areas. Try to understand where they come from, what their food habits are, what their dress preferences are, what religious and social beliefs they hold and the events they celebrate.

Next time you see a differently abled person on the street, offer and help in any way you can.

Recognize, understand and appreciate the special talents each of your class mates possess.

6. Women Empowerment

Indian culture and tradition always held women in very high esteem. An old Tamil adage says “*Annaiyum Pithaavum Munnari Deivam* ” which means “our mother and father are the first Gods “(ranking mother ahead of father). Similarly, the woman of the household is called “*Illatharasi*” (which means “Queen of the household”) but the man of the household is never called “*Illatharasan* ” (meaning “King of the household”)! Why, even this country is reverentially called “Bharath Maatha” (Mother India) and not “Bharath Pithaa” (Father India)!

But, if we proclaim today that the Indian tradition and culture places women in a high pedestal and gives them special respect and empowerment, it is likely that we will face very stiff opposition and cynicism. The nay-sayers will argue “Look at the western countries: Women can dress whichever way they want; there is no restriction on how women can mingle with men. On par with men, they also have a right to divorce and remarry. Does our culture encourage such ‘liberal’ thought and action?”

To be fair to these people, their argument is not entirely without merit. The traditional views of what constitutes women empowerment may have undergone some changes over the last couple of centuries. But what is important is that our culture and tradition has extended the concept of women empowerment beyond the narrow boundaries of dress and other things alluded above. Our Holy Trinity has exemplified and extolled the essence of women empowerment in their thoughts, words and action. They have enunciated excellent means of bringing out the best in our women without compromising on the basic values of our tradition and culture. We will see in this chapter some practical and effective ways of achieving this.

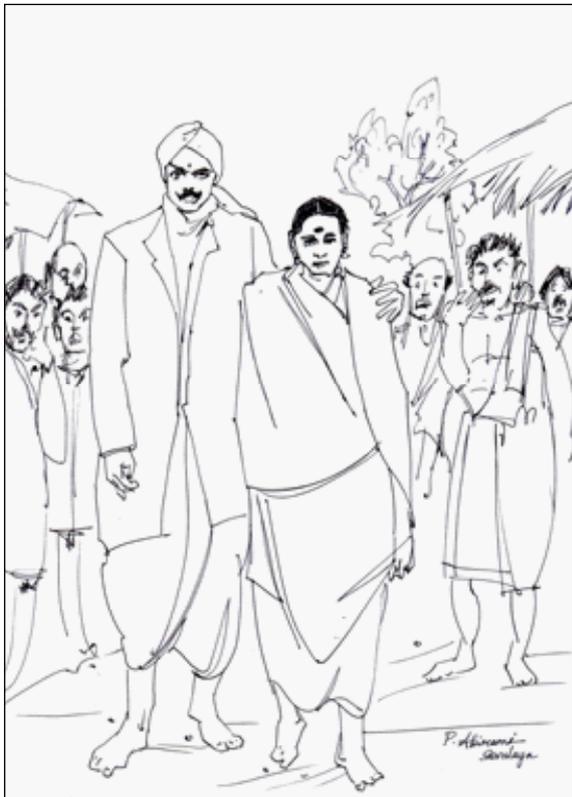
The foundation to women empowerment lies in educating the women: India has enacted a “Right to Education” act, which established education as a fundamental right to all people. For everyone – be it man or woman – education is as important as food, clothing and shelter. Bharathiyaar says “Once women become educated, a lot of misconceptions and myths will automatically get demystified. In order for our womenfolk to get a better appreciation for what is good for the home and what is good for the country, there is no better tool than education. Until women get education on par with men, gender equity will not prevail and women will continue to feel oppressed”

Practice gender equity in all walks of life: Not just in the field of education, but in all the fields, it is important not to discriminate against women. Gandhiji always held that it was wrong to keep women tied down to the house and that they should be provided with enough

opportunities to discover, display and nurture their inherent and unique talents. Thanks to his trend setting examples and to his magnetic personality, there was a significant participation of women in all his initiatives and movements. More than 150 years ago, a large number of women participated willingly and enthusiastically in his protests in South Africa. An 18 year old young girl called Thillayadi Valliammai participated in these protests and lost her life. Sarojini Naidu made stellar contributions to the Indian freedom struggle. Meera Bhen, despite being a foreigner, took active part in Gandhiji's endeavors. The sacrifices and tribulations of Gandhiji's wife Kasturbha are unparalleled. If these talented and committed women did not get the opportunities and encouragement to display their potential, what a loss it would have been for the country!

Removing all the wrong beliefs and superstitions about women: In the last couple of centuries, a lot of wrong beliefs and superstitions have infested our society. These are not consistent with the high values of women imbibed in our culture. One such wrong belief is about ridiculing women who have lost their husbands. Current practices of isolating widows and considering them as taboo to all auspicious occasions is a strongly condemnable act that is completely contrary to our established norms. This and similar unreasonable isolation of widows are among the wrongs that must be eradicated.

Giving women full freedom to move about in the society: Once Bharathiyaar met with Sister Niveditha, a close associate of Swami Vivekananda. She asked Bharathiyaar if he has brought his



wife along. Bharathiyaar replied that it was not customary to bring women out. Sister Nivethitha asked "If half the society (viz., women) are oppressed and confined to their homes, how can India experience true independence?" This candid question shook Bharathiyaar and set him thinking along a new dimension. At that moment, he took a firm decision that he would start implementing giving full rights of movement and participation to women.

When he walked on the streets of his Agrahara² holding his wife, it caused a real stir and awakening. It is fair to say that the fire of women empowerment that he kindled that day blossomed into several poems and odes which had a cascading effect on the society at large. To further display his commitment to the cause of women empowerment, Bharathiyaar edited and oversaw a journal called *Chakravarthini*, meaning Queen or Empress exclusively for women.

² Agrahara is the term used to refer to the street where the Brahmin community dwelled in a town or village.

Bharathiyar proposed the following as the basic tenets of women empowerment and women uplift:

1. Women should not be married before they are physically mature and come of age
2. Women should not be forced to marry someone they do not like
3. If, after the wedding, she does not feel comfortable with her husband, she should be allowed to separate from him and should not be ridiculed for such an action
4. If the husband dies, she should be allowed to remarry
5. Those women who do not want to get married at all and want to work and be on their own should be allowed to do so; there should be enough suitable job opportunities created for them.
6. Girl children should have equal rights in ancestral property
7. There should be no restriction on women speaking to males other than their husband
8. Women – like men -- should be allowed to participate in all branches of higher education without any restriction.
9. If a women is qualified for a job, they should not be denied the job
10. Women should be allowed to contribute to the governance and administration of the country

These were postulated and proposed by Bharathiyar more than 150 years ago. They go to show the foresight and long-term vision the poet had. What a grand definition of women empowerment that goes far beyond just freedom of dress that is bragged about today!

Chapter 2 talked about how Bharathiyar visualized how it would be when India attains independence. He similarly visualized what women empowerment should be by the following poem:

*Yettaiyum Pennal Thoduvathu Theemaiyendru
Enni Irundhavar Maayndhu Vittar
Veettukkulle Pennai Pootti Vaippom Endra
Vinthai Manithar Thalai Kavizhndaar*

...

*Pattangal Aalvathum Sattangal Seivadhum
Paarinil Pennal Nadatha Vandhom
Ettumarivinil Aanukkinge Penn
Ilaippilai Kaan Endru Gummiydi
Kaadoruvanai kai pidithe Avan
Kaariyam yavinum Kai Koduthu
Maatharaangal Pazhamaiyai kaattilum
Maatchi Pera Seythu Vazhvomadi*

...

which translates to:

“Gone are they who said to women : ‘Thou shall not open the book of knowledge’.

And the strange ones who boasted saying:

‘We will immerse these women in our homes’ –

Today they hang down their heads

...

To rule the realms and make the laws

We have arisen;

Nor shall it be said

that woman lags behind man

in the knowledge he attaineth.

Dance the kummi, beat the measure”

SEVALAYA's EXPERIENCES

To provide financial and social independence to women, Sevalaya has been creating several opportunities and opening several doors for the past several years. Trainings imparting tailoring, basic computer usage skills, basic English skills are provided free of cost to village women. In addition, we provide placement assistance to these trained women to help them placed in an appropriate job.

We make sure there is no gender based discrimination in the school, children’s home and old age home.

Seeing the success of our Mahakavi Bharathiyaar School, the neighboring villagers started to enroll their daughters who had earlier been made to abandon their studies to return to studies in our school. As more and more girls started enrolling to our school, the percentage of girls rose to 65%. Because of this social revolution, there is practically not one girl child in that neighborhood who does not come to school. Over the past few years, there are an equal number of girls and boys in the school, thereby really ushering in gender equity in education.

GIVE IT A TRY

In the school, treat boys and girls alike, with no discrimination or bias

Abstain from any acts or words that demean and ridicule girls

When there is a task to be done, choose the people for the task purely based on merit without discriminating by gender

7 Time Management

We often hear people saying “time is golden – do not waste time”. In fact, time is even more precious than gold. With a stroke of luck, you may be able to get back the gold you lost. But, time, once lost, can never be regained. How many of us realize the importance of time and use it judiciously? While a lot of things to be accomplished stare at us on our face, most of us give a common – lame – excuse for not striving to do anything “I do not have time!” Is it an excuse or a valid reason? If indeed “not having time” is a valid “reason”, how is it possible to achieve so many things? Swami Vivekananda, Bharathiyaar, the mathematical genius Srinivasa Ramanujan, Jesus Christ and Adi Sankara all had very short lives and yet achieved so much in life and have left a great legacy behind. How did they accomplish so much in their short life span? What lessons can we learn from them?

Recognizing that Time Management is extremely important: We can see that many people simply do not recognize the value of time and hence the need for effective time management.



Gandhiji always had a deep sense of appreciation for the importance of time management. In one of his visits to Tamil Nadu, Gandhiji was slated to address the students of Annamalai University and was travelling in a car. Knowing about his travel plans, a group of enthusiastic people intercepted his car midway and requested him to have lunch with them.

Gandhiji understood from his fellow traveler Dr. Rajan that this was not on their original schedule and that only ten minutes were left for the scheduled event at Annamalai University to start. Much as Gandhiji and Dr. Rajan told the gathered audience that they were running late for his scheduled appointment, the crowd – because of their love for Gandhiji – insisted that he should have lunch with them.

Gandhiji quietly got out from the other side of the car, walked some distance and took a tractor

that was passing by and covered the rough terrain to reach Annamalai University. He started his lecture to the students with an apology for the slight delay in reaching the venue. Thus Gandhiji demonstrated that keeping up time commitments is of paramount importance, far exceeding any other commitment.

Your poor time management will affect other people also: Gandhiji set an example in several important qualities like truth and non-violence. Time consciousness was also one of the habits Gandhiji was very well known for. He was meticulous in ensuring that he always keeps up his time commitments. He will also be firm with others to ensure they also keep up their time commitments and will not hesitate to chide people who are lax with meeting time commitments.

Gandhiji was traveling through a certain district and would spend one night in each village and start early next morning for the next village. One morning when Gandhiji was ready to leave his grandniece Manuben was not yet ready, because she had to pack Gandhiji's baggage. Even though the delay was not her fault, Gandhiji got very irritated and chided her by saying "Manu! This is not right. Just see how many people are waiting. You are young and you can run and catch up with me. But look at so many people here – do you realize that it is a cardinal sin to steal five minutes from each of them?"

Let us extend Gandhiji's thoughts and quickly calculate the effect of a "small" delay in time by a couple of examples

Suppose there are 50 students in a class and a teacher comes ten minutes late. This will translate to a total loss of $50 \times 10 = 500$ minutes of productive time of all the students put together. If you want another perspective of the amount of time wastage, this is equivalent to one student wasting eight hours of his time!

Let us take one more example, where we will try to quantify the loss in monetary terms. Suppose in an organization, a manager calls his fifteen subordinates for a meeting and comes late by "just" ten minutes to the meeting. What is the monetary loss to the organization? Since there are ten of them, there is a total loss of 150 minutes – this works out to about two and a half hours or roughly the equivalent of quarter day's salary!

Gandhiji was once slated to deliver a lecture at Gujarat Art Academy which was a couple of miles from his ashram. The organizers failed to send a vehicle on time and hence Gandhiji decided to walk the distance.

On the way, he found his friend riding a bicycle. Gandhiji requested to borrow the bicycle for a short while. The friend obliged and was pleasantly surprised to see Gandhiji pedaling the bike in a hurry to be on time for the meeting. Such was his respect for time that he did not mind exerting himself physically to keep up time!

By this incident, Gandhiji proved that whatever be the obstacles, we should never cease from putting our best efforts to keep up time, even if the cause for any delay is because of factors beyond our control.

Organize and plan your time and work to a well-defined schedule: Bharathiyar's famous song "*Odi Vilayadu Paappa*," ("Run about and play, my sweet little child") draws a very practical timetable for all children to follow:

Kalai Ezhundavudan Padippu
Pinbu Kanivu Kodukkum Nalla Paattu
Maalai Muzhuthum Vilayaattu
Endru Pazhakka paduthi Kollu Paappaa

"Rise at dawn to learn your lessons
Then sing such airs that are soothing
To games devote the whole evening
Get habituated thus, oh child"

Bharatiyar lived on this planet for a short 39 years. But he stands out as a stellar example of someone who made optimum use of every minute of his life and demonstrated that it is far better to lead a short life effectively than living for a hundred years and squandering away valuable time.

In Bhagwad Geeta, when Arjuna asks Lord Krishna "who are you", Krishna starts His reply with "*Kaaloham*". The word "Kaala" indicates God of Death and also means "time". Again, while enumerating His different manifestations, He says "*Ahamevaakshayaha Kaalo*" meaning "I am the infinite time, without beginning and end" May be, by this repeated emphasis, it was Krishna's intention to show that time is the first manifestation of Godliness and that wasting time is equivalent to insulting God. People who value time and use it effectively and judiciously go to the highest levels of achievement and become well respected leaders. Effective time management is one of the most beneficial skills one can have. Possessing this one skill can bring in every other wealth and benefit. On the contrary, not having this one skill can annul every other skill that a person may have and prevent him from reaching his potential. When a person is unable to accomplish something, he immediately blames it to lack of time. Time moves relentlessly and does not wait for anyone. It is up to us to learn to use time judiciously and not waste even one moment of our precious life.

An English poet said "The bad news is that Time is flying like a plane. But the good news is you are the pilot in this plane! How well you lead the plane to your desired destination is only in your hands and not in anyone else's hand". Let us follow the path shown by our guiding lights and use our time effectively and accomplish all our desires and goals!

SEVALAYA's EXPERIENCES

The children at Sevalaya have formed a habit of waking up at 5:30 in the morning and going to sleep at 10 in the night, with specific time slots for prayers, exercise, studying at home, meals and going to school.

At the beginning of the year itself, a detailed calendar is published, giving dates for exams, excursions, educational tours, celebrations and events in the campus, village walks, activities towards rural development and so on. This calendar is printed and circulated to all the teachers. As they accomplish their daily goals, the larger annual goals (from which the daily goals are derived), get scaled automatically. The daily activities dovetail into weekly reports and the weekly reports get discussed in monthly meetings of the management teams and eventually the summary gets presented in the annual report. Such a systematic work culture with utmost respect for time is a key to the sustained success of Sevalaya over the past 26 years.

GIVE IT A TRY

At the beginning of every day, make a prioritized list of things you would like to accomplish that day. At the end of the day, revisit this list and identify which things you could accomplish and which you could not. Go to the root cause of why you could not accomplish certain things, draw lessons and apply these lessons while drawing up the next day's list. In order to make this list effective, you can try the following process:

1. Identify those tasks that are “urgent” – those tasks that will have disastrous consequences if you do not complete them that day itself, (e.g., an assignment you must submit that day itself). You will have to prioritize these tasks ahead of everything else.
2. From the list of tasks that are due next week (or even next month), pick up a few tasks and make time for them that day. (e.g., start preparing for your half yearly exam due in three weeks' time now itself). Scheduling these tasks can reduce the mental and physical stress for you in future.
3. In your schedule, allocate time for exercise and play. After all, as the saying goes, “All work and no play make Jack a dull boy!” Besides, while doing your other work, you will be only thinking of what you missed in sports and never get the concentration to do your work.

8 Patriotism

Every individual should feel and display patriotism. If every individual carries a sense of pride about the society and the country where he was brought up, then it would add to the well-being of the entire country. “Ask not what the country can do for you -- ask what you can do for your country”, said John F Kennedy, former President of the United States. This very well applies to citizens of any country, including India. There are a large number of unsung patriots whose selfless services and sacrifices have benefited India enormously. Indeed, these people are hailed as the most noble and most blessed among the men.

Mohandas Gandhi was not academically the brightest in school days, but went on to be called Mahatma and the “Father of the Nation”. This was made possible only because of his strong commitment to ethical values like honesty and non-violence as well as his self-confidence and unflinching love for the nation. His sacrifices towards independence and communal harmony are unparalleled.

India has a long and stellar history and heritage. Even when other civilizations were just budding – or not even existent -- India had made far reaching advances and progress in various disciplines and was a highly evolved civilization. Buddha propounded and practiced non-violence more than 2,500 years ago. When Kanchi and Nalanda universities were offering courses on higher education in various disciplines like astronomy and political science, even basic literacy had not caught on in many parts of the world. In order to instill a sense of pride about this rich heritage, Bharathiyaar has penned several inspiring odes.

*Nanmaiyle Udal Vanmaiyle –
Selvappanmaiyle Melarath Thanmaiyle
Ponmayil Othidu Maathartham
Karpin Pugazhinile Uyar Naadu

Vanmaiyle Ulath Thinnmaiyle
Manath Thanmaiyle Madhi Nunnmaiyle
Unnmaiyle Thavaraatha Pulavar
Unarvinile Uyar Naadu*

“In utter goodness and strength of physique
In wealth, multitudinous and unique,
In the chaste glory of golden damsels
And in courage this land forever excels.

In magnificence, in stoutness of heart,
In loving mind and brain – subtle and smart,
In poets wedded to ever-during truth,
Beyond compare is this country in sooth”

Other authors from India have also written countless poems and texts that extol the greatness of India. No wonder that even today people from across the globe come to India in quest of knowledge and peace. The great Himalayas and Ganges and the ancient wisdom of Upanishads are the jewels that add a special glow to the country.

*Mannum Imayamalai Engal Malaiye
Maanila Meethithu Porpiri Thilaiye*

“Himachal is our mountain
The world hath not its fellow”

Just like how we have a special attraction and affection to the home we were brought up, it is but natural that we also get a similar affection for the places where our parents and forefathers grew up. Bharathiyaar says

*Enthaiyum Thaayum Magizhndhu Kulaavi
Irunthathum Innaade – Adan
Munthaiyar Aayiram Aandugal Vaazhnthu
Mudinthathum Innaade – Avar
Sindhaiyil Aayirm Ennam Valarthu
Siranthathum Innaade – Idhai
Vandhanai Koori Manathil Iruththi En
Vaayura Vaazhththeno – Idhai
Vandhe Maatharam Vandhe Maatharam
Endru Vanangeno?*

“This is our Motherland, Bharat,
It’s here our parents dear loved and lived,
In joyous wedlock pure,
Our forebears too in ages past
Had lived for centuries, ere they died,
A myriad noble thoughts they had
To enrich the land and make it great
Shan’t I enthrone you in my heart,
While my grateful tongue doth sing thy praise:
‘Salutations to thee! Mother! Salutations!’”

Among the people who guided the nation on a righteous path through spirituality, Swami Vivekananda holds a special place of honour. His inspiring words underscore the importance of patriotism:

“Mother India is the genesis of good character, good values, spirituality, religion and discipline.

This is the land of several great saints and ascetics. Even today, this land is the abode of people with divinity. My beloved brother, let us take a lantern and travel the length and breadth of this great country to visit the cities, towns, villages, forests, flora and fauna. I challenge you to find such great people in any other part of the planet!”

Swamiji further adds: “Before I left the shores of India, I used to love this country. But today, even a speck of its dust appears holy to me; the air is fresh and feels divine. If you look at it superficially, it looks like the culture and heritage of this country is dead, but the flame is still very much alive”.

This country is the source of several deep, inspiring and practical ideas and concepts about the inter-dependencies of Man and God. The entire culture and heritage have been built on these deep rooted principles

Characteristics of Patriotism

We will now see what our Holy Trinity have to say about patriotism and how they have demonstrated patriotism in all their actions.

Patriotism respects the greatness of individual languages but transcends languages: Language is a God sent gift for humanity. It is a great tool that fosters communication and co-existence among humans. Patriotism should not degenerate into mindless infighting and narrow minded bashing of languages. There is nothing wrong – indeed it is desirable – that we cherish and appreciate the beauty of our own language. This is indeed a very integral component of patriotism. Bharathiyaar relishes the beauty of Tamil language like this:

*“Senthamizh Naadennum Podinile
Inbath Then Vandhu Paayudhu Kaathinile”*

“When the words resound,
‘Good old Tamil-Land!’
Dulcet streams of honey
Flow into our ear”

But he does not stop at this. He goes on to extol the greatness of other languages as well.

*Sundarat Telunginil Paatisaithu
Thonigal Otti Viliyaadi Varuvom*

“Singing songs in the melodious Telegu language,
we will row our boats playfully”

*“Singa Maraattiyar Tham Kavithai Kondu
Seraththu Thanthangal Parisalippom”*

“We will reward the lion-like Maratthas
for their poems with ivory from Kerala”

Patriotism is about recognizing and appreciating different cultural heritages: In India, not only are there different languages, there are also a rich store of literature in these languages. In

each of the regions speaking these languages and treasuring these works of literature, evolved diverse methods of practices, traditions, food habits and cultural nuances. Indian culture is indeed a melting pot of all these different and diverse cultures. Just as it is important to take pride in and practice habits from our own local culture, it is equally important to respect the differences in other people's culture and co-exist with them peacefully and seamlessly.

Patriotism encompasses making sure we do not give up our rights: When Gandhiji was traveling in a first class compartment in South Africa, he was questioned for claiming his right of travel and thrown out of the train. This arose the patriotic spirits which culminated in India's freedom struggle and its eventual independence. Whether it is enterprise or a nation, one should neither forget his or her responsibilities and obligations nor should one forsake the rights that come with it. Bharathiyaar says this as:

*“Endru Thanium Indha Sundanthira Thaagam
Endru Madiyum Engal Adimaiyin Mogam”*

“When will this thirst for freedom be quenched?
When will our love for slavery die?”

Bharathiyaar symbolizes slavery as our giving up our individual and collective rights.

Patriotism is about helping our brethren in any part of the country, standing shoulder to shoulder with them in fighting any calamity: When a speck of dust falls on our eyes, the hand automatically and involuntarily goes to help the eye. Similarly, if people in any part of the country suffer, then people from other parts should immediately and unhesitatingly lend a helping hand. Every region will have its own set of problems as well as its own assets. Meaningful co-operation among these regions resulting in a win-win relationship for everyone is indeed true patriotism, according to Bharathiyaar.

*“Gangai Nadhipurathu Gothumai Pandam
Kaaviri Vetrilaikku Maaru Kolvom”*

“We will take in exchange for the grains of wheat
from the Gangetic plains for the betels of the Cauvery”

*“Vangathin Odi Varum Neerin Migaiyaal
Maiyathu Naadugalil Payir Seyguvom”*

“We will irrigate the central regions
with the surplus water of Ganges”

Indeed, Bharathiyaar was the first architect who dreamt of and had a wonderful foresight about inter linking of rivers!

Bharathiyaar teaches a very important actionable lesson for us from the above: if any part of the country is afflicted by calamities like a tsunami or a flood or an earthquake or a famine, we should rise up the occasion and render unflinching help as if such a calamity has taken place in our own state or town. One should not take the callous attitude of “oh, this has not happened in my town, why should I care”

True patriotism transcends the country's borders: Passion towards one's own country is the first level of patriotism. True patriotism actually goes far beyond this and is about considering the entire humanity as one single family all belonging to this planet. Swami Vivekananda's famous Chicago address started with "My dear sisters and brothers of America". It is not an exaggeration to say that Swamiji's broadmindedness and foresight created an awakening that led to India's freedom movement by taking pride in the old saying "Jagat Vasudeva Kudumbam" meaning the "entire world is one family of Vasudeva, the God". Once we realize that we are all children of the same God, it will automatically enhance one's patriotism.

Bharatiyaar also emphasizes the same concept. While highlighting the glories of India, he underscores global harmony by his words

"Singala Theevinikkor Paalam Amaippom "
meaning "we will build bridges to Sri Lanka"

SEVALAYA's EXPERIENCES

Sevalaya regularly celebrates Independence Day and Republic Day. All the days of national importance are reverentially celebrated in Sevalaya. The alumni donate blood.

In the Children's Home, children sing patriotic songs during the evening prayers

GIVE IT A TRY

When you go to a new town or state, understand the places of worship and heritage of that place. Find out from locals information about the eminent people who are born in that place.

When you represent your school and travel out, mingle with the children of other schools. Observe and understand their culture and practices. Also, educate them about the traditions, culture and practices from your town.

Visit websites that contain information about other places; share this with your friends

Learn another language from India as well as a foreign language. Compare and contrast the languages with your mother tongue.

If there is any natural calamity in any part of the country, try to volunteer your services in whatever way you can.

9 Lifelong Learning

The education we get in our childhood days is the foundation on which our entire life is built. Contrary to common misconceptions, education and learning does not stop the moment we leave our school or college. Learning is a continuous journey throughout our life, not an end by itself. In this chapter, we will see what our Holy Trinity have to say and had to practice about lifelong learning.

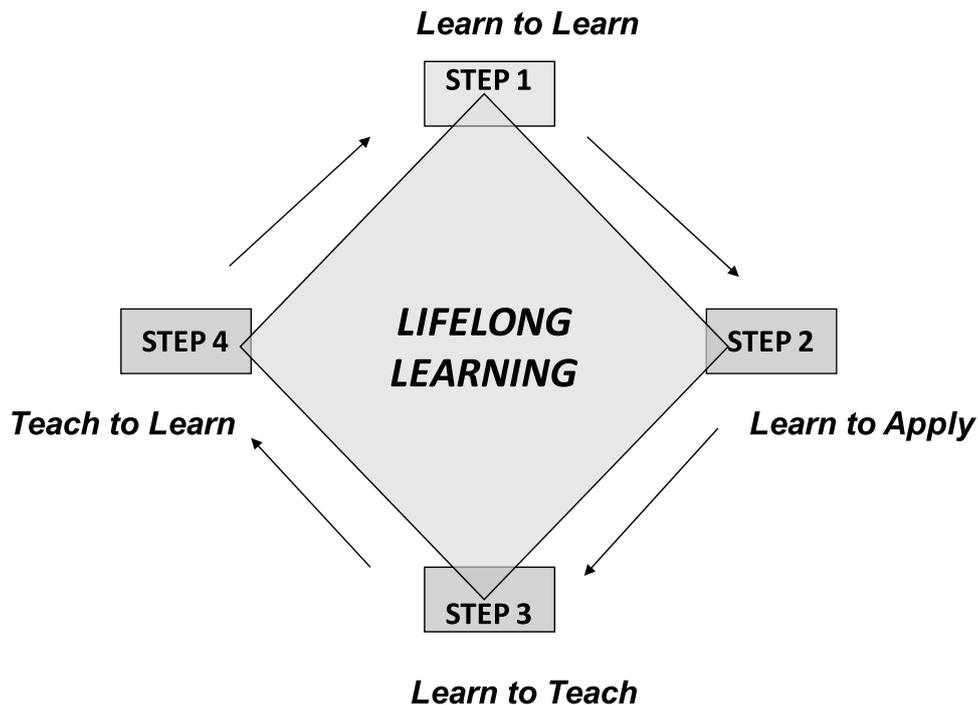
The benefits we should get by education and learning: Swami Vivekananda lists out the benefits that should accrue from real education. “We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one’s own feet” says Swamiji. He further builds upon this by saying “Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man; Religion is the manifestation of divinity already in man”. So, the real goal of good education should be to make everyone realize their potential and divinity within and build self-confidence and independence.



Under no circumstances should learning stop:

We often see people giving excuses like “Oh, the situation at home is not good” or “I don’t have time because of my work” and procrastinate or even avoid learning and upgrading their skills and knowledge. This is simply unacceptable. There will always be hundreds of obstacles to learning and excuses why you should not / cannot learn anything new. You should shed all such excuses and embark upon lifelong and continuous learning. Here is an example from the life of Gandhiji. In 1921, Gandhiji decided to launch the Satyagraha program, but violence unexpectedly broke out in a place called Chowri Chowra. Hence Gandhiji was imprisoned on March 18, 1922 and had to spend 18 months in Sabarmati jail. Later he was moved to Yerwada prison.

In Yerwada prison, Gandhiji went through untold suffering and the prison authorities unleashed



harsh treatment to him. The British Government went to the extent of even delisting Gandhiji's name from the Inner Temple Bar Association(this happened in 1922 and the debarring was nullified only in 1984 when a statue of Mahatma was erected in Inner Temple.)None of this deterred Gandhiji from pursuing continuous learning. He read an astonishing 150 books while being in unhygienic and harsh conditions, which to many could have been an excuse for being non-conducive to reading and learning. Such was his commitment to continuous and lifelong learning, defying all odds and notwithstanding any impediments.

Lifelong learning is a continuous, perpetual journey that loops in four stages³. For any new skill or concept, we first have to *learn to learn*. This first step in the process is about understanding the right method of learning anything new. Once we master this, we can pick up myriad subjects and concepts that come our way during our student days. At the second stage, we *learn to apply* what we learnt. Knowledge becomes internalized only when we know how to apply it. At the third stage, we *learn to teach* what we know. When we teach what we know to others, two things happen that enhance our learning: first we get to know how to express what we know and this strengthens what we have learnt; second we get exposed to questions from learners that bring new perspectives that make our own understanding more holistic. At the final stage of this unending journey of lifelong learning, we *teach to learn*. As we share our learning with others, we find we learn about new things that we have never known before, and this takes us back to the first stage of learning (learn to learn).

You are never too old to learn: Age is never an obstacle to learn. You can – and should -- learn at any age. Gandhiji was 53 years old when the imprisonment described above took place.

³ "The ACE of Soft Skills " by Gopaldaswamy Ramesh and Mahadevan Ramesh, published by Pearson Education, 2010.

There is a Tamil proverb which essentially means that what you don't get trained to at five, you will never do it at fifty. Whether it is at five or fifty, you have to keep learning. Especially in these days when everything is changing so fast, you have no option but to keep learning continuously and keep abreast of technology. Not practicing lifelong and continuous learning is like getting down from a fast moving train in one station and saying you will catch the same train by walking to the next station. The good news is that modern technologies like internet have indeed made learning more accessible and convenient to acquire. But the real bottleneck is your willingness to learn. No amount of technology can help if you do not have this appetite for continuous learning. It is like food we need to sustain ourselves; nay, it is like our breathing without which we cannot live even for a minute! The great poet Tiruvalluvar elucidates this in this couplet which implies that people who are not learned are like people with no eyes.

*“Kannudiyaar Enbavar Katror Mugathirandu
Punnadaiyaar Kalla Thavar”*

Whatever field of work you are in, constant practice and application is essential: Learning is not merely reading books and performing rote learning. There is an old Tamil proverb which says “*Kalavum Katru Mara*” which means that even to steal you have to first learn! The following couplet from Thirukural is something that all students of Tamil are very familiar with:

*“Karka Kasadara Karpavai Katrapin
Nirka Adarku Thaga”*

“So learn that you may full and faultless learning gain,
Then in obedience meet to lessons learnt remain”.

In other words, you learn what you need to learn blemishlessly and completely and then sincerely apply in your life what you learnt”

Education that is practiced in the above manner will result in making a person self-reliant. This is a tangible and true benefit of good education. During our endeavors, there are bound to be a few tasks which we may not like to do but are compelled to do. It is essential that we do not refrain from carrying out such tasks, keeping in mind our goal of self-reliance.

Once we internalize the goal of self-reliance, we will not dodge any opportunities to learn new skills, however menial these skills may appear to be. Gandhiji explained this through his practices: “As our Ashram expands, it becomes essential for us to teach the young boys and girls growing up here. We do not get qualified teachers. It is neither feasible to hire teachers nor do I have much faith in the educational practices in vogue today. I always had a desire to explore and reinvent education based on experiential methods. I was also convinced that parents alone can give true, high quality education. Hence I took personal responsibility to impart the right education to the children. I strongly believed that the greatest foundation to their education lies in their discipline. Once we ensure that this foundation is strong, the children will learn everything else well either by themselves or from their peers. In addition, as I believed exposure to literature and emphasis on physical education was important, I started a few classes with the help of Mr. Herman Kallenbheh and Shri. Pragji Desai. Since we did not have any workers in the ashram, all the children and adults had to participate in diverse activities like farming,

gardening, watering trees and plants, kitchen work and so on. This gave them physical exercise as well as immense mental satisfaction that they are contributing to the overall functioning of the ashram”.

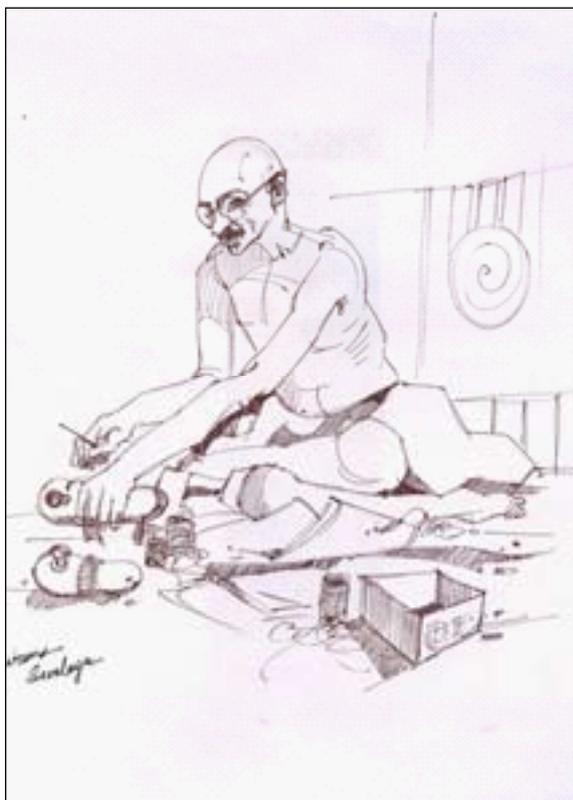
This anecdote shows the importance of being ready to learn and perform well any task that is required that is beneficial to the society and will make you self-reliant.

When you teach others, your own knowledge increases in depth and breadth: We saw that one of the stages of lifelong learning was to teach others. When Gandhiji taught the children in the ashram, his own knowledge multiplied manifold. When we teach others, we can get humbled by the questions that are asked by learners.

This will not only bring us new perspectives but also increase the humility in us and propel us to learn more.

True education encompasses acquiring practical skills that can increase employability: Gandhiji gives an example for this also: “I wanted to teach the children some practical skill. Some children were interested in cobbling up shoes; I taught them that skill. Some students were interested in carpentry. We set up a class on carpentry for them. All this ensured that the children learnt what they were keen on and hence kept them highly motivated and satisfied”.

Each child can be endowed with certain special practical skills. It could be for example carpentry, as described above. It could be any other practical skills as well. In today’s context it could include using machines or computers. The real point is that true education has to be practical and not just confined to book knowledge.



In order to maximize the benefits of education, respecting the teacher like God is an absolute must: Swami Vivekananda said “A teacher is equivalent to God. It also behooves that the teacher must act in a way that is worthy of the exalted status. He should be a role model and behave in an exemplary manner. He should be fully pure, do the service selflessly and should not expect anything in return”. When such a teacher imparts knowledge, he or she will also impact good value systems. Hence it is imperative that such a teacher must be kept on the same pedestal as God. Swamiji has pointed out the essential need of today – the need for ideal teachers and the need to respect them.

Bharathiyaar’s illuminating explanation about what constitutes true education: Bharatiyaar wrote two essays under the title “*Thesiya Kalvi*” (“Nationalist Education”). These two articles of thirty pages written several

decades ago act as a beacon of light which remains valid even in today's environment. He has clearly elucidated what should constitute the syllabus (what should be taught) and the pedagogy and methodology of teaching and learning. Let us see some gems from these articles:

- The foundation for nationalistic education lies in providing education in proper family values.
- Every village should have at least one school
- The history and stories from Vedas, Epics, Buddhist age and Rajput era have to be taught and imbibed into the children
- The students should be made aware of history and greatness of the local area and district
- Education should be in the vernacular
- Education should not only be about India, but also should include about Arabia, Persia, Egypt, England and other countries
- Education should impart lessons from all the above sources, unadulterated by the baggage of animosity based on religion, superstitions and such garbage which got added on later.
- While allowing children to worship their favorite Gods, they should be sensitized not to insult other Gods or exhibit animosity to people who worship these other Gods.
- Citizenship training is essential and it should imbibe in the children that the Government exists for their welfare. Government's actions should faithfully reflect the aspirations of the people expressed through the elected representatives
- Children should be educated on the important issues of village development, keeping villages clean, providing medical emergency assistance to villagers.
- Children should be educated on ethical business practices that also enable garnering resources from appropriate sources to further societal development
- Children should be able to conduct experiments in science by themselves and be able to get a better understanding of the scientific concepts
- Teachers should be aware of the new developments in science and should impart such current knowledge to the students
- As much as possible, students must be made to learn crafts like weaving and should also learn the basics of farming and horticulture and agriculture. People practically experienced in these areas should teach the students.
- Children should get into the habit of drawing water from the well and take bath regularly every morning; they must also be made to wash their own clothes. Sports and physical education should be an integral part of education
- Excursions and field trips must be a compulsory part of education
- Girls must also be encouraged to go to school, at least till the age of 10.
- While imparting education that meets the above needs, no fees should be collected

SEVALAYA's EXPERIENCES

Most of the ideas proposed above have been in vogue at Sevalaya for the past 26 years. For example:

- * As per Gandhiji's suggestion, vocational training and agriculture are part of the curriculum
- * As per Swami Vivekananda's dictum, we make every student self-reliant and independent. The fact that every one of the alumni of Sevalaya is gainfully employed and also contribute to the upkeep of the next generation of students in Sevalaya bears ample testimony to this
- * Most of Bharathiyar's suggestions above have been implemented. Excursions and field trips, vocational training, health and medical camps are some of the examples. In keeping with his suggestion of encouraging science students to experiment, an annual science exhibition is held wherein children from the Sevalaya school as well as the neighboring schools participate. In this, the children design their own models and charts and explain the scientific concepts. This not only increases their understanding of scientific concepts, but also enhances their communication skills
- * Most importantly, Sevalaya ardently follows the dictum of not charging even one rupee for such high quality education. All children in the Sevalaya school – who are from financially disadvantaged sections of the society – get free education. They do not have to pay any fees; in addition they also get all the required notebooks, books and uniforms free.
- * While the syllabus forces them to read about national and international history and matters, it is important not to lose perspectives about the local history and heritage. "Heritage Club" started in Sevalaya enrolled children whose charter was to study the heritage of the Thirunindravur district (where Sevalaya is located). These children made extensive studies of the district including religious heritage, flora and fauna, population and demographics and produced a booklet. This gained tremendous appreciation from the then education minister who released this booklet. There is no doubt that such initiatives should be encouraged in all the schools in the far flung areas of the country so as to create an awareness and pride in the local heritage.

GIVE IT A TRY

Develop whatever vocational skills you like and are good at and also teach such skills to others

Read at least one book a week. Write a report about that book and share it with your friends

Chalk out ways by which you can actually implement some principles you learnt

Treat your teachers with reverence and respect. Even after you leave your school or college, visit there often, meet your teachers and express your sense of gratitude and appreciation.

10 Physical Fitness and Environmental Consciousness

Belief in God and self-confidence give us mental strength. Education sharpens our intellect. In addition to mental strength and sharp intellect, we also need physical strength and environmental purity to bring all our efforts to fruition.

It is our bounden duty to take very good care of our health. Without good health we simply will not be able to accomplish anything else we have seen so far – lifelong learning, earning money, performing social service and so on. In this chapter, we will see what our Holy Trinity has to say about this.

It is essential to allocate time for sports and physical exercises: Our traditional practices and customs implicitly and automatically inculcated physical fitness. Nowadays, doctors advise us to walk five kilometers every day. Our ancestors used to go to the temple every morning and evening, circumambulate the large area and prostrate several times. This automatically gave the necessary physical exercise. In addition, the construction of the temple and the greenery around it ensured unpolluted fresh oxygen thereby giving people excellent health. Thus at one shot people got physical fitness, peace of mind and spiritual progress. Yet another traditional practice was Guru Kula. This was the practice of students staying in teacher's abode for their schooling. During this time, students not only learnt the academic lessons, but also helped the teacher's family in all household chores like drawing water from a well and also acquired the mental sharpness to be able to absorb the lessons that the teacher taught.

Bharathiyar says "The practice of gardening, drawing water from the well are indeed very effective for good health. Children should get up early in the morning, draw water from the well themselves and wash their clothes. They should also practice running and traditional Indian sports like Gilli and Kabadi in addition to western sports like football. Group sports are very essential. We must cultivate an interest in sports for children. Simply giving the students academic skills without focusing sufficiently on physical fitness will defeat the purpose by resulting in poor health and shorter life span.

Bharathiyar's famous poem below stresses the equal importance to be given to both academics and physical fitness:

*"Odi Vilaiyaadu Paappaa – Nee
Oynthirukka Laagaadhu Paappaa*

...

*Kaalai Ezhundavudan Padippu
Pinbu Kanivu Kodukkum Nalla Paattu
Maalai Muzhuthum Vilayaattu
Endru Pazhakka Paduthi Kollu Paappa*

“Run about and play my sweet little child,
And idle not sweet little child

...

Rise at dawn to learn your lesson,
Then sing such airs that are soothing
To games devote the whole evening
Get habituated thus, oh child!”

In today’s mechanical life and changed education system, these natural good habits are all long forgotten. Hence, we should find substitutes for these healthy habits and bring them in some other form.

Gandhiji also gave a lot of importance to allocating time for physical exercises. In 1937, Gandhiji stayed in Calcutta with Sarath Chandra Bose, brother of Subash Chandra Bose. Two people named Mahadev Desai and Gagan Vihari Mehta were also staying with him. Seeing Mahadev Desai very busy with chores and unable to come for a daily walk, he instructed others to ensure that Desai comes for his daily walk. One day, because of preoccupations, Desai could not come for his daily walk. Gandhiji told him “It is alright for you to skip food one day, but never ever skip your physical exercise and walking”.



Good food habits are essential for good health: Our scriptures postulate that man gets under the influence of three types of behavior – *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*.

Sattva bestows us good health and peace of mind. *Rajas* results in anger, restlessness and anxiety. *Tamas* gives laziness, excessive sleep, lethargy and unhealthiness. The more of *Sattva* behavior we imbibe and exhibit, more will be our positive energy and general well-being. Appropriate food is very essential to develop *Sattva*. Gandhiji clearly explains what type of food we should eat and at what times to develop *Sattva* characteristics. If nuts, seeds, vegetables and fruits are taken in the right proportion, with the right amount of cooking, they will ensure our mental and physical well-being. Instead, if we eat all kinds of food at untimely hours, it is bound to lead to disastrous consequences.

Environmental and physical cleanliness is very important: Swami Vivekananda gave a lot of importance to physical and environmental cleanliness. He always maintained that cleanliness is the first step towards Godliness. He would frequently inspect the buildings and corridors of the Mutt and if some places are found to be dirty, he would clean it himself. Once when he found an area not clean, he called up his fellow monk Swami Brahmananda and said “Why is this place so dirty? If we cannot maintain the Mutt clean, we might as well live under a tree. Once we have a Mutt, it our duty to keep it clean”. He would periodically inspect the rooms of other members of the mutt. He was very particular about ensuring all the things were put back where they belong in an orderly manner and clothes neatly folded and tucked away. He liked the way his disciple Swami Atmananda maintained his room which would always be perfectly clean and well maintained and well organized.

Realizing that lack of personal cleanliness and unhealthy food habits form the root causes for several diseases, Swamiji did whatever was possible to inculcate personal hygiene and encourage good food habits. During the rainy season, as Ganges waters were muddy, he dug deep wells to get clear and pure water. Even though he found it physically uncomfortable to stay in the hot kitchen, he used spend a long time and frequently examine the kitchen to ensure cleanliness and hygiene.

Swamiji would not even accept a glass of water from people who had not cut their nails. He insisted and made sure that people always washed their hands after using the rest room. He also did not like the practice of washing the hands and then wiping the wet hands on one’s own dress.

Once when a person came into the dining hall with slippers, Swamiji pointed out that this will bring in dust and make the food unhygienic. Furthermore, he also pointed out that it was not reverential to walk in slippers when someone was eating.

Such was Swamiji’s meticulous attention to detail in physical cleanliness and environmental purity. Indeed, we should all try to emulate such practices.

Today’s special challenges: Our current generation and future generations face a challenge that was not prevalent in the times of our Holy Trinity. That is environmental pollution. Air pollution caused by increased vehicular traffic, water pollution caused by factories indiscriminately dumping harmful chemicals, increased use of plastics that cannot be recycled and add to the planet’s mass, use of artificial fertilizers that degrade the quality of crops are all serious dangers that need to be combated. Each of us should do our bit to minimize our contributions to these harmful factors. Else we run the real risk of turning this entire planet into a desert, bereft of rain and good crops.

SEVALAYA's EXPERIENCES

From the date of inception, for the past 26 years, close to 20,000 saplings have been planted by Sevalaya in and around the Kasuva Village.

The students create awareness about environmental cleanliness by forming teams like “Green Team”, “Nature team” and so on.

All the events related to environment are observed consistently and solemnly. Environmental awareness related field trips and drills are periodically undertaken. Practices like organic farming, plastics avoidance, Gobar gas usage, use of solar energy are all diligently followed by Sevalaya, thereby doing our bit for the environment.

Smokeless Bhogi is another awareness program that the students undertake a walkathon through the villages to ensure the burning tires and rubber is avoided on Bhogi day.

As a mark of appreciation for Sevalaya’s initiatives for awareness creation about the harmful effects of plastics and global warming, Sevalaya won recognition at international level from two organizations called Primerica and “Design for Change”. These organizations conduct a contest in which 25,000 schools from all over the world participate. For two successive years, Sevalaya has figured in the top 20 schools. Indeed, a creditable achievement for a rural school for underprivileged children who are first generation learners!

GIVE IT A TRY

Eat only nutritious food; avoid fast food

Allocate time for sports and physical exercises every day

Keep a dustbin in each room and ensure that the garbage is dumped in the bin and the accumulated garbage is disposed of appropriately

Avoid using plastics – take a cloth bag when you go shopping

Chalk out ways by which you can actually implement some principles you learnt

Treat your teachers with reverence and respect. Even after you leave your school or college, visit them often, meet your teachers and express your sense of gratitude and appreciation

11. Other Important Qualities

There are a number of important attributes or qualities that have been constantly emphasized in our epics and our classical Tamil texts like Aathichoodi and Thirukural. We will take a few of these and see what our Holy Trinity has to elucidate about these. Specifically, we will look at the following qualities:

- Speaking the truth and keeping up one's promises
- Being fair and impartial
- Having a positive attitude
- Respecting others' viewpoints and time
- Being courageous
- Practicing non-violence and universal kindness

Speaking the truth and keeping up one's promises

The first and principal value that the Upanishads extol us to do is "*Satyam Vadha*" – that is to "utter the truth". The most exemplary role model for practicing this value is Gandhiji whose passion for truth and non-violence is well known and well chronicled. He viewed "satya and ahimsa" (truth and non-violence) as his two eyes and made sure he never deviated even an inch from upholding these two cardinal principles.

"Satya" does not limit itself to just telling the truth. It goes far beyond and spans the important attribute of keeping up the commitments made to others even if it means you have to stretch yourself and experience any inconvenience. There was an incidence in Gandhiji's life that took place in Tamil Nadu that brought out this trait:

When Gandhiji visited Tamil Nadu, a donation of Rs. 5,000 was to be given to him in the town of Karur. Similarly, there was a fund raising drive in the town of Gobichettypalayam also. The schedule for a grand function for the collection to be handed over to Gandhiji was drawn out and elaborate arrangements were being made by the people in the two towns who were eagerly looking forward to the occasion. But the people who were doing the scheduling for Gandhiji's visit cancelled these in the last minute and routed Gandhiji's visit to Tamil Nadu through the town of Kallikottai. The residents of Karur and Gobicehtypalayam were highly agitated. One of them came to Gandhiji, became emotional and yelled at him as to why such unfair scheduling was done when the residents had taken a lot of effort for the fund raising and the event.

Gandhiji was deeply hurt and immediately summoned the people in charge of scheduling. He told that once a commitment is made, it should be honoured notwithstanding any difficulties. A rest day had been scheduled for Gandhiji to give him a break in his hectic schedule. But Gandhiji gave up the rest day, went to the two towns first and then carried on his other planned activities. As someone who valued truth, commitment and hard work, he would never abandon his co-workers who stood by these values.

Another manifestation of the principle of satya is to abide by the rules all the time. We can learn a lesson about this aspect from Gandhiji's stay in the Yerwada prison. When Gandhiji was imprisoned by the British in the Yerwada prison, there were other political prisoners in the same prison. But the prison authorities segregated Gandhiji from the others.

The other political prisoners did not like the way the officials treated them and they also did not like the food provided. The food often used to be stale and stinking and there were even worms floating in the food. Because they did not like the food, they decided to fast and abstain from eating. For three days, no one even touched the food. But, to the surprise of the prison authorities, on the fourth day, they all ate the food! When they tried to find out the reason, one of the prisoners confided "Yesterday I managed to secretly meet Gandhiji. He said that we cannot break the rules of the prison just because we do not like the food. Fasting and satyagraha are weapons that should only be used when our self-respect is insulted. They should not be misused as tools to achieve selfish ends. Thus Gandhiji demonstrated that part of satya is not breaking the rules under any circumstances.

Bharathiyar also extols the value of truth or satya by the words "*Poi Solla Koodaathu Paappaa*" which means "do not lie, my child". His daughter Shakuntala Bharathi recounts an incidence in her younger days where she learnt her father's deep commitment to truth.

One evening Bharathiyar finished writing a piece for a journal and gave it to his daughter to be posted. Shakuntala went to beach with her friends and completely forgot to post the letter. Since Bharathiyar was on Mouna Vratha (i.e., a day when he would observe complete silence), he did not ask his daughter whether she posted the letter. When she realized that she had forgotten, Shakuntala decided that she will lie to her father that it has been posted but post it the next day. But when she saw her father's face radiant with honesty and wisdom, she immediately gave up the idea of lying and emotionally confided that she forgot to post the letter. The kind hearted Bharathiyar who always appreciated truth and honesty said "Don't worry dear – anyway I wanted to revise the article; so it is good that you did not post the article!"

We learn an important lesson from the above: When we follow values like truth and non-violence, others around us will also espouse these values and together, there would be a multiplicative or even exponential increase in the benefit to the society.

No fear or favour!

Today, it is indeed very common to find undue favours being shown to people close to the influential ones and to sideline those who are not so "privileged". Our Holy Trinity not only vehemently opposed this unethical practice, but also were role models in displaying integrity,

not showing fear or favour under any circumstances. They were very particular that everyone should be treated fairly.

Gandhiji's eldest son Harilal Gandhi approached several people and borrowed money citing his father's name. When Gandhiji came to know this, he put an advertisement in the newspapers that nobody need to do any favours to Harilal just because he is Gandhiji's son. When people questioned Gandhiji whether it was right to harm his son's interests like this, Gandhiji replied eloquently "Just like a mother shows special love and attention to a sick child, I am also fond of my eldest son. Even so, it is my duty to warn the people not to get deceived. If Harilal comes to me today, I will not hate him nor will I be biased against him – but that is a different matter". Gandhiji demonstrated that even if it is one's own son, it is the parent's duty to point out the mistake and correct the mistake and ensure that the son does not stray on the wrong path. Gandhiji set an example for being impartial, unbiased, loving and ensuring no special favours are dished out to anyone.

Maintaining a positive attitude even in times of calamities

An old adage in Tamil says "*Idukkann Varungaal Naguga*" which means "smile in times of distress". A very important attribute to character building is remaining calm, composed, confident and resilient even in times of extreme difficulties. An anecdote from Swami Vivekananda's life illustrates this point. When Swamiji visited the United States, he did not know anyone there. Unfortunately he lost all his money and had nowhere to go and did not even have a change of dress. Anyone else in this situation would have lost heart, got depressed and even gone to the extent of suicide. But Swamiji was completely unperturbed and thought "I have come here at the command of my teacher. He will take care of solving my problems". He slept in empty goods trains (freight trains), used the rucksacks in these trains as blankets and braved the American winter cold.

Braving all these odds, Swamiji captivated the minds of everyone by his famous lecture that started with the words "My dear sisters and brothers of America" in the Parliament of Religions. After the lecture, he had invitations from large number of people to come and stay with them. What a contrast from the situation just a few days before when he had no place to stay! But Swamiji maintained equanimity and a level head and did not get carried away by these invitations.

Swamiji's resilience and balance in taking the difficulties and successes in their stride without getting either depressed or overjoyed is a lesson for all of us. His advice of "Even if you fail a thousand times, try one more time!" is a wakeup call for all of us in our moments of feeling daunted by challenges.

Respecting other people's feelings and time

We often talk of "empathizing" with others. What does this mean? This means putting ourselves in others shoes and trying to think what we would have done if we had been in their situation or to reason out the root cause of why they behaved the way they did. Doing this regularly would increase the goodwill people around us have and make us also more balanced and reasonable.

An anecdote in Gandhiji's life brings out the importance of empathy. Once, Gandhiji had undertaken a fast. A poor boy named Vitoba in that neighborhood was very fond of Gandhiji. Gandhiji had mentioned to him that he will break his fast with the juice that the boy brings. The boy was thrilled and with the very limited money he had tried to look for fruits. When the shopkeepers were intrigued why he is looking for fruits, he mentioned that Gandhiji is going to break the fast only with the juice from the fruits he is buying. They all laughed at him and said "There will be lots of rich and influential people who would get baskets of expensive fruits. Do you think Gandhiji will forsake all that and take the juice from the fruit someone like you brought?" As news about Gandhiji's breaking fast spread like wild fire, the prices of fruits started to skyrocket. The poor boy could afford only a small and not so juicy fruit. Without losing hope, he bought that and stood in an obscure corner of the crowd which had gathered to watch Gandhiji break his fast.

As expected, several rich people brought baskets of fresh fruits. But Gandhiji looked around for Vitoba and said he will break his fast only with what Vitoba offers. Immediately people began to search for Vitoba and located him in the crowd. He was brought to the stage and Gandhiji broke his fast with the juice from the fruit Vitoba bought. Vitoba was ecstatic and tears of joy flowed down from his eyes realising the magnanimity of Gandhiji. Gandhiji's empathy and honesty are amply exemplified by this anecdote.

Compassion and non-violence

As discussed earlier, compassion means being considerate and kind to all the fellow human beings as well as to all the creatures of this planet. Ahimsa or non-violence means not injuring anyone under any circumstances. Gandhiji steadfastly adhered to the principle of Ahimsa in the freedom struggle. Though the two terms – ahimsa and compassion – have subtle differences, they both have the same genesis namely being kind to everyone and not inflicting pain or suffering to anyone under any circumstances. Hence we will see these two good traits together.

Gandhiji was the personification of compassion. In every one of his actions, compassion would be paramount. Gandhiji was once participating in an important meeting with the top political leaders. Suddenly he rushed out of the meeting. Everybody was puzzled by this weird behavior. What surprised them even more was what Gandhiji said when he returned to the meeting:

He had a little goat whose leg was hurt and the wound had to be dressed periodically. As he was anxious that the animal should be given timely care, he had to go out of the meeting!

What a stellar example of compassion! Whatever important matters await him, the well-being of a creature of this planet assumed more importance and urgency. No wonder Gandhiji has been called "Mahatma"!

Bharatiyaar also declares

"Thani Oru Manithankku Unavu Illai Enil Jagathai Azhithiduvom!"

meaning "if even one human being does not get food, we will destroy the earth". In fact, Bharatiyaar's compassion towards animals and birds is manifested even greater. We have seen this in another chapter where he fed hungry birds while starving himself. He illustrated the

need to treat animals as our fellow creations of God by a short story: “There were two kings. One of them treats his subjects like slaves. He does not ensure good food is made available to the subjects, nor does he bestow any freedom or a decent life to them. But, he extracts taxes heavily. The second king, in contrast, treats his subjects as his equals, takes care of all their basic needs of food and shelter, gives them all the freedom and liberty, makes them better citizens by giving them education and a decent life. In the event of the first king being in trouble, his subjects will not come to his rescue. In fact, they will ensure his downfall. The second king, on the other hand, will be safe from all dangers and his subjects will stand by him through thick and thin. In the case of animals, we human beings behave like the first king instead of behaving like the second king”.



If such is the consideration to be shown to animals, we can imagine how much consideration we need to show to fellow human beings! We must treat our colleagues and fellow human beings, like the second king in the story above.

Swami Vivekananda says the same using different words: “God comes in the form of bread to a hungry person. Even if one dog goes hungry, what is the use of all these temples and mutts? First let us abolish the hunger of every human being. Then let all the religion and God come!”

The summary of what all these three have said is that without basic compassion and consideration towards fellow creations of God, there is no point in ritualistically uttering prayers or going to temples.

Courage

Chapter 1 talks about the importance of self-confidence. Courage is a manifestation of self-confidence. Self-confidence and clarity of thought process will manifest outside as courage. Thus, it stands to reason that courage is a very important trait one should possess.

Bharatiyaar says “Our ancestors respect people with courage as people with intellect. Do not trust a coward who becomes afraid for every small thing, even if he claims he is highly educated”. He also says “Fear is ignorance; courage is knowledge. A truly enlightened person is not one who has read all the scriptures but one who stands courageous and unperturbed in moments of distress”. He further underscores the importance of being courageous by “Everyone says the essential thing needed to rejuvenate India is education. I believe that the essential thing to rejuvenate India is courage. Courage is the mother of all good things including education”

An incident from Swami Vivekananda’s life also brings out the same point. Once Swamiji was climbing up a mountain and felt tired. Hunger and exhaustion hit him hard. As he rested under a tree, he thought he could not even take one step forward. But a positive thought struck him like

a thunderbolt. “It is true that the soul is all powerful. That being the case, where did tiredness, hunger and exhaustion come from? I should be courageous and positive”. That very moment he felt a surge of energy run through his system and rejuvenated him. The tiredness, exhaustion and hunger flew away almost magically and he resumed his strenuous climb up the hill. Indeed, this is a wonderful example of the strong relationship between internal courage and physical energy.

When Swamiji was a little boy, then Narendra, he was playing with his friends under a tree. Wanting to chase them away from there, an old man tried to scare them by saying there was a ghost in that tree. Naren told his friends, “We have been playing here every day. Have we ever seen any ghost? There is no such thing as ghosts. Do not be afraid”. No wonder Naren was a microcosm of the courage that became the beacon of light called Swami Vivekananda in the later years!

Gandhiji was also a standing example of the strong correlation between firmness of mind and courage. That he won the freedom struggle with no guns or weapons but only by his courage, determination and commitment to principles of truth and non-violence is a great demonstration of the importance of mental strength and courage.

SEVALAYA's EXPERIENCES

To underscore the importance of courage, Sevalaya's morning prayer song is Bharathiyaar's "*Achchamillai Achchamillai* " which means "there is no fear; there is no fear".

In early 1990s, the areas surrounding Sevalaya were used for brewing illicit liquor. People were using the polluted oils from brick kilns as fuel, causing serious pollution. Sevalaya courageously opposed these nefarious activities. There was stiff resistance from vested interests and even death threats. Undaunted by all these, Sevalaya succeeded in abolishing brewing of illicit liquor and eradicating the bad practices causing pollution.

GIVE IT A TRY

Make a promise to yourself and fulfill it every day. When you consistently and repeatedly keep up commitments to yourself, this becomes a habit and enters your system. You will automatically start being honest and keep up commitments to others.

Under no circumstances lose the radiant smile on your face; never use unkind words to anyone under any circumstances. Keep a diary and track how many days you are able to accomplish this. Try to set targets to increase the number of such “good days”, with the ultimate goal of never losing a positive attitude and never being rude to others.

If someone yells at you or is angry with you, try to put yourself in their shoes and analyze the root cause of why he behaved the way he did. Analyze what you would have done had you been in his shoes. In order not to retaliate, gain some time for yourself to cool down your emotions by mentally counting backwards from 100 to 1. You will soon see that the urge to retaliate and further sour the relationships will reduce and eventually go away.

Every day, make it a habit to help a person who is differently abled. Try to feed at least a few grains to a crow every day.

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REVIEWS OF THE TAMIL VERSION

Muralidharan, who is the founder and managing trustee of Sevalaya, has brought out a beautiful book which contains experiential stories with good morals aimed to benefit school children. These stories have even moved and touched prisoners. This book derives its inspiration from the principles of Mahakavi Bharathiyaar, Mahatma Gandhiji and Swami Vivekananda. The editor, Gopalaswamy Ramesh, has aptly used the Chinese proverb “Tell me, I will forget; show me, I will understand; involve me, I will learn” for this book. Sevalaya has won numerous awards for innovation in education. The book released during the silver jubilee year of Sevalaya is available free of cost. Whoever is interested in the wellbeing of the younger generation can get this book free of cost and benefit from it.

– Kalki magazine

In general, the only target and focus of all the schools is on just increasing the marks obtained by students in the examinations. In this scenario, in addition to the above goal, the NGO Sevalaya, conducts exclusive moral science/education classes which focuses on core values like belief in Divinity, self-confidence, integrity and honesty, discipline and an attitude for social welfare for its students. Specifically, lessons from the great lives of Mahakavi Bharathiyaar, Mahatma Gandhiji and Swami Vivekananda are taken, compiled and imparted as valuable lessons in the moral education classes. Sowing the good seeds of these values in young minds will stand these future generations in good stead as they grow from childhood to their careers earning money. This will benefit not only them and their families, but also the entire county and society. Good character and value systems are as important as formal education. With a view that all schools should re-introduce this kind of moral education in their curriculum, Sevalaya has compiled the lessons they teach in this area in the form of a book . There is no profit motive and the book is available free of cost and can be downloaded from Sevalaya’s Web site.

- Thuglak magazine



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