

## **Evolution of the school**

*Narrated by the founder*

In 1984, I was working in Sree Rayalaseema Paper Mills, Kurnool. Though I was materialistically comfortable, I was unhappy, unable to find an internal sense of satisfaction and happiness. At that time I read a book titled "Mahayogi" about Sri Aurobindo. I was inspired by the book, especially the letters written by Sri Aurobindo to his wife Mrunalini. I decided to join Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. But I was not accepted because I had not studied in the Ashram school. I also did not know much about the life and works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.

At Pondicherry, I came across an Industrialist Mr. L.M. Shah, who offered me a job in his industry. From 1984 to 1987, I worked in Fastenex Private Limited and its sister concerns run by him at Pondicherry. He liked me and my work very much. He was an ardent devotee of Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The relationship between me and Mr. L.M. Shah went beyond employer-employee relationship. I learnt many things as an Engineer and as a human being from him.

During 1987, I joined Auro Service D'Auroville, Pondicherry (Consultants for Vishakapatnam Steel Project township design, Vishakapatnam) as site in-charge. Later I relinquished my job and joined Vivekananda Kendra, Kanyakumari, a spiritually oriented service organisation as a whole timer in March 1991.

After Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, there was a perceived threat to Vivekananda Rock Memorial by LTTE. So the management of Vivekananda Kendra started posting whole time volunteers for Rock Memorial. Similarly I was sent for a week. This was where Swami Vivekananda sat and meditated for three days. Laxmi Didi's classes on Vivekananda also had an impact on me. Night stays on Rock memorial amidst roaring sea helped me to crystallise my thoughts and to identify my source of happiness. I discovered my goal there. It was to work for brightening the future of opportunity deprived children. It would give me personal satisfaction as I had had a turbulent childhood and could empathize with such children. It was a token of my patriotism and would serve as a means of self-discovery!

In August 1992, I came and settled down in a village 'Srirampura' on the outskirts of Mysore city. I began my grass root level work there, by initiating free supplementary classes for the rural school going children. Children's response was good. So other activities were also started. I used to work as a part time lecturer in an AMIE coaching centre and initiated income-cum-employment generating activities such as screen printing, desk top publishing and handmade greeting cards unit. This provided the necessary funds and gave employment to some youth of that village. I experienced first-hand the challenges of staying in villages and the reasons for the reluctance of urban educated people to stay in villages. I could comprehend the challenges of running a rural school. This grass root level work helped me to conceptualise my dream school "Kaliyuva Mane" – an innovative school for rural OUT OF SYSTEM children. In 1996 Padma, a

post graduate in Sociology joined me as wife cum collaborator. During 1999, Divyadeepa received the first public contribution and was registered as a public charitable trust

In 2001, my ex-employer Sri L.M. Shah visited our home. I described my plan of starting an experimental school for the benefit of rural OUT OF SYSTEM children, such as school dropouts, first generation school goers, children going to schools and not reaching the desired educational standards, children from difficult family backgrounds, etc. He was very happy with the proposal of my dream school. He came forward to offer me financial support for buying the land for our project. In 2003, I bought the project site of 2 acres and 33 guntas in Kenchalagudu village. In 2004, we shifted our family base to the project site at Kenchalagudu village. We stayed in a makeshift house existed already there. We erected a small hut with Cuddapah slabs as benches. This became our learning area. In June 2005, we started Kaliyuva Mane, with 14 children. Two children from Srirampura joined the school. One was going to school once in a blue moon. My son joined the same school. My wife started working as a whole time volunteer. The school was run with the help of personal funds for more than a year.

In 2006, I had attended a website launching ceremony of Karthavya IT Solutions. The President of Ramakrishna Ashrama, Swami Nithyasthanandaji inaugurated the website. Mr. C.K. Naveena, the young and dynamic CEO asked me to say a few words about our school. I spoke. There were few young engineering college students also. They were keen to visit the school. Then one afternoon 16 Engineering College students came on 8 bikes and wanted to support the school. Educated youth from high profile families coming to a remote rural school to offer support! I was shocked, surprised, and happy! They have brought more and more youngsters to Kaliyuva Mane. Now Divyadeepa is lucky to have more than 200 young volunteers. Thus my dream turned into a vision has become **our** project in a true sense, bringing into its hold more and more people. They have become an integral part of Divyadeepa family.

Again Sri L. M. Shah visited the project site in December 2006. He was very happy to see the happy faces of the children and the functioning of the school. By then he had formed "The Grace and Gratitude Trust" to fund service organisations like ours. Again in 2007 December, he visited our school and offered financial assistance to construct my residence, volunteer's block, office, computer laboratory, library, science laboratory, water sumps, OH tanks, Generator room, and multi-purpose hall. Construction was completed during 2008-2010. On his subsequent visit he sponsored Diesel Generator set and a school van for the school. Even now he is supporting our school in many ways. Thus a dream cum vision became a reality. Our school is progressing well with its attendant challenges.

**M.R. Ananth Kumar**

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*"Feel from the bottom of your heart. Take up an issue. Find a solution. Put your hands to the wheels of work. Money will come, Men will come, and God's Grace will come".*

**- Swami Vivekananda**