

On Mission to Educate Differently-abled and Underprivileged Children

Very rarely, people used to qualify the chartered accountants examinations. Very rarely, those professionals after qualifying the CA examinations treaded the difficult path of uncertainty in life. Very rarely, such professionals invest everything into charity, which they have earned so far. Very rarely, they leave their convenient and successful city life and go back to a village with a wish to resurrect the humanity, i.e. improve the human condition, by providing primary education to the physically- and mentally-challenged children from underprivileged sections of our society. Strongly supported by his better-half, CA. M. R. Raghavan once decided to do that in 1992 while he was practicing his accountancy in Mumbai. Strongly moved by his will to bring in change in primary education scenario of the country, Raghavans moved away from Bombay and decided to dedicate their life for this cause. Read on...

Having strong conviction to serve the society, CA. M. R. Raghavan started his journey as a chartered accountant and software development programmer, in Bombay (now Mumbai), and took a road not frequently taken.



CA. Raghavan and his wife, Ms. Aruna Raghavan, spent about a decade in Bombay experimenting with creative child pedagogy. In 1991, they started methodically training parents on available alternate pedagogy in order to create a love of learning in children. In 1992, they decided to leave Bombay and invest their entire savings to set up a school to provide free education to the underprivileged children. They started a primary school, *Shikshayatan*, on August 15, 1994, at a village called Arasavanangkadu in the District Thiruvarur of Tamil Nadu with 12 children, of which two could not speak, one seemed to suffer

from rickets, one suffered from ear infection and six from primary TB. All students of his school came from the illiterate and underprivileged section of the society. They started by taking children of five years of age, but reduced the age to 2 later. They preferred the physically- and mentally-challenged children, and girls to other underprivileged children. Today the number of students in this school has grown to about 200.

They based their innovative teaching technique on the philosophy of the Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, i.e. everyone in life is seeking perfection of the physical, the emotion, the intellect and the spiritual, and they hoped to encourage kids to seek that perfection through their work.

Since the children from villages did not have labs, books, etc., CA. Raghavan envisioned *Jnana Vahanam*, a mobile lab and library to go from school to school twice a week. Somebody donated a van to them and they re-designed its interiors to carry books, science equipment, a computer, a projector and a screen and a generator.

They conducted more than 200 workshops for parents and teacher education programmes in more than 53 schools and helped start 18 schools in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Malaysia. Using his accountant's training, CA. Raghavan sketches his five-year plans and projections, and then works hard to convert them into a reality.

CA. M. R. Raghavan's work is an inspiration not only for the stakeholders of accountancy profession in India, which includes the members and students of ICAI, but for the competent professionals across various professions, who wish to bring a change in their society and improve the human condition of the country. ■

* Contributed by Journal Section of the ICAI.