

The Banyan Tree has Fallen, Long Live the Banyan



There is a Japanese proverb that says, "Better than a thousand days of diligent study is one day with a great teacher." A pillar of support, an epitome of strength, a disciplinarian yet always approachable and warm at heart — that's what a teacher is, for every student.

G. Ramachandran, affectionately called GR, who was passionately connected with and committed to the Swami Dayananda Saraswathi school/college and its allied institutions in Tamil Nadu, precisely fits into this frame.

Manjakudi is a village near Kodavasal, Kumbakonam in Tamil Nadu. It houses an



aided higher secondary school, where 2,100 children within a radius of 10 km have been receiving quality education for the past 30 years. In 2000, with the help of an industrial house, an arts and science college emerged. To tap the rural potential, and talent, a large IT company established in 2011 its first rural BPO at Manjakudi.

Born and brought up at Manjakudi with three brothers, GR was a teacher. While he would not tolerate any student or teacher failing to be punctual, he would be the first person to help them if they had any personal problem.

Alcoholism is a major problem in villages, and many children drop out of school due to their fathers' drink habit which leaves them with no choice but to take up some job. To address this issue, we started our first treatment camp at Manjakudi.



The stigma associated with alcoholism is so high in villages that it is not that easy for a recovering person to get immediately employed even after treatment.

GR stepped in and made the vital contribution of giving some work to the person until he got a job. (He was doing this till he breathed his last). This was crucial to the villager as it helped him sustain his recovery and keep his morale intact. This again shows GR's non-judgmental attitude and innate compassion.

Whenever anyone in the village died, GR would be the first caller to console the bereaved. Besides, he would offer them cash to buy firewood and other basic needs for cremation.

Understanding the ground reality that an agricultural labourer may not have cash in hand at the time of death of his family member, and providing money — a very crucial and timely help for the villager.



When the tsunami struck, GR was one of the first to go over to Nagapattinam. He spent a week there helping the injured and physically moving the dead and the mutilated for mass burial and cremation. Little did GR bother that this action took a toll on his health.

During his last few days, GR needed help to move around. Despite this, he continued to be actively engaged in work. Actually, he was on the school premises 20 minutes before his final departure.

A banyan tree has fallen. Banyans do leave behind a number of roots to survive and grow again.

(The writer worked with GR for over 26 years in running the higher secondary school and also conducting addiction treatment camps. email: ttrcrf@gmail.com)