

Educate, Organise and Integrate

The Story of a Community School at Macherla



The great Indian tradition promoting and nurturing social cohesion and wellbeing of all human beings (*sarvejana sukhinobhavanthu*) meets its ideal realisation in *Satya Sai Vidya Vihar* on the outskirts of Macherla town in Guntur district. The legacy of this great tradition has been passionately preserved and strengthened by many Indian seers and saints over a period of time. One among them is Sri Satya Sai Baba who recommended to all his followers the one and only course of social action: *Love All, Serve All*. At the material level, two of his pet slogans and projects recommended are: *ceiling on desires and human values in education*. The *Satya Sai Vidya Vihar* of Macherla town today reverberates with these twin social commandments

ordained by the seer. It achieved the sobriquet of *Light House School*, an institution that guides, drives and trains children in acquiring secular, social and humane credentials in life. Essentially most of these children are drawn from socially backward and economically weaker sections of local society (more than 90% admissions are from SC, ST, BC and Muslim communities). The institution is duly recognised and follows the guidelines of Government of Andhra Pradesh. The medium of instruction is English and there is enough emphasis on mother tongue and inherited historical traditions.

The *Satya Sai Vidya Vihar* school was established in the year 2006 on a patch of 2-acre land procured and purchased

by Nimmagadda Lakshmi Prasad and his family members. The idea was to establish an educational institution catering to the needs of poor families in the locality (an industrial locality in the vicinity of KCP Cement Factory). In due course of time, Lakshmi Prasad was joined by Jakka Srinivasa Rao who too was influenced by ideas of selfless social service. The duo has been unstoppable since then. Over the next decade they have transformed the institution into a place of learning and ideal training ground for children. The development of the institution has been momentous. They have created a 5-crore worth of property for the sole benefit of poor children: 2-acre land (around 2.5 crores); assets including classrooms, laboratories, library, dining

hall, cultural centre, training centre (2 crores); fixtures and furniture (10 lakh rupees); computers, digital rooms and software (around 5 lakh rupees) etc. There are four major donors for institution: Nimmagadda Family, Jakka Family, Koneru Family and Arka Media Pvt. Ltd.

The underlying social principle in the constitution of the Executive Committee and General Body is amazing and unprecedented. Every member on these committees necessarily donates a minimum of one lakh rupees each and only those who are prepared to shoulder this responsibility are accepted into management bodies. Number of members is proportional to the annual expenditure the school incurs. As on date the cost of running the school is 29 lakh rupees per annum and there are 20 members

on the school committee contributing this amount every year (minimum one lakh rupees and there is no limit on maximum contribution). The members thus appointed on the General Body are given to a necessary understanding that the individual contributions shall continue without break. Their successors too will continue the healthy habit. This inter-generational understanding about the need to donate and run the institution guides the working of Satya Sai Vidya Vihar. The arrangement has an inbuilt strength and all the assets are registered in the name of Sri Satya Sai Seva Samithi. The school has inaugurated an interesting social paradigm, *Donor-Doer Matrix* where donors/contributors are socially inspired and conduct the routines of the school with zeal, zest, patience and perseverance.

The commendable social churning that is visible today in the school has been mentored and promoted by Sai Educational Society and the guiding spirit in the entire process is Nimmagadda Lakshmi Prasad, an 85-year-old follower of Sri Satya Sai and ably assisted by Jakka Srinivasa Rao. Commenting on the ultimate social goal of the institution, Akkineni Anil Kumar (Member of the Executive Committee) succinctly wraps up thus: *to train sensible social engineers for promoting the concept of social egalitarianism*. The expectation has not gone in vain. Students passing out from this institution are in great demand today. And the silver lining in the entire social discourse is the local colleges line up before Satya Sai Vidya Vihar year after year to offer free seats for all the students leaving





this institution after class X. The writing on the wall is clear: students from this school are rated the best social products by local community. Naturally demand for admissions is on a steep vertical ascent every academic year. The ratio between admission aspirants and the actual admissions oscillates around 1:10. This is unthinkable for a small, discreet and unassuming private educational institution in a mofussil region. The most important economic and social attributes of the school are: *education is free for all and admissions are meant only for those who produce an undertaking to follow its avowed social/cultural mission.* These two are observed with a religious zeal by the managers of the institution. Often times, the school admits children into LKG class only so that they will be properly trained in the course of next

12 years of their life in the school. Admissions into higher classes are rarely encouraged and accepted.

Admission process in the school is guided by certain basic considerations. Indian ethics, culture, spirituality and social morals form the bedrock of the institution. Those parents who approve of these basic principles are encouraged to admit their wards. In the words of the Headmistress, Y Ramadevi, *the school stands for transition (from mediocracy to decency), transformation (from ordinary behaviour to imposing personality) and tremendous social experience (of acceptable social value systems).* As part of this institutional thinking, the school promotes important co-curricular and non-academic pursuits like learning to chant classical texts;

understanding moral stories from scriptures; respecting elders; learning Indian folk arts, Yoga, classical dances, music etc. Precept is strictly followed by healthy practice by students of the school. Education is totally free (for 12 long years). Students are to meet the cost of books and uniform only (to the tune of Rs. 4000-5000 per year). The management is looking for donors who will either subsidise this component or liberally meet the total expenditure. The school reports 100% result (with GPA running above 8.5 for all the students who have appeared for class X public examination) in the last three years.

The school admits a maximum of 35 students every year (only one section at LKG level) through a common interactive session with students and parents. Preference is always for daily



wagers and poor parents (irrespective of religion, creed, class and caste). As on date there are around 380 children pursuing their studies in the school and the social math is highly encouraging and interesting: BC children (56%); Muslim minority children (18%); SC children (11%); ST children (6%) and OC children (9%). There is observed an ideal form of gender equality in the admissions: half of the students are girl children and the rest are boys. However, there is a favourable gender balance and approach in the recruitment of teachers. Most of the teachers are women and there are very few male teachers in the institution. Seating arrangements in the classrooms is striking: only two students per bench and there are maximum of 15-18 benches in each room. The room leaves enough physical space for the kids to negotiate their movements and internal classroom interactions. Each room flaunts decorated learning

atmosphere with walls sporting academic designs. In addition, the walls of the institution (corridors and common places) are painted with subjects of study or general knowledge (the concept of *Building as Learning aide*). Memory of subject and general awareness continually reimposes itself on the formative minds of students in the school. The large play ground and ambience of the location are always attractive to the children under instruction. Needless to say, toilet and running water facilities are present in the school.

The success of the school is a foregone conclusion given the background of its make-up, growth and concern of the promoters like Nimmagadda Lakshmi Prasad, Jakka Srinivasa Rao, K. Bapineedu Choudary (E-tv), Mallemala Syam Prasad Reddy, Yarlaga Shobu, Devineni Prasad and their associates on the general body of the organisation. Any social

success has its own innate reasons and the school boasts of its impressive success due to a set of inter-related factors: free education; sensible admission process; promotion of an enduring social psychology free from hatred and suspicion; ideal personality development of kids under instruction; quality education; women teaching staff; highly qualified teachers; sufficient learning aides and equipment; sufficient infrastructure; free nutrition support for children sitting for public examination; large operational canvas for amenable socialisation; absence of child abuse; absence of sectarian approach.

In a nut shell the school is promoting a time-tested Indian tradition (characterised more by a larger social canvas than by a sectarian approach) which has been successfully nurtured for public consumption. The social indulgence of people involved in the running and maintenance of the school





creates a role model at Macherla. It can be replicated or duplicated or followed at other places with an efficient ease and it only requires the social will of an individual. Indian tradition is not devoid of people willing to donate, contribute and work towards social cohesion. This attribute had a meaningful and socially beneficial repeat occurrence at frequent intervals of historical times. The words of Jakka Srinivasa Rao, Secretary of the Society sound prophetic in this context: *Sri Satya Sai Vidya Vihar is an example for this inherited socio-cultural tradition and, its continued existence is a contemporary social necessity.* The managers of the school say that it is an experiment. But the reality unfolds an interesting and enduring social saga of a commendable learning process in operation. It does not call for appreciation. On the other hand, what is needed is its possible replication in other places. For, appreciation is temporary whereas replication of experiment is transcendental and ideal. To put everything in one social phrase, the Community School (Satya Sai Vidya Vihar) at Macherla has become the contemporary *Cradle of Socialisation* in Guntur district today. It denotes the arrival of a new social dawn.





Sri Satya Sai Vidya Vihar at Macherla (Guntur District)
Promoting commendable social inclusion in school education

Smart AP Foundation: 20 Non-negotiable Indicators

Human Development

- 100% Institutional Deliveries
- End all preventable maternal deaths
- End all preventable infant deaths
- Malnutrition free children (below 5 years of age)
- Zero school drop outs upto 12th class

Environmental Development

- GP / Ward has trees in vacant land i.e. common land, road side, institutional premises
- GP / Ward has functional water conservation and harvesting structures
- Functional solid / liquid waste management system

Social Development

- End open defecation
- End girl-child marriages (girls below 18 years of age)

Good Governance

- GP / Ward has functional Information Centre i.e. Computer Lab, and Mee Seva Centre
- GP / Ward has telecom/ internet connectivity
- GP / Ward has functional grievance redressal system
- Gram Sabha/Ward Sabha held 4 times a year with 2/3rd attendance
- GP / Ward has its own dynamic

development plan prepared by community participation

Economic Development

- Home for all – with access to toilet, safe-drinking water, and regular power
- Every household has diversified livelihood opportunities and/or micro- enterprise
- Every village household has a functional bank account/PM Jan Dhan Bank Account
- Every farmer has soil health card, enriched micro-nutrients
- Functional toilet, potable water, electricity available in Anganwadi Centres, Govt. Schools, health centre, GP / Ward building



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