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Sathya Sai Baba : A divine legend

I admire Bhagwan Satya Sai Baba for his selfless work and contributions to the welfare of the people by providing drinking water for the rural population, free healthcare facilities for the rural poor and free higher education.

The major factors in human resource development are value based education and quality healthcare. In addition, the infrastructural requirement like availability of potable water is an essential need of the human resource. While the government is actively engaged in providing these resources to the citizens, Baba has been sensitive to these essential needs of the Indian population, particularly of the people living in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, for over four decades.

Keeping this in mind, he has created vast infrastructure for providing value-based quality education to children from primary to university level, established super specialty hospitals in rural areas - as early as 1991 when there were no corporate hospitals in such interior regions - and worked on a project to provide potable safe drinking water for people of Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh. I would like to discuss the unique characteristics of these institutions.

Value-Based Education

The best part of a young person is his or her childhood in school and the best time spent is 8am to 4 pm each day in the school. This is applicable for all children in the age group of five to 20 living in both urban and rural areas.

Baba has realised the problems of the rural poor and has made it a point that education is absolutely free in all the schools and colleges established by the Sathya Sai Trust.

Interestingly, the Sathya Sai Educational Institutions cater equally to the development of the mind, heart and the body. This is achieved through integrated education, which lays equal emphasis on keeping the body healthy, the mind active and sharp and the heart pure. Baba, being the Chancellor of the institute, spends substantial amount of time with the students to groom them into ideal citizens.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba says, "Students are the foundation of the nation, the only wealth that I cherish. Students are my all; my entire property consists of students. I have offered myself to them." He also says, "The end of education is character and the end of knowledge is love." This is the reason why Sri Sathya Sai Institute of higher learning emphasises character building as an important component of education apart from acquiring academic excellence.

Nobility in character comes out of humility, generosity, compassion, helpfulness and respect for moral values. The single thread that runs through all the activities of the institute, curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular is that education is for life and not for mere living. Experience has shown that leading organisations and companies in the country absorb Sai students. It is claimed that the students so recruited bring about a quiet change in work ethics and inject team spirit as well as a value-based approach to all aspects of organisational activity.

Water Mission

In 1994, Baba made a moving reference to the difficulties experienced by the people of Rayalaseema region in getting safe drinking water and suggested that the century-old problem needed urgent attention. In 1995, he added a new dimension to his societal mission by the trust, undertaking work to provide good and safe drinking water to as many people of Anantapur district as possible in the shortest possible time, irrespective of the difficulties experienced and the cost.

Tapping ground water was considered as an option, but was ruled out because of the fluoride problem. It was decided to use rainwater by drawing water during the monsoon and storing in special reservoirs.

Most of the water sources were in the northern part of Anantapur district and the terrain to the south sloped upwards. Hence, bringing water to the southern region needed creation of large number of pumping stations to pump water against gravity. This called for extensive civil and engineering work. In spite of all the difficulties, the water was made available to Anantapur district in 18 months. After a year of regular operation, the entire water works was handed over to the people of the state as a gift. The scheme covers 750 villages and provides water to over one million people.

India needs a thousand such organisations to provide cost effective potable drinking water to the billion people spread in different parts of the country.

Healthcare

During the 1980s, a substantial number of super specialty corporate hospitals came into being in our urban areas. However, due to commercialisation, they could cater only to the needs of urban rich people. There was wide gap in the availability of medicare for the rich and poor and between rural and urban population. Keeping this in mind, Baba declared on November 23, 1990, there would be a world-class hospital in Puttaparthi area within a year and it would offer free treatment to everyone who come there, especially the poor.

This hospital was inaugurated on November 22, 1991. After its inauguration, the super specialty hospital has conducted many major heart surgeries and catheterisation procedures. Specialist surgeons from reputed hospitals, both from India and abroad, voluntarily take leave from their regular work and come to Puttaparthi and perform operations free of cost. Same is the case with nursing services.

I understand the convalescing patients provide voluntary help to the new patients who come to the hospitals for operation. Also the hospital premises are maintained in a clean, calm, serene and divine atmosphere. We can see the power of service consciousness flowing in the entire hospital environment.

Project Management

Whether it be a super specialty hospital at Puttaparthi or provision of safe drinking water for Anantapur or provision of drinking water to Chennai by solving the problems associated with Kandaleru reservoir, all projects have been completed to meet the specified objective within the prescribed time and cost. How this has been possible? I was thinking about it. The major reason appears to be that the projects have been entrusted to socially committed project managers, contractors and sub-contractors. They have executed the project with a spirit of co-operation, the spirit of sacrifice and dedication. The programme chiefs have followed the five core human values - truth, right conduct, non-violence, love and peace - while executing the projects. Can there be a better role model than this for promoting a nationwide selfless, societal transformation mission?