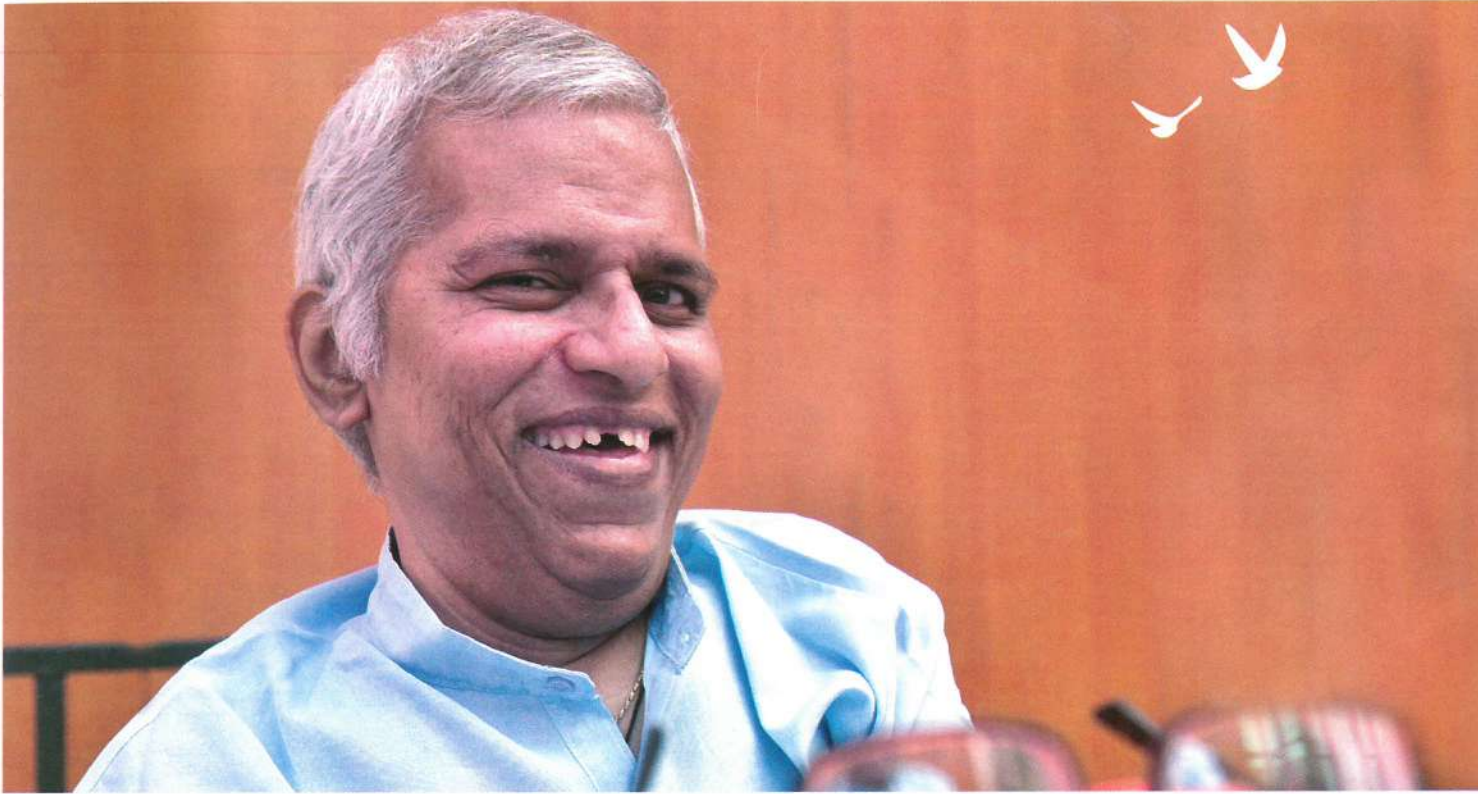




Mr. Sankara Raman



“
*Disability is nothing but a state of mind ...
keep a positive approach to life
and you will achieve success in the
face of all obstacles.*
”

The international tennis champion Martina Navratilova once commented, “Disability is a matter of perception. If you can do just one thing well, you’re needed by someone.”

Mr. Sankara Raman, who has Muscular Dystrophy, fully agrees with this and points out, “I truly believe that disability is just a condition, not a constraint. Just like some people are afflicted with diabetes or blood pressure or cardiac issues, we are affected by disability. But the important thing is that anyone with any sort of condition should not become functionally incapable or constrained. Disability is nothing but a state of mind ... keep a positive approach to life and you will achieve success in the face of all obstacles.”

For the past 25 years, Mr. Sankara Raman has been furthering the objectives and growth of Amar Seva Sangam founded in 1992 by Mr. S Ramakrishnan (page 116).

and is now a premier organization in the field of disability management. As Mr. Sankara Raman puts it, "Our approach has been to establish a centralised resource center to act as a catalyst for change in the development of the physically and mentally challenged. Amar Seva Sangam has brought in a new ray of hope and positivity to thousands of families in the past four decades," he adds with a happy look on his face.

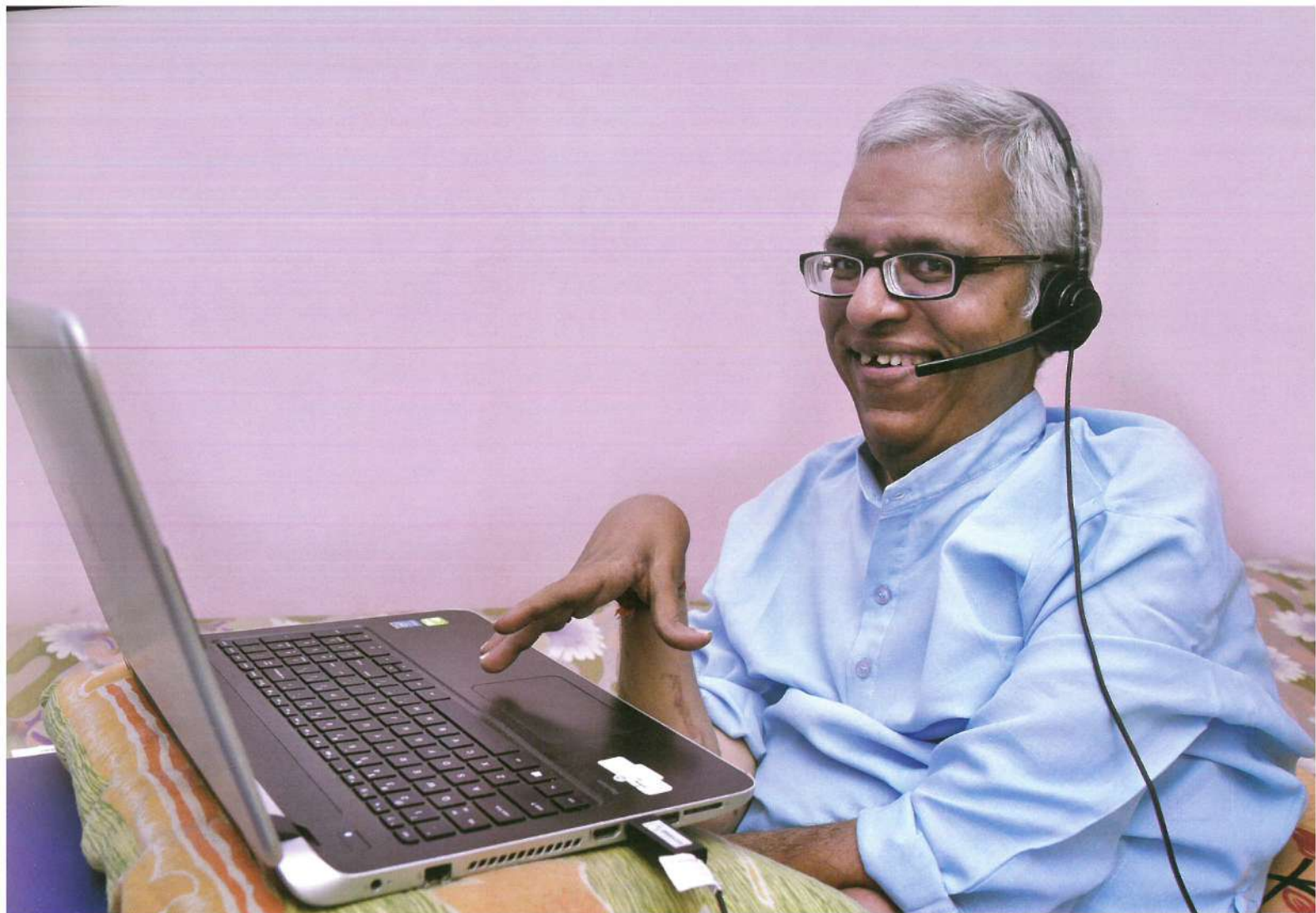
Getting a positive outlook

Mr. Sankara Raman was born at Pattukkottai in Tamil Nadu. His father, Mr. S. Srinivasan, was with the Life Insurance Corporation of India, a transferable job, so Mr. Sankara Raman also stayed in various towns.

"When I was around 3 years old," he recalls, "we were in Bangalore and I was not able to walk properly. I went through many medical tests and Dr. Mani, a neuro specialist, diagnosed me with Muscular Dystrophy. He told my father that there is no cure for this."



📷 Mrs. Ramani & Mr. Sankara Raman



📷 Complete mastery over the latest technologies

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”

However, like any father, Mr.Srinivasan decided to explore all avenues which gave some hope. “I was sent for many types of treatment including to Swami Gnananandain Thapovanam. He became my Guru and taught me many *bhajans*,” Mr. Sankara Raman says.

The family moved to Ranipet where Mr. Sankara Raman did his elementary education from Little Flower Convent, then to Palghat and finally to Chidambaram where he joined a Municipal School as it was very close to his house. His condition was steadily deteriorating and he was unable to walk to school after the 8th standard, so the family shifted to Chennai.

“That was a big change for me,” he says. “The environment of a big city was totally different and I had to leave all my friends behind me. It was emotionally a very difficult time and it reflected in my behaviour towards my family. I always felt low, unwell and dispirited. Tuition classes were arranged for me and I passed my 11th with excellent marks. It was then that I thought to myself, ‘Why am I making

everyone unhappy?' and I decided to become more cheerful and positive in my approach. That was a turning point in my life," he adds.

Love and influence of sisters

Mr. Sankara Raman had 3 sisters. The eldest, Sulochana is married and in Canada. She runs a registered charity called Handi-Care Intl., which has been supporting several projects at Amar Seva Sangam for the past 25 years. Dr. Sumathi, his second sister, expired recently and was also associated with the Amar Seva Sangam. She was a Director at Amar Seva Sangam and contributed significantly to the growth in the education and vocational training sectors. His third sister is Gomathi.

People were generally sceptical of Mr. Sankara Raman's academic capabilities and future. "This was even though I used to be very bright in school and used to come first or second in class. However, my sisters used to encourage me a lot and had a lot of positive influence on my life," he states.

Perhaps because his sister was doing M. Com, Mr. Sankara Raman wanted to become an 'auditor'. He completed a 2 year Diploma in Commerce with Costing as his specialty. His father then asked him 'Do you want to become a Chartered Accountant (CA)?' When he said 'Yes', his father took him to meet a CA, Mr. TAP Varatakutty, who was also in a wheelchair with locomotor disabilities because of polio.

"It was Mr. Varatakutty who further enthused me. 'Of course you can become a CA,' he straightaway told me. With his motivation, I passed all the CA examinations in the first attempt itself. Mr. Vartakutty and I are still friends. In fact, together we started an Association for the Disabled while I was still studying and we have been involved in a number of other social activities," he adds with a satisfied look.

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”

Facing challenges with confidence

Mr. Sankara Raman's life is full of important lessons of immense help to the youth. "In your life, you will face problems but remember that they will overwhelm you only if you just 'give up' in your mind," he advises. "The important thing for you is not to panic and get stressed but instead relax, take a deep breath, keep a positive mindset and face the issue head on. Of course, you can make mistakes and will certainly do so, but these are just lessons in your journey of life and will make your life better if you learn from them and imbibe the lessons well," he recommends.

Mr. Sankara Raman relates an interesting incident when he went to sit for his CA Finals examination. "I had gone to take my Financial Management examination, which was full of mathematical calculations ... but I forgot to take my calculator. Instead of panicking, I just thought to myself - So what if I have not got the



📷 Always happy together

calculator, let's just move on. I got a logarithm table and went on to complete the test with 10 minutes to spare, so that I had time to revise. In fact, I always ensured that I had 5-10 minutes at the end of every examination for revision. I did very well and got a Gold Medal in Financial Management," Mr. Sankara Raman beams, the happiness clearly visible on his face.

As a Chartered Accountant, Mr. Sankara Raman built an excellent reputation for himself. "Initially, people were not prepared to believe that I was a CA because I was just 22 years old and moved around in a wheelchair, but slowly they realized that I meant business and became a force to reckon with," he says confidently.

Getting married...and how !!!

How Mr. Sankara Raman got married is another highly interesting story. "In 1997, I gave an interview on television on World Disabled Day," he recounts. "The interviewer suddenly asked me if I was married. Taken aback, I spontaneously answered that I was not, but if there was a proposal I would certainly consider it. A young lady, Ramani, saw me on TV and got mentally connected with me. She traced me out and on January 21, 1998, around 2 pm, I got a call from her and she asked –'What is your opinion on getting married, someone wants to marry you, come and meet me' !!"

Flabbergasted, Mr. Sankara Raman asked her to first go and meet his friend Mr. Sridhar, who was an astrologer and also on a wheelchair. A week later, on January 28, Mr. Sridhar called him and said, "Come over to my house. There is someone here who wants to marry you."

Though he did not go to Mr. Sridhar's house on that day, Mr. Sankara Raman met Ramani a few days later at a temple. "We talked for 2-3 hours and her firmness on her decision to marry me surprised me," he says. They were engaged on June 1, 1998 and got married on January 27, 1999. "It was a grand marriage," he says with a twinkle in his eye. "A number of VIP's, Ministers attended it. Officials, well wishers of Amar Seva Sangam from Germany and Canada, officials of the Japanese Embassy also came for it."

Strong move...

Earlier, in 1992, Mr. Sankara Raman joined the Amar Seva Sangam and has devoted his whole life to it.

Explaining the reasons for his decision to shift to Ayikudy, where the *Valley for the Differently Abled* of the Amar Seva Sangam is located, Mr. Sankara Raman says, "People, especially in the rural areas, do not have too many facilities. I wanted to come and help them to the best of my abilities. I knew it was going to be a tough life, but I was prepared for it. I came here and initially set up the accounting system, other processes and helped in resource mobilization."

But seeing the possibility of what I can do to bring out the potential of the young children and to transform the quality of lives for the entire rural area, I decided to stay permanently," he states.

Amar Seva Sangam is empowering the Differently Abled citizens and developing models for self-help initiatives by integrating them with the society for improved living conditions in the villages. "We want to create a solution for any type of disability and have progressed a lot in meeting this objective at our model township. We are also working for a 'barrier-free' environment, especially at bus shelters, toilets and during elections. Of course, there is still a long way to go and we welcome any support which can be provided to us," Mr. Sankara Raman says.

📷 Adding to knowledge at all times





📷 Mrs. Ramani & Mr. Sankara Raman

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*Give a job to differently abled persons,
even if it is a 'small' one. It will help build
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”

Doing your bit...

Mr. Sankara Raman has a request for everyone. “If you meet differently abled persons, do consider giving them a job, even if it is a ‘small’ one. It will make them happy, help build their confidence and make them feel that they are ‘accepted’ in society,” he adds.

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