

VOLUNTEERISM

I would like to share some personal thoughts with our temple members which I expressed earlier with a larger audience through Khabar magazine. (With the permission of Khabar as it wanted copyright of the article) I was responding to the articles about us, the Indian Americans in Indian news media in the US on the topics of isolationism, assimilation, second class citizens, charitable contributions etc.

We, the Indian Americans migrated to the US armored with higher education and by working hard, most of us are in a better financial status than the average American Americans. I realize a number of us do get involve in local charitable, social, and political activities. Yet, there is an overwhelming group of us who do not participate. It does not take rocket science to realize why some of us feel like second class citizens and perhaps occasionally we are not treated so well by ignorance. But, I must say that those of us who do get involve wherever and whenever there is a chance, we have not encountered such a thing. I urge those who feel isolated should get out of the nest and partake in charitable activities on individual basis when there is opportunity, if they have hesitation to interact with others in social and political areas.

Charity does not necessarily mean donating money. It can be in any of the three actions, as our scriptures said, *Tan, man and dhan* (I translate as Time, Talent and Treasure). Look around your neighborhood, there are folks who can use one or all of these three resources to make their lives better. E.G. Thanks, again to the quality education we received in India which helped us to become good at math and science. Let us, active or the retired engineers and scientists amongst us seek those opportunities to volunteer. Collect a few kids in our neighborhood, who are not helped by their parents for whatever the cause might be, and give them a helping hand similar to what some of us receive from our handyman neighbors when we have small maintenance issues. I urge all of us get involve to whatever extant one can and also encourage children to serve in organizations such as Ronald McDonald House, Easter seals, Food bank, soup kitchen etc. as some of us are already participating.

Further, in spite of all the euphoria the economists have created about India, with the statistics the analysts generated, the government has not been able to improve the lives of the down trodden people very much. There are more poor people in India today than ever before. We Indian Americans cannot solve this mammoth problem. But we can make a small dent. Lack of education and proper skills are the major causes of the poverty. There are millions of poor students who are smart but cannot afford higher education or learn technical skills. We can give a hand to these people and pay back the unwritten debt we owe to India of the near free education most of us received there without which we would not be in the U.S. and what we are today. The free education available these days, stops at a very low standard high school at best. Pick up the tab of one of these smart students and help him/her through college or acquiring skills, be somebody in your village or town. A dollar a day will send one student through college. Let's not give as charity for good, make as loan and make him/her repay when able to earn to another deserving student. For the sake of those who have no connections left in India, the Temple committee is looking into setting up a process in the near future where a member may be able to donate funds and accomplish this and get tax benefits. If one is planning to contribute right away, there are several genuine non-profit organizations in US which can conduit the aid properly without pilferage.

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