

A rare gesture of generosity

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MUMBAI: NO, THE humanity has not become extinct. It still exists though in comparatively fewer minds than in the past. Even in this mad world of hypocrisy and skepticism there are a few people who look at those who are overlooked by others.

Vinimay Trust at Anushakti Nagar, is a congregation of such humanity conscious people. The speciality of Vinimay is that it supplements the work of existing institutions rather than starting its own institution. This is because it feels that a lot of informal work remains to be done in existing institutions by voluntary workers. In fact it tries to fill up the cavities in these institutions.

Vinimay started as a group of socially conscious friends eager to contribute towards building up of a just and loving society. In the beginning the programmes were tentative and the goals were a bit uncertain but in 1982 the group was invited to assist the children of Chembur Children's Home in their school studies which gave a focus to the activities of the group.

"Initially when we went there the students told us that our

Gandhism wouldn't work with them. We observed that until we give them a sense of involvement, things wouldn't work. Simply teaching them was not enough. We would have to make them realise that we belonged to them. Most of these children suffer from psychological problems. It is not easy to deal with them. Only a warm reply could help. Therefore we started intellectual activity drenched in recreation," says L. Venkatraman, one of the trustees and the mainstay of the trust.

"The purpose of forming the trust was not to get the government funds but to make the things more organised. We have not yet applied for the government funds. All the money we have is financed by volunteers or other individuals," clarifies Venkatraman.

The trust has an informal structure so as to enable socially conscious volunteers to work with freedom and contribute their best. It emphasises on human touch in its social work because it believes that the bruised hearts can be enthused only by love and emotional support and not by material comforts and competitive incentives alone.

Vinimay's child welfare activities includes recreation centre, picnics, study hall, tutorial assistance, library, educational trips, personality development camps, yoga classes, sports camps, adventure treks, health, hygiene and nutrition, opportunities for interaction with community, inter-institutional sports and cultural meets.

The children under the age of 10 years are taken to children's garden, those in 10 - 15 years to zoo, museum and Nehru Science Centre. Whereas those above 15 years are taken for trekking every year.

A large number of children who leave child welfare institutions at the statutory age of eighteen tend to become unstable and misguided due to lack of guidance. In order to support them Vinimay broadened its perspective to cover under-privileged youth also.

Its youth welfare activities involves job placements, rent free accommodation, housing, interest free loan, medical aid, education, searching family links etc. Till now it has helped about 130 students in getting jobs and provided rent free accommodation to about

23 of them. Besides this the trust also helps in restoring family links of many children.

One of the important projects which the organisation has embarked upon is a transition hostel for boys where they can live for a few years after leaving the institutions.

The hostel will house about 50 boys at a time and provide them shelter for 3 to 5 years. During this period the trust will assist them in getting job, saving money and acquiring their own living accommodation.

L. Venkatraman is an ex-scientific officer at Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC). He resigned from his job 17 years before the due date of retirement and remained bachelor to serve the underprivileged children.

Initially the group started its work with Chembur Children's Home but now its activities has extended to about 18 institutions but currently the main focus is on Chembur Children's Home, Bal Kalyan Nagri and two other observation homes. The group presently consists of 50 to 60 volunteers and the number of volunteers is continuously increasing.