

In this 20th issue of Pathirikai, we have the pleasure and privilege to welcome a man who deserves no introduction. Mr Gurnaden Vydelingum is a well-known figure of our community for having been in the fore-front of all debates, demonstration and activities in connection with the Tamils of Mauritius. He is a very kind and humble man, who is always attentive to any person facing difficulties. As former President of the Tamil League he has been the first person to believe in the goodness of Pathirikai, and readily offered to house the office of Pathirikai® at the seat of Tamil League in Reduit. We then had our very first brainstorming meeting in his office.

1. Vanakkam Aya Vydelingum. Let me welcome you on Pathirikai. Can you tell us about your family and professional background?



I was born in a modest family of 8 children on 25 May 1947. I am married and I have one son and two grandsons. I pursued my primary education at Young Men's Hindu Aided School and Port Mathurin Government School. I followed my secondary education at Bhujoharry College where I passed my Higher School Certificate.

After my secondary education, I worked as a teacher for two years at Bhujoharry College, after which I joined the Central Statistical Office in 1969 as a compiler. I followed courses in statistics for 2 years with the London Institute of Statisticians, after which I got a scholarship to study at the Institut Africain et Mauricien de la Statistique et d'Economie Appliquée where I received the Degree D'Ingénieur des Travaux Statistiques. I spent 38 years at the CSO where I retired as Deputy Director of Statistics in May 2007. During my successful career at the Statistics office, I had the opportunity of travelling a lot, attending conferences and seminars. For three consecutive years, I tutored for four months each year at a very prestigious institution in Munich, Germany.

After my retirement, I worked for two years as Manager at Sofres (Mauritius) after which I joined as Manager at H.Padiachy Contractor Ltd. Since 2007 I am serving as a Board Director at the Bank of Mauritius. I am also a part-time lecturer at the institute run by the Mauritius Employers' Federation.

2. How did you cultivate this passion for social work with all its difficulties, whereas as a retired person, you could be spending a more joyful life?

Since my young days I have been very active in social activities. I joined the Tamil League in 1964 and it is with some pride and gratitude that I will say that the League has been my second university, where I learnt to take and to give. With due respect to my parents, I must say that the major part of my character has been moulded there and the Tamil League has a big share in my successful career and social life.

I was very active with the youth movement in general and I was elected President of the Port Louis Youth Federation for two years. In 1977, I was awarded the Certificate and Badge of Honour by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II for voluntary service to the youth movement.

I have served for several years as Auditor for the Hindu Maha Jana Sangham and have assisted in the organisation of many great events on a national scale

My greatest satisfaction as a social worker has been the sharing of my knowledge. During the past 40 years I have been coaching students, free of charge, in Mathematics and Statistics up to HSC level. The intake every year turns around 50 students.

3. The Tamil League celebrated with great feast its 75th Anniversary last year. You have been very closely associated with the destinies of the League. Tell us about your involvement with Tamil League.

As I mentioned earlier, I joined the Tamil League in 1964 and was elected Managing Committee member since 1967. You may ask yourself why is it that I have been staying as a Committee member for so many years – the reason is simple. La relève se fait attendre.

I cannot talk about my personal achievements at the Tamil League because we have always worked as a team and this is the reason why the Association has stood the test of time and we have this year celebrated our 76th anniversary. However, I can say that I have participated in all the activities organised, from educational to social and fun raising. I will always cherish the days where myself, even though I was working as a civil servant, and other friends of the League we pushed a cart loaded with vegetables from the Central Market to the seat of the League on the eve of our Fancy Fairs. Until recently, we would be pasting posters for our fancy fair at night in Port Louis and Plaines Wilhems. We enjoy ourselves.

Although I have been at the League for so many years, it was only in 2007 that I accepted to become the President, upon the insistence of my other friends. I thus served the League in this position for 6 years until last month when another devoted member, Mr. Dassen Samy, took over.

The most acute problem for the Tamil League as well for other voluntary social organisations is the involvement of the younger generation. What have we not tried to attract young people to come and take over. Conscious of the fact that needs have changed, we have many times re-invented the activities of the League but unfortunately the interest is not there. I can try to understand them because society has changed and time availability has become a rare commodity. But we do not feel discouraged and times and often we organise interaction meetings with different groups of young people. Probably, gone are the days when we can expect young people to get involved as we have been, but I hope that they will come and contribute in their own ways.

4. Indeed the new generation sees social work in a much different way. Pathirikai as well is facing resistance from youth involvements. Let's now talk about our

community in particular. Do you feel there is a synergy among the various Tamil Organisations?

Everybody is saying that there is no unity within the Community. In fact we have many leaders among us but unfortunately most of them are looking in different directions. There have been attempts to discuss about issues facing the Community. Tamil League also has organised seminars involving the major stakeholders. Every time resolutions are taken and action plans drafted. But unfortunately the Community remains stagnant. The reason is simple: Most associations do not want to work together. Pour moi, le cancer de la Communauté se resume en un seul mot: JALOUSIE. Si on arrive à se defaire de cette mauvaise qualité, je dirai qu'il y a un avenir brilliant pour nous.

However, we must admit that there are also many sincere social workers in the Community. I know many people who are working for the welfare of their kovils and the Tamilians in their respective catchment areas. They are people who have decided to become leaders not to sit in front rows during events, but with vocation to serve.

5. Do you feel there is a need to guide our youth in their education and choice of career?

You are quite right to say that some students, mainly those from very modest background need to be guided after the completion of their secondary education. Prospects and opportunities are there but, again it is a question of co-ordination. Many associations do organise career guidance sessions, but if we co-ordinate our efforts, we can do better to assist our students in the choice of their tertiary education which will give them a better chance of securing a job commensurate with their field of study.

We need also to look after our unemployed youth. In this respect, the Tamil league will soon organise a session on jobs availability and working prospects for them.

6. You happened to be among the victims of Flash Flood of “Canal Dayot”. How did you experienced that disastrous moment?

I must thank God for having spared me and my family during that flash flood. However, I feel sorry for these families who suffered losses during that tragic event. My social background has been of great help during the days following the event. My yard and my house were used as collecting and distribution points for donations. We prepared and served food to some people who lost all their belongings.

During this sad event, I was really proud to be a Mauritian. You should have seen that spontaneous solidarity from people of all religions and walks of life coming to help.

7. To conclude; Do you believe Pathirikai can assist the community in fulfilling its vision?

Pathirikai is an example of the achievement of a group of volunteers who want to do something for the welfare of the Community. My friend, Devarajen Venethethan, is a very humble person who took this initiative with a small group of collaborators and for that we must be grateful to them all.

There have been many attempts for the publication of newspapers for the Community and most of them died premature death. I do not want to comment on the reasons of their disappearance. But one thing I can say is that had they followed the principles of Pathirikai then they would not have disappeared. Pathirikai is indeed neutral, apolitical. The contents are informative and target all groups. It serves as a hub for the various associations and is providing good networking.

Unfortunately, we need to attract more readers and subscribers. Of course, there can be improvements and I suggest that we organise a brainstorming session among the readers to review that online paper for the benefit of the Community.

Thank you Pathirikai.