

A Salute

VOICE OF LOVE

Today, if we find ourselves living in a tarnished society, I hold a lot of good human beings responsible for that. Shocking!!! But it is true. While the bad and evil forces of the society have assumed leadership and are drawing more and more people towards them, most good people are so content with being good that they stop with themselves. While the bad is making so much noise (the press helps in this noise making), the good prefers to remain in silent oblivion. While the bad is efficiently breeding itself, the good is satisfied with me, mine and myself. The bad seems to be more selfless in its cause of destruction, while the good seems to be selfishly happy. I know this realisation hurts; but then, when has the truth not hurt???

My cry is that more and more good human beings should evolve themselves into good leaders, not necessarily in the political sense, but to be positive role models to the next generation. My call is also that if you are a good human being then you have the moral responsibility to be rich. The amount of official currency in circulation is a constant. The money is either going to be in

the hands of a good human being or in the hands of a scoundrel. While the financial resources available with good human beings serve to build the society, the same with the rascals destroy the society. If all good human beings can come together as one concerted force, transforming themselves into good leaders and prosperous human beings, we will re-experience the golden age in this land.

How blessed I am to know a human being who is noble hearted, successful and a positive role model to so many people! He not only has a mind that strives to prosper but also a heart which revels in giving. He has the passion of a hardcore businessman and the compassion of a sage. He reads about the business maharajas to build his industry and contemplates on the Vedic scriptures to build his life. When his eyes are open, he visualises Tata, Birla and Ambani; and when his eyes are closed, he visualises Sankaracharya, Ramana and Vivekananda. He is such a gem that you can just call your children and



M. MURALI

ask them to take him as their role model.

The inseparable three - think of the sweet 'Mysurpa', you think of 'Sri Krishna Sweets'. Think of 'Sri Krishna Sweets', you think of **M.Murali**, the person we salute through this edition of Frozen Thoughts.

I had entered the reception of 'Sri Krishna Sweets' office. The sound of Vedic chanting was lingering in the background. Traditional lamps were burning. Wherever I looked, I could see pictures of the Divine, the Gurus and the Masters. The air was scented with the fragrance of jasmine flowers. The ambience was that of deep rooted culture and tradition. I knew I was in a special place. Of course, I also knew I was going to experience a very very

special person. Just waiting there was a profound experience. I wanted that waiting to continue but it didn't...

In a spotless white dhoti and white shirt, with sacred ash adorning his forehead, hands folded in a *Namaste*, sporting a welcoming smile and a face carved with expressions of love and affection... this beautiful human being came out of his cabin to receive me. There was so much humility in him, that just being in that atmosphere was a humbling experience. As he led me into his cabin, I walked through scores and scores of *Ganesh* idols - each very different from the other. Instantaneously I commented, "I have never ever been in the presence of so many *Ganesh* idols."

Just as spontaneously he replied, "There are over 2500 *Ganesh* idols here. To me, *Ganesh* is very symbolic. *Ganesh* represents the elephant. I love the majestic strides of an elephant. I love its confidence, memory power, patience and ego-less-ness. I love those small beady eyes that are so powerful and yet radiate so much affection, care and love. I love the fact that it is vegetarian - demonstrating that vegetarianism is power. I love the fact that every part of an elephant's body (including its hair) is valuable, not only when it is alive but even after its death. I love the fact that there is not a single idle non-active moment in an elephant's life. I want to inculcate all these qualities and make them an integral part of me."

While my ears were still with him, my eyes kept gazing at that marvellous collection. He further added, "More importantly, nothing in this culture happens without invoking *Ganesh*. He is placed as the No: 1, ahead of everything that happens in this land. Yet, *Ganesh* is available everywhere, accessible to everyone and above all the simplest of the Hindu Gods. I want to be No: 1. I want to be accessible. I want to

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be present wherever good happens. I want to remain simple and humble. *Ganesh* is very symbolic and I find in Him so many qualities worthy of emulation."

With a lot of curiosity, I asked Murali, "In the last two years, wherever good has happened in Chennai, in the form of events and programmes, you have been a part of it - how come?"

He replied, "The Vedas say, let good come to us from all directions; but I

believe that good should also go from us in all directions. I believe in the percolation of good. The moment I come to know of something good, I ensure that at least another 1000 people come to know of it. God gives you only for you to pass it on. I don't believe in just material giving but I believe in giving of myself. That is why you will see me as an integral part of all the projects we sponsor or get associated with. It does not give me any joy to just write a cheque and pass it on. In mind and body, I become a part of the project itself. I want every bit of my time, capabilities, experiences and resources to be utilised to make this world a better place to live in."

Murali was born in Coimbatore on July 20, 1960 as the fourth child of N.K.Mahadeva Iyer and Narayani Ammal, who lived in a joint family of about 25 people. Murali's father founded 'Sri Krishna Bhavan' in 1948, a restaurant which also had a sweet stall attached to it.

Murali studied up to the 3rd standard in CSR School and from the 4th standard up to SSLC in St. Michael's High School. Recalling his days at school, Murali said, "I was an average student and not much into extra curricular activities. We were a gang of happy friends. We troubled no one but had enormous fun amongst ourselves. My life changed completely when I came across a wall hanging in my school auditorium that read - 'God is Love'. My search on 'What is Love?' and 'What is God?' began from then on. Love then became Divinity to me."

Though Murali went on to do his PUC from PSG College and B.Sc. Mathematics from CBM College, his mind was never with academics. His inclination was always towards tasting and innovating food items. The taste and aroma of foods always magnetised Murali. All his time away from school and college was spent in 'Sri Krishna Bhavan'.

Speaking about his relationship with his mother, Murali said, "When I was a school boy, on one of my birthdays, I had a *beeda* with my friends for the first time. Noticing that my tongue was red, my mother said, 'I am proud of you my boy. Next, you will be drawn to those white paper rolls and after that those coloured bottles. Go on... but when you take up the white paper rolls, be sure, I will not be alive to see it. I cannot control you but I can give up my life for you.' That was the first and the last *beeda* to have touched my tongue. I have been spotlessly clean ever since."

He further added, "Even after I became a so-called business success, whenever I used to feel stressed in Chennai, I would rush to Coimbatore to just lie down on my mother's lap. She would run her fingers through my hair and just say, 'God is with you. We are with you.' I would then return to Chennai with the confidence to take the world head on. If this existence is 'Love' then the essence of this existence is a 'Mother'."

When asked about his father, Murali's face softened with expressions of gratitude. He said,

"Parents are divine manifestations. My father was more than just a father to me. He was also my boss, guru, friend, mentor and role model. Without my father, I would have

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been a non-entity. He was a visionary and a man of uncompromising principles. With the launch of 'Sri Krishna Sweets' in 1972, he changed the way sweets were retailed forever. His work was his belief, his worship, his devotion and his breath. Clarity was his

power - he always knew what he was doing and why he was doing it. He would analyse everything in depth. He always believed that what you speak comes from your mind but what you write comes from your heart. So he used to always take everything in writing, including people's confession of their mistakes. He would repeatedly say, 'If you want more, ask God; but never betray the trust of your customers'. He would always explain the struggles he had to undergo in life to earn every single rupee before giving it to us so as to make us understand the value of money. Most importantly, he taught us that the struggles we might have to go through in building our business should have no bearing on our happiness. He showed us by the way he lived that happiness is beyond materialism. He was a legend among men."

Murali added, "I also owe a lot to my brother Krishnan. I imbibed discipline, dedication, honesty and transparency from him. He taught me to look at life creatively and differently. Above all, he has been my emotional anchor. When I was over stressed with the initial hiccups of setting up 'Sri Krishna Sweets' in Chennai, he told me, 'My shoulders are always there for you. If things do not go well, throw everything and come to me'. Even today these words of my brother linger in me, giving me the impetus to move on."

Murali got married to Kala on April 20, 1988 and is blessed with two daughters, Shruthi studying in the

7th standard and Sneha studying in the 4th standard. It is a very affectionate family which has learnt to cherish the good and adjust to the limitations of each other. Speaking of his wife, he said, "I am able to take care of my business and the society around me because I have Kala to take care of me. She has been so unconditional with me and has accepted me as I am. She is truly a blessing in my life. But for her, I would not be what I am."

The defining moment of Murali's life - his shift and the launch 'Sri Krishna Sweets' at Chennai - happened in 1996. Speaking about this transition, Murali said, "I am first so grateful to the people of Chennai, my customers, my well wishers, my friends and relatives who adopted me into Chennai with so much love, affection and encouragement. I came to Chennai not to earn more but to achieve. It is such a great blessing to be born as a human being and we would turn this blessing into a curse if we do not stamp our presence on this planet. I want to play my part in creating the next generation. I want to play my part in the renaissance of our culture and tradition. I believed that Chennai could be that base from which I could launch myself."

Speaking about how he plans to make an impact on this society, Murali said, "My primary focus is to kindle the feelings of patriotism in children in the age group of 3 to 12. We are distributing metallic National Flags across schools, and with the assistance of the managements of those schools,

making it compulsory for children to wear the National flag to school. I organise a programme on All India Radio every Sunday morning through which the voices of great Indian leaders are being heard. While kindling love for the motherland in children, I want to

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kindle love for our culture and tradition in adolescents. The age bracket of 13 to 20, with its many chemical, biological, hormonal and physiological changes, is truly a traumatic phase for teenagers. Most of them slip during this phase because they do not have the needed emotional and psychological

support. Through men of wisdom and renowned speakers, I am reaching out to colleges to make a difference to these students by instilling in them the value of our culture and tradition. While enough materialistic support pours into all destitute homes, I am contributing by teaching various art forms such as music and dance to these children. I am also attempting to develop herbal gardens across the city which have the capacity to draw negative vibrations and emit positive vibrations. In fact this New Year, I planted a Neem sapling, protecting it with a tree guard, outside every VIP's house on my list. I want to be a part of any function or programme aligned to our culture and tradition which focuses on building a better tomorrow."

Today 'Sri Krishna Sweets' from its modest beginning has grown into a multi-crore establishment with over 29 branches. 'Sri Krishna Sweets' received the prestigious 'Visvesvaraya Industrial Award' for the year 2002 from the All India Manufacturers' Organisation for its excellence in performance as a Corporate/Industrial house. Thousands of customers walk in every day and thousands of families earn their bread from this 'Sweet Revolution'.

Talking about his business, Murali said, "My business is my penance. I have merged with my products and my products speak to me. I experience a spiritual connectivity with my products. My commitment to quality is so high

that I will never compromise on it as long as I live. In everything we produce, apart from all the pure ingredients, one can always sense our love in it... love similar to the love I experienced in the sweets that my mother used to make for me. In fact, we are doing nothing more than sticking to our principles and ethics, and the business is flourishing by itself. Even today, I won't call myself a success. In life, there is a path of success and a path of failure available for everyone. Some choose to walk on the path of failure but I have chosen to walk on the path of success."

'Sri Krishna Sweets' believes a lot in advertising and publicity. When I queried him on this, Murali clarified, "Without publicity, how will people know you are there? What is the point in doing everything if you do not announce to people that you are there? People need reminding and that can be achieved only through advertising. However, advertising will only bring the customer to your place; then the quality of your products and the quality of your service has to take over. Else they will never return. True, we focus a lot on publicity but observe: in all our publicity there is also a social outlook. With every inch of growth in our business we ensure that the society around us also grows."

When I asked him about what spirituality means to him, he explained, "First-of-all, I see God as my friend. I believe, fear and doubt distances; love and faith bridges. I love my God and I know

he loves me. My faith in HIM is such, I believe, there is a reason behind all that He gives me. I have learnt to look for the good in everything that is given to me. Struggles are not God given; it is man's inability to understand the reason behind things that makes him see it as a struggle. I always feel the vibrations and blessings of

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my Guru, Kanchi Paramacharya. In fact, whenever I am with a spiritually evolved person, I am more focussed on collecting their blessings and vibrations than knowledge. Knowledge, you can get from books; vibrations, you can only get from the Master."

"So what are you striving to become in life?" I asked. Murali said, "In every human being there are the qualities of animal, man and God... only the proportions vary. My continuous striving is to increase the manifestation of those Godly qualities in me. I am continuously striving for purity of thoughts and feelings. I am striving to become the person I can always look up to. I want to become so pure that I am ready to house God within me."

To conclude Murali added, "Rajan, I see this whole experience with you as a self declaration that 'I am a good human being'. I know this interaction with you makes me publicly accountable. To live by my words is my solemn promise to Frozen Thoughts."

As I hugged him and began my strides away from him, I whispered my prayer to my God for showing me so many good human beings through 'Salute'. In the silent chambers of my heart, a voice echoed loud; it said... with so many good human beings going beyond 'me, mine and myself' to create a new world... could this be the renaissance of a new era?

Ironically, everything that comes out of a man stinks. His sweat, saliva, tears, blood, urine, excreta... everything stinks. The only thing that comes out of a man and can yet be sweet are his WORDS. Am I not blessed to have found a friend whose words are as sweet as the sweets he produces - Sri Krishna Sweets Murali!