

THE KALLAKURU EXPERIMENT

Presenter: Dr. Vegesena Prudhvi Raju

Retired physician Vegesena Prudhvi Raju resides in the southern United States for much of the year, but his heart remains in his home village of Kallakuru, where he is conducting an ongoing experiment. Although he claims no expertise in economics, government or religion, his approach to community improvement is proving to be a transformative model that encompasses each of those societal elements.

THE SATYA SEVA TRUST: A FOUNDATION FOR THE EXPERIMENT

It began like any other charitable foundation. While living in the United States, in 1986, V.P. Raju established the “SST” to help the people of Kallakuru. They began by addressing some of the most basic needs such as sanitation and a clean water supply. Under the SST’s leadership, more than 500 individual toilets were built, the water system was improved by the addition of filter beds and pipelines were extended throughout the village.

The story might have ended there had Raju not returned to India with his wife in 2001 to assist his mother. Over a nine-year period, he saw the lives of the people from a close-up perspective. He went door-to-door, talking at length with the poorest of residents, and he even spent time with the village drunks.

He was committed to the work of the SST, but he began to question his methods. He worried that the financial help provided through the Trust was turning many people into “beggars” and falling remarkably short of meeting the true needs of the village.



Poverty and alcoholism were rampant, and human dignity was almost a forgotten concept. Also, a strange business was booming in the countryside where corrupt politicians purchase votes. Both buyers and sellers were exploiting themselves and others. Millions of dollars would not help—unless individuals could realize their self-worth. His efforts then became focused on providing the people with the necessary conditions to not only achieve economic independence, but also facilitate human growth.



MILK MONEY

The first stage of the Kallakuru Experiment was the creation of the Kallakuru Milk Producers—or the KMP—a co-operative of dairy farmers that was established in 2006 with the help of the SST. The Trust provides loans at favorable interest rates to farmers when they purchase buffalos. Recipients must agree to conduct business honestly. The farmers promise—in writing—

not to cheat buyers by watering down the milk. They also pledge not to sell their votes in elections.

KMP's profits are given back to the farmers in the form of bonuses, but they must also contribute three paise for every rupee they earn from sales of the milk. Those funds are used to help the elderly and poorest residents of the village.

These small farmers also borrowed and donated 350,000 rupees to help build a water purification plant and paid off part of the loan from the profits of the milk co-operative. This is a remarkable thing considering that most of them own no property other than a hut or a subsidized house.



FAILURE LEADS TO SUCCESS

Raju says he is learning much from the successes of these villagers, and in the process, he is learning about his own folly.

There are some farmers who continue to try to find new ways to cheat the KMP, but Raju now understands that his initial desire to promote positive change is akin to controlling the very people he is attempting to liberate and that concept conflicts with his desire to nourish human goodness and dignity.

Just before the general elections in 2009, Raju was enthusiastic about the people's resolve not to sell their votes. He was crushed when he saw that many families sold out. Politicians went to the villagers' homes in the middle of the night and plied the ladies with money and saris while offering the men the substance that enslaves and destroys many impoverished families: liquor.

Raju conceded failure and was about to close the experiment, but some of the farmers persuaded him to give them a second chance. Those who have seen the benefits of their hard work and honesty have since become awe-inspiring.

These are the ordinary people who have that power—because they are the majority.

The day these ordinary people realize their self-worth and stop selling their vote, all this political corruption will be washed out into the ocean. When they are able to make political decisions based

on moral principle and the highest good of the community—versus short-term financial gain, they will enjoy the security that we all can find in human goodness.

These are the people who can save us—and the nation of India.

OUR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

We too have an important role to play.

By garlanding those who practice corruption, we actually promote it. This is a certain death sentence to any democracy and to the spirits of our people.

Let us say loudly in unison, “If you buy votes in elections we will not call you MLA, and we will not garland you.” Let us respect our political leaders, as we celebrate our peers for any good deeds they perform. Let us nourish the good in everyone without feeding the qualities and practices that deprive us of true happiness.

The SST does not accept donations, but Raju seeks wisdom, advice, and volunteerism from anyone willing to support and practice the principles behind this endeavor.

Join “the experiment” by promoting human goodness in everyone—everywhere, and do not tolerate corruption.

THE HYPOTHESIS BEHIND THE EXPERIMENT

When given the resources and the opportunity to live with human dignity, the innate goodness in the people of Kallakuru—or of any other society—will triumph.

MORE INFORMATION

V.P. Raju attended medical school at Rangaraya Medical College, Kakinada, AP, India, and worked in both the government medical system and at Rangaraya Medical School. He completed his surgical residency in England (F.R.C.S. Eng.) and worked as a surgical registrar. In the US he worked in emergency medicine in Jacksonville, Greenville, and High Point, North Carolina, from 1974–1998, and was an assistant professor in the Department of Emergency Medicine at East Carolina University. Retiring in 1998, he returned to Kallakuru from 2001-2010. He currently resides in Greenville, South Carolina, with his wife Krishnaveni. He is working on a book, tentatively titled, “The Kallakuru Experiment,” about the successes and failures he has experienced while attempting to help the people of his home village establish a new vision for themselves and the country, based on human goodness.



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