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Hon. Editor: N. H. Attreya



Excellence

## The "ACME" Excellence Award

It is an award for the pursuit of excellence in one area of human activity or another. But ACME is **not** a contraction for a long name; it is not an acronym.

ACME is just acme, height, zenith, the culmination or perfection in the career of anything. It is symbolic of the heights of excellence people are scaling in their chosen or chance area.

The "ACME" Award also symbolises the thrust, the upward thrust, the onward thrust, the constant moving forward, the unceasing march in human excellence. Mahato mahiyan is the Upanishadic saying. "Greater than the great". As Longfellow put it, it is "Excelsior", and as poet Shelley says, it is "higher still and higher".

It also symbolises stamina, the energy that goes with the pursuit of excellence.

The sustained concern for others and the hardiness of spirit that calls for the demonstration thereof are symbolised by this ACME Excellence Award.

N. H. ATTREYA

[ Sri. T. M. Narayanaswami Pillai, the first citizen of Tiruchirapalli and an erudite scholar among the elder generation is distinguished by his selfless services in the social and religious spheres. He has proved his mettle in various fields, as Commissioner of the H. R. C. E., Chairman of the Madras Public Service Commission and Vice-Chancellor of the Annamalai University. A more fitting person to preside over this function can hardly be thought of. ]

It is in the fitness of things that my good friend Sri G. Vanmikanathan should have been chosen for the conferment of the Acme Excellence Award. His services to Tamil Language and Literature as Author, Editor and Translator are highly commendable. Sri Vanmikanathan belongs to a noble tradition of scholars renowned alike for their love of Tamil as well as literary erudition. Like Ulysses of old, he has spent his entire life in the seeking and accumulation of knowledge and is for ever desirous of being a student in the true sense of the term. He is a living model of plain living and high thinking. As Wordsworth said of Milton. *His soul is like a star and dwells apart.* Many are the lessons which I have learnt from him, younger though he be in years. I can proudly say that he is my mentor.

Sri Vanmikanathan teaches by example and precept how to live a useful and purposeful life in society, useful to others and purposeful to oneself.

He is a living embodiment of such fine qualities as love of fellowmen, a sense of universal brotherhood, genial temperament, deep scholarship, wide experience, literary acumen, strong determination and untiring industry. Another remarkable thing about him is that he is never intolerant of other people's views and never prone to criticize others. No wonder he commands the respect and regard of one and all with whom he comes into contact.

Living as he has done for about seventy years, living for others and not for himself, living in the world and yet not of it, he represents the goal of human life, the *summum bonum* of human existence. If a saint is one who sacrifices his life for a noble cause, you might as well call him a Saint.

Last but not least, Sri Vanmikanathan is also notable for his ardent devotion to Sri Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peeta. This makes him a noble example of the heights to which sincere devotion to the Acharya can raise a man.

To-day the Indian Centre for Encouraging Excellence has done an honour to itself by honouring such a man by selecting him for the Acme Excellence Award.

And I am very thankful to the organizers for giving me this opportunity of presiding over such a happy function and presenting the Award to such a fitting recipient as Sri Vanmikanathan. Thank you all!

**PRESIDENTIAL**

**ADDRESS**

**BY**

**SRI T. M.  
NARAYANASWAMI  
PILLAI**

## Citation of the 'Acme Excellence Award' to Sri. G. Vanmikanathan by the Indian Centre for Encouraging Excellence

In felicitating you, Sir, we are felicitating a savant, a literateur and a Man.

What one MAN can do by pursuing excellence in his chosen area you have proved to yourself and to others.

From your many-dimensioned life, we would highlight one, for the reason that it speaks for others as well.

For well over 30 years you have been serving the cause of significant literature.

Moved by a larger perspective, namely, that the best of eternal heritage in one part of the world should be made accessible to the rest of the world, you undertook the near impossible task of rendering into English such classics as Tirukkural, Thiruvachakam and Tiru Arutpa and making them available to the English speaking millions.

You had such faith in the cause, in yourself and in others that you decided to dedicate your life of retirement for this cause. When many choose to keep awake for 4 hours a day you chose to work for 14 hours a day. With no funds or friends to back you, you started almost as one man, giving shape to your unique idea, the idea of sharing the eternal heritage of the Tamils with the rest of the world.

Your purity of purpose, your universality of vision, your scientific temper, your missionary zeal and your sustained efforts made your projects a singular success.

Your works are original in the sense that you have brought skill and scholarship, research and insight to all the renderings. Realizing you are dealing with experimental literature, you spent months with those great men who have personal experience of the eternal truths. What is more, you waited to experience the insights yourself before you started writing. It is this integrity that makes your writing lasting literature.

Apart from what you did, which is Herculean, the way you did it is an exercise in excellence. You planned every move; you organised every facility; you implemented every move and you reviewed every detail - so you may do one better next time; and you did one better every time. In this pursuit of a worthy end, no task was small or great for you.

Great as your contribution to causes literary and humanitarian has been, equally great are your contributions to the cause of man-making. You have played the proverbial Jambhavan to hundreds of men and women. You do in such appropriate time, bring such ringing sincerity, use such choice expressions that the ones you come in touch with you go back inches taller.

You are proof to the saying: The purpose of life is to so live it as it may outlast it.

We keep asking: What can account for your eternal youth, your contagious positiveness, your endless energy? Is it your surrendering yourself to a larger cause? Is it your unique talent of encouraging others and encouraging yourself? Is it your zest for new thought, new expression, new life? Or is it all these and more that keep off the corroding effects of chronological age and conventional retirement?

At this young age of 75, you are relentlessly and cheerfully working on many more projects. Being the worker, the innovator, the organiser and the motivator that you are, you will continue succeeding.

We at the centre for Encouraging Excellence, along with the thousands that benefited by your many-sided services, pray for many more years of fruitful service in the cause of the significant. Please accept this ACME Award for Excellence as a token of our respect, admiration and affection.

Tiruchirappalli-17  
30th November, 1976.

N H. ATTHREYA  
Hon. Director

*While we converse with what is above us, we do not grow old, but grow young.*

— Emerson

*The little done vanishes from the sight of him who looks forward to what is still to do.*

— Goethe

*As plants take hold, not for the sake of staying, but only that they may climb higher, so it is with men.—By only part of our nature we clasp things above us, one after another, not for the sake of remaining where we take hold, but that we may go higher.*

— H. W. Beecher

Respected Dear Friend Sri T.M.N. the Grand Old Man of Tamilnadu, Dear Sri Atthreya and Adi Lakshmanan, Ladies and Gentlemen, my humble salutations to you all. It is indeed a great privilege to be considered worthy of the ACME award and more so to receive it at the hands of my dear friend, the Grand Old Man of Tamilnadu. I consider myself not worthy of the award ; I have a feeling that the affection and regard which my friend Sri Atthreya has for me has influenced his judgment. My feeling of unworthiness is enhanced when I call to mind that two of the recipients of this award in the past were Mr. Melville de Mellow and Dr. V. V. Pendse the founder of Dnayana Prabodhinee, a school for the gifted, a school with a difference, whose motivation is Attitude Formation in the young as a prelude to Leadership Development. Be it as it may, I am very grateful indeed to The Indian Centre for Encouraging Excellence, Bombay for conferring the award on me.

I am also grateful to you all who are gathered here this evening to honour me. I thank you all most sincerely for your affection and regard.

When my book "Pathway to God Trod by Saint Ramalinga" was released by His Excellency the Vice-President Sri Jatti on the 4th October this year in Delhi, I said :

"I am put down here in the programme for a speech. I shall use this opportunity to pay my homage to and bear witness to the boundless grace of His Holiness

Sri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi Sri Sankaracharya Swamikal of Kanchi by whose command and blessing I have been able to do a small amount of work in the field of spiritual literature"

I consider the present occasion to be a proper place to record the full story. It was in September 1961 that I had the first darsan of His Holiness. I shall reproduce his gracious words verbatim. In this respect, time has not dimmed my memory.

He said :

For the last eight or ten years I had been thinking of sending for you and seeing you. Now you have come yourself."

I looked extremely puzzled as there was nothing in me which could make His Holiness wish to send for me and see me. He noted my puzzlement and proceeded :

"He admired very much the Sikh religion. He went so far as to grow a beard like the Sikhs."

I was much more puzzled, wondering who this person could be. He continued :

"I am referring to him, V. V. S. Aiyar, whose book you published in Delhi. Before the manuscript was sent to you it was with me for two years. It was from me that Krishnamoorthy took it and sent it to you. And when you sent me the copy of the book, I read it twice."

He then went on to enquire why I was given this particular and peculiar name and where

**REPLY**

**BY**

**SRI G.**

**VANMIKANATHAN**

and when I learnt Tamil. His concluding remarks accompanying the giving of the prasadam to me were :

“Continue doing service to Tamil like this.”

I could not understand why His Holiness should have wished for eight or ten years to send for me and see me. This puzzle was cleared when I was in Delhi this September. I have repeated to many friends these words of His Holiness and I did so at the assembly of friends who had come to meet me at the Delhi Tamil Sangam on the 26th of September. Then Sri A. V. Venkatasubban, my friend and foster-brother — for his father used to call me his fifth son — cleared the mystery. He said that in 1953 when he had gone for a darsan of His Holiness, His Holiness had said that some people had been telling him evil things about me and enquired who I was. Sri Venkatasubban cleared my character and told His Holiness the truth about me. To those persons who unwittingly fulfilled a divine purpose through maligning me, I am ever grateful. With love and humility I invoke God's blessings on them.

Let me now relate how the grace of His Holiness has been using me. The manuscript of V. V. S. Aiyar's book “Kamba Ramayanam—A Study” came to my hands directly from the hands of His Holiness. The joke which set in motion a chain of events and the publication of that book by the Delhi Tamil Sangam is now well known. This was in 1949-50.

On page 589 of my present book, I wrote :

“In the case of every one of the five literary works (including this) I had undertaken, I did not choose the work. I had no choice. They were thrust on me. In every case I felt myself totally unworthy of doing the work. But, nevertheless, I had to do the work. I had no choice. It was as if an external force, an unseen force was, despite myself, compelling me to undertake the work, was helping me along with the work.”

Again, as the opening sentence of Chapter 12 of the same book I wrote :

“I am not writing this book. It writes itself.”

The above words are the literal truth.

In 1953 my first article on the Thiruvachakam was written. Writing about how it came to be written, I said in my Introduction to the book “Pathway to God through Tamil Literature (i) through The Thiruvachakam”:

“Dr. B. Natarajan, a dear friend of mine with a puckish humour, was responsible for making me write on the Thiruvachakam. At his suggestion, Rev. Fr. Xavier S. Thaninayakam, then Editor of “Tamil Culture”, wrote to me in 1953 asking me to contribute an article to the Quarterly.”

In 1959, a casual remark by Sri Machwe, then Assistant Secretary of the Sahitya Academy, at a lucheon table made me curious as to why several people were refusing to undertake the translation

of the autobiography in Hindi of Dr. Rajendra Prasad. What followed was a translation of that work in Tamil for the Sahitya Academy. It was four years later that I realised that this was the way in which the grace of His Holiness was preparing me for the work of editing the Hindi Translation of the Thirukkural by Sri M. G. Venkatakrishnan in 1964-67.

In October 1963 His Holiness was camping at Tiruchirappalli. I was in the habit of finishing my pooja very early in the morning and going to have a darsan of His Holiness at 5-30 a. m. on his return from his bath in the Cauvery. When I was in my pooja on the 1st of October 1963, a project flitted through my mind like lightning. The Thirukkural should be translated into Hindi Doha Metre, my friends should be asked to shoulder the cost of the printing by each of them donating the cost of one chapter, and the book should be priced at Re. 1/- I was alarmed at this fantastic project for which I was in no way fitted. In the afternoon of the same day, when I had a darsan of His Holiness, apropos of nothing, His Holiness said while giving me the prasadam, “Everything will turn out all right.” And so it did. For instead of printing 2,000 copies as originally planned, we printed 12,000 copies, and each High School in the seven Hindi speaking States of our country was sent a copy as a gift to its library.

The translation of the Thirukkural in English was a natural sequence to the Thirukkural in Hindi.

An Association of Roman Catholic young men called The Newman Association asked me to give three talks to them on the Thiruvachakam and the result was "Pathway to God through Tamil Literature. (i) through The Thiruvachakam".

And in the case of the present book, I rebelled vainly against the grace and will of God and His Holiness. I did not want to write this book. I told Sri Mahalingam, who was pressing me to just translate about 300 of the poems of Ramalinga Swamikal, that I had finished with writing book, and that after the Thiruvachakam it would be something like bathos to write another book. I added that I was going to study the Thirumanthiram and Caiva Siddhantha. God laughed at my presumption and made me write this book.

As a crowning act of grace, when I submitted the copy of this book to His Holiness on the night of the 22nd August this year at 9 p.m. he read the book at one sitting and when I went for his darsan again on the morning of the 23rd at 6 a.m., he had read the entire text of 760 pages at one sitting and was, moreover, gracious enough to point out a mistake on page 589!

To that ocean of compassion and grace I pay my homage and stand as a witness to the might of his grace which has made true the words of his earliest predecessor, Sri Adi Sankaracharya Bhagavad-padal who said:

"Mookam karoti vaachalam", "You make orators of the dumb".

Even so have I been made by his grace.

I am a tree in the orchard  
of my Master;  
He chose the seed and the  
ground,  
The manure too!

In seedling and in sapling  
He stood guard,  
My fence and staff to grow  
Areaching Him.

Water was He, and  
He withheld it too!  
His boundless mercy and  
love  
'Twas that purned me.

He is the sun and rain and  
the air I breathe.  
The autumn wind that leaves  
My limbs so bare.

But forsaken I was not,  
for even then  
He made the leaf-buds  
sprout  
New life in me!

When in the fulness of time  
He comes to claim  
The fruit, could I deny him?  
For He is my life.

His may flowers and fruit,  
His the glory!  
I am a tree in the orchard  
of my Master.

\* \* \*

Excellence is a Journey  
Not a Destination

Nothing But the best  
From Me  
And For me

Trifles Make Perfection  
And Perfection is not Trifle  
—Michael Angelo

\* \* \*

Don't Complain About the  
Darkness  
Light a Candle

It is a Funny Thing About  
Life

If you Refuse To Accept  
Anything

Except the Best  
You Very Often Get it  
—Somerset Maugham

\* \* \*

Do a Little More Each Day  
Than You Think You  
Possibly Can

—Lowell Thomas

\* \* \*

Doing the Best We Can  
And Then Some

The Whole Fun of Living  
Is Trying to Make Some-  
thing Better

—Charles Kettering

\* \* \*

Mistakes will Happen  
But Must You Give Them  
So much Help?

Nothing Will Ever Be  
Attempted  
If All Possible Objections  
Must First Be Overcome

—Samuel Johnson

## Aims and Objects of the Centre

1. To stimulate amongst all sections of the public, thought and effort for the promotion and development of the excellence movement in the country.
2. To establish a network of contacts both at home and abroad to strengthen this movement.
3. To publish a journal that would serve as an organ of the Centre, communicate its ideas and ideals and keep the public informed of the achievements, possibilities and trends in this direction.
4. To bring out original writings, reprints, translations of relevant publications in India and elsewhere that would help raise standards of achievement in different walks of life.
5. To compile and maintain lists of individuals and institutions that have consistently maintained high standards and to extend such support as is possible.
6. To establish and maintain a library of visual aids, books, periodicals and papers on this subject for the benefit of the members.
7. To set up institutions like schools, colleges, studios, galleries, libraries etc. for training in excellence as a concept and activity.
8. To institute and establish fellowships, scholarships, grants, awards and prizes to encourage the excellence movement in all its facets.
9. To set up a laboratory which will objectively and systematically examine the products and services given to the public and loan them excellence seals for specific periods.
10. To found, establish, create and maintain endowments and/or grants for the purposes aforesaid.
11. To undertake all such activities as may promote the excellence movement in the country.

Two of the continuing activities are (a) the publication of this bimonthly *Excellence* and (b) the felicitation of men and women who pursue excellence in any area. To encourage the excellence movement, you can (a) subscribe to or gift this journal—it costs Rs. 10 per year ; (b) bring to our attention any that you know of in any part of India who can be extended an Excellence Award ; (c) make possible one more award by donating Rs. 500.

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