

Shri. Kulandaivel Anna: A Long Life of Service

As an intern at the Shanti Ashram this summer, I have been able to see figures crucial to the education of children, especially within Coimbatore. Shri. Kulandaivel Anna is one of these figures. He is a staunch supporter in the education of children, and has effectively changed the lives of those he educates. Through meeting him, I was able to gain some insight into how he did it.

This Wednesday I along with Dr. Kezevino Aram and Dr. S.R. Subramanian had the honor of visiting Shri. Kulandaivel Anna in his rural Coimbatore home. Our visit's intention was to deliver an invitation to an event at the Shanti Ashram, Shri. Kulandaivel Anna's own 100th Birthday Party. He received us at the front gate, alert and ready for visitors, and led us into his home.



Figure 1. Dr. Kulandaivel Anna outside his Coimbatore home.

Shri. Kulandaivel Anna is a pillar of education in Coimbatore, having a long history of commitment, compassion, and caring in his teaching. As an intern, I had only heard of his major contributions through the fond stories of others. The adoration and respect that Dr. Kezevino and Dr. S.R. Subramanian have for him was clear as he led us through his home. As we sat, S. R. Subramanian and Shri. Kulandaivel Anna launched into a discussion on his autobiographical books, "Faith Never Falts". Both Dr. Kezevino and Dr. S.R. Subramanian affectionately asked for an autograph, to which Shri. Kulandaivel Anna carefully inscribed thoughtful messages on their copies of his book.



Figure 2. Dr. Kulandaivel Anna and Dr. Kezevino Aram posing with his book, “Faith Never Falters”, outside his Coimbatore home.

Shri. Kulandaivel Anna is a picture of health at 100 years old, and when asked what his secret was he talked about his simple daily routine. He wakes up at 3:30, walks, reads, naps, and sleeps at a regular time every day. To me, what was most striking was his alertness. He engaged our every request, giving us tours of the house and telling us stories about education. He lives primarily independently in his home, with just one caretaker supporting him as he carries out his daily activities.



Figure 3. Dr. S.R. Subramanian Anna and Shri. Kulandaivel Anna discussing his career inside his home.

It is inspiring to see the peace that he has achieved after such a fulfilling and impactful life. He was Chancellor of the esteemed Avinashilingam University and continued to have community influence through various public engagements. During his Chancellorship the university was recognized for female empowerment, environmental and campus excellence, and

various other accolades. He remained an educator alongside a renowned public figure. He is a stout supporter of Gandhian values and principles and publicly honored the work of freedom fighters.

The 100th birthday celebration of Shri. Kulandaivel Anna this Saturday is more than a birthday party – it's a celebration of a life of dedicated service to the education of children. Months of preparation have precluded this celebration in order to ensure that the community can come together to celebrate and further inspire others to keep fighting for a better tomorrow. Many important figures in Coimbatore are coming together to honor this milestone in his life, and are set to speak about his contributions to education. As part of the community's commitment, and in honor of Kulandaivel Anna's life, 100 different volunteers from 7 different institutions have committed to each doing 100 hours of volunteer work in the next six months. This totals to 10,000 hours of work, all dedicated to Kulandaivel Anna and his work.

The opportunity to hand-deliver the Shanti Ashram's invitation and see the culmination of a life of wisdom and compassion was an honor. At the end of our visit, he walked us to the car, and posed for the many photos we requested. We left with a wave from Anna, and promises to visit again.



Figure 4. Shri. Kulandaivel Anna wishing us goodbye.

What was most striking about the visit was the alertness of Shri. Kulandaivel Anna. Even at 100 years old he was able to recall and clearly communicate memories of his life and their impact. He claims that his simple daily routine is what led to this, but I would argue that it is also a result of the constant positive stimulation in his life. He reads, talks, and is still to this day learning. While he has stopped working as of 10 years ago, his legacy will continue to live on.



Figure 5. Dr. Kulandaivel Anna and Sahana Subramanian outside his Coimbatore home.

This report is prepared by Sahana Subramanian, International Intern at the Shanti Ashram