

“Although opportunities and choices are more, I find our students focused.”

Dr. Fatima Vasanth shares with Marie Banu the changes in the student community today.

Dr. Fatima Vasanth has a Post Graduate Degree in Social Work from Stella Maris College and M.Phil. and Ph.D. in Social Work from Madras School of Social Work, University of Madras. She worked at Madras School of Social Work as an Asst. Professor from 1984 and Principal from 2005, a post from which she retired in 2014. The same year, she joined as Principal of Patrician College of Arts and Science, and in June 2016 took over as Deputy Principal at Loyola College, Chennai.

She was a member of the Syndicate, Senate and Academic Council, University of Madras. She served as the Governor's Nominee at Mother Teresa University, Kodaikannal, Tamil Nadu Open University and Pondicherry Central University. She has undertaken several Professional assignments for Government, Corporate and other Professional bodies at International, National and Regional Level. She was a member of Pre-Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) of Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) Chennai, member of NAAC peer review committee, member of National Committee for Transgender, New Delhi and Member - Advisory Committee for Central Board for workers, Government of Tamil Nadu.

In recognition for the contribution made towards Academic, Research and Training, the Government of Tamil Nadu awarded Dr. Fatima Vasanth the Best Educationist Award in August 2010.

In an exclusive interview, Dr. Fatima Vasanth shares with Marie Banu the changes in the student community today.

How do you feel to be the first woman to head the head evening shift in Loyola College?

Loyola College is not new to me. I have been associated with the College for more than three decades in several capacities - as member of Board of Studies, Board of Examiner, as Chief Guest, and as an expert member of their Academic Audit.

Loyola College is run by Jesuit Priests and the top management positions are usually held by them. In fact, it was a radical decision made by the Jesuit Management to bring an outsider for this key position and that too for the first time a lady. I am sure that they have deliberated much to take this decision.

While I was already holding the position of Principal in a College, I had to make a critical decision to accept this



position. Given the reputation of the College, its rich heritage, the largeness and new opportunities and that a woman is going to head this position for the first time, I was thrilled! I consciously made the decision to come and try out new avenues, face new frontiers and new challenges.

When you see the College's response, it has been very positive. I feel that my presence has made a lot of difference by way of connecting, building ownership, affinity, and human relationships.

What do you think are the changes in the student community compared to what was a decade ago?

The context, culture, relationships were different a decade ago. We had accommodated and adjusted ourselves, and reciprocated or responded to the requirements then. Today, students are matching with the changes around them. Many have working parents, some have parents who are living abroad and family environments are different. The Students have access to varied sources of information yet they are still responding

positively to the changing times. I do not find any abnormality as is feared by adults.

We too do not continue the same practices as we were doing earlier - like visiting our relatives or meeting them on special occasions or spending time with them. Why should we blame the students who are being caught up in a different web? They have their own linkages and different ways and levels of keeping relationships.

Although opportunities and choices are more, I find our students focused. We did not have such choices in our times and even when we were kept in a closed environment, we struggled. But, students today are performing despite their wide choices which could get them astray if right choice is not made. I am truly appreciative of our students as they are able to focus in their academics as well as extra-curricular activities, gear up to the skills they would require, and face campus interviews successfully.

Of course, there might be a small group that might indulge in deviant behaviour, but this was so even in our times.

Is the curriculum design for the present generation of students in line with student and market expectations?

At the Under Graduation level, the student is still young and cannot decide on what he wants to be. For many, the choice of discipline has been made by their parents, and there is a mismatch in a few cases. Market keeps changing and there is no ever Green discipline for the student to make a firm decision on the demand course.

The UG level covers a broad spectrum of subject knowledge, the foundation courses and personality development programmes. The basic objective of UG curriculum is not to specialise in any subject, but is meant to orient the student to life and career. That is why we include courses on Human Excellence where the student understands himself and the society and is prepared to be a good human being with the necessary skill sets.

At the PG level, the student is old enough to understand and identify his interests and skill sets, and match them with the market demands.

Having pursued a Doctoral degree in Social Work, which of the social issues are your passionate about?

I have a passion to work for women and children related issues. I have been associated with several women initiatives both with NGOs as well as the Government & served as a member in several committees. I once undertook a Government assignment to conduct a study about 'Children in Moral Danger'. The research findings has brought in a lot of sensitisation on child abuse.

I have anchored training programmes on gender sensitisation and counselling at the Police Training College for Police Officials. I suggested counselling to resolve many domestic cases instead of filing FIR as this strains family relationship.

I was also a member of the LokAdalat and handled long pending disputes along with the Honourable Judges in the High Court. My approach was always through counselling, and have never given consent for divorce or separation easily.

I was a member of the core committee for drafting transgender policy which has now become an ACT. I have represented several international forums on status of women in India and was also a guest faculty for international universities where I lectured on women concerns and issues.