

# Kalam's tryst with brush and canvas

## Launches a couple of projects of Banyan for women with mental illness

Special Correspondent

**CHENNAI:** The former President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, on Thursday inaugurated a couple of projects initiated by the Banyan, a non-governmental organisation working with women with mental illness, at Kovalam, 30 km from here.

The Banyan Academy of Leadership and Management and a protected community setting for rehabilitated patients were launched.

### Plants saplings

Dr. Kalam planted saplings and painted the first strokes on a canvas that will be completed by M.F. Hussain to raise funds for the Banyan. He also interacted with some members of the protected community.

Touched by the experience, he pledged Rs. 1 lakh for 10 women who warmly embraced him as he entered their home in the protected community shelter.

He congratulated Vandana Gopikumar and Vaishnavi Jayakumar, founders of the Banyan, on their meaningful

- He painted the first strokes on a canvas that will be completed by M.F. Hussain

- The painting will be auctioned and the proceeds will go to the Banyan

contributions to society.

### Model replicated

Ms. Gopikumar said the aim of starting the protected community project and the academy was to address the basic issue that lies at the root of the problem: access to healthcare for rural communities. The model had already been replicated in several States. Only a little over 60 out of the 600-odd districts in the country were running programmes to serve persons with mental illness.

The Banyan was seeking to establish demonstrable models to showcase and replicate.

### MoU with college

She signed a memorandum of understanding with Jepiaar Engineering College representative Regeena Wilson. Under the tie-up, the college

would supply free food to all the residents of the protected community shelter three times a day and lend its NSS volunteers for the project. The college would also enable clients of the Banyan to access medical care through telemedicine.

The women living in the place have recovered from their mental illness, but for many reasons, cannot or will not go home, Nachiket Mor, ICICI Deputy General Manager, who also helps out with the NGO, said.

M.F. Hussain's son Mustafa Hussain, who was present, will take the canvas to his father for being completed. It will be auctioned, and the proceeds will go to the Banyan.

Director Mani Rathnam and Actor Vivek Oberoi attended the function.



**NOBLE INITIATIVE:** Former President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam at the inauguration of a couple of projects launched by the Banyan in Chennai on Thursday. Vandana Gopikumar (left) and Vaishnavi Jayakumar (right), founders of the Banyan, are in the picture. — PHOTO: V. GANESAN