

In this Facebook era, a Good Samaritan who won't give his photo for media

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In this age of Facebook and selfies, when people love posting their pictures online on one pretext or the other, a man who helps economically disadvantaged youth to chase their dreams, stands out from the crowd.

He shies away from publicity, is quite reluctant to talk about his work, and agrees for an interview only on the condition that we would not publish his photograph in our website.



Mugavari helps students from poor families pursue their higher studies and trains them to appear for competitive exams

“I have not done anything big. It is because of the support of many kind-hearted souls, I have been able to help students from underprivileged families to pursue their higher studies and train them for competitive exams,” says K Ramesh, a 35-year-old bachelor, who has finally made up his mind to tie the knot soon heeding to the advice of his friends.

Ramesh heads an NGO called ‘*Mugavari*,’ which has helped nearly 200 students to do their graduation, post-graduation, and even doctoral studies.

About 25 students have finished their studies and got jobs. One of them, Boopathi Raja, has joined Indian Railway Traffic Service, a Group I cadre of Government of India, after cracking the tough Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) exams. He is now drawing a monthly salary of Rs.36000.

M Vetrivel, whose ambition is to join the IAS, has joined Tamil Nadu Agricultural Marketing and Agricultural Business Department as a supervisor after he cleared the Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission (TNPSC) Group II exam.

Vetrivel earns Rs.25000 per month. “He cleared the UPSC Main Exams twice and went up to the interview stage. He has made one more attempt and is confident of getting a posting this time in one of the central services,” says Ramesh.

Mugavari sent both Boopathi and Vetrivel to Delhi to prepare for the civil service exam.



The grateful duo is now part of the ‘Vanavil’ program for *Mugavari* students (*mugavari* means address or identity in Tamil) to give back to the organization that gave them an identity in life.

Under Vanavil scheme, past beneficiaries donate 7 percent of their earnings to *Mugavari*. This scheme was started recently to make the organization sustainable in the long run and reduce its dependence on external donors.

Presently there are 7 members in Vanavil. “Between them they are contributing Rs.15000 per month. One of them is a girl, G S Durga, who works in an insurance company as an assistant officer,” says Ramesh, who expects the scheme to bring in the funds for *Mugavari*’s programs.

Mugavari helps deserving students in different ways. It finds sponsors to pay the tuition or hostel fees for some students. It provides a fixed monthly assistance for some others.

Expenses for Boopathi’s and Vetrivel’s civil service preparation in Delhi was borne by R Krishnamurthy, a Chennai based industrialist, for instance.

In certain other cases, *Mugavari* negotiates with college managements to waive or discount tuition or hostel fees for deserving students.

Ramesh himself does not draw a fixed salary. “I have my mother and brother to support me. There are also friends who help me on a regular basis. When I need money for my expenses, I just send a text message to some of them.

“They are quite generous. If I ask for Rs.2000, there are friends who deposit at least 1000 rupees more in my account,” he says.



About 200 students have benefited from various initiatives of Mugavari

He has minimum needs and lives a simple life. He depends on public transport to move around and even his organization does not own a vehicle yet.

Since 2008, he has been residing at a wedding hall in Velachery – which is owned by an AIADMK politician and the present mayor of Chennai Corporation, Saidai Duraisamy - along with about thirty of his students.

“The mayor takes care of our food and accommodation,” says Ramesh, who would have been a successful chartered accountant had he not discontinued his CA articleship.

Ramesh grew up in difficult circumstances in Salem district after his family sold their 5-acre agriculture land in their village after his father could not repay the loan he had borrowed to fund the education of his maternal uncle.

“I grew up with my relatives in Salem as my parents came to Chennai in search of work. They worked as construction laborers. I remember visiting them during a summer vacation and sleeping on the pavement near the Anna Nagar arch.

“But I have inherited my father’s helping tendency. He bore no bitterness towards my uncle, who was not in a position to help us in our distress even though he was well-settled by then after getting a good government job,” he says.

Ramesh graduated from the Government Arts College, Namakkal, in Mathematics with flying colors. He secured the third rank in Madras University, which then had about 263 colleges affiliated to it.

Ramesh lost his sister to a heart ailment in 1998 and the thought of not being able to save her life affected him deeply.



Students studying in groups at Mugavari

While he was doing his CA articleship in 2002, a girl from his village, Kasthuri, approached him for help after she secured 95 percent in the higher secondary school exam. She reminded him how he had encouraged her to study well, so that she could get into a medical college.

Ramesh promised to help her. He managed to get in touch with film director A R Murugadoss, who had just given a hit film ‘Ramanna’ with a social theme against corruption.

“He agreed to sponsor her medical education. Till date Murugadoss remains one of our strongest supporters. Kasthuri is currently doing her MS in ophthalmology,” he says.

After people heard about his good turn to Kasthuri, many more students from his village and surrounding places began to seek his help. Ramesh decided to shelve his own dreams to help others achieve theirs.

Ask him if he has had ungrateful students, he refuses to answer. Prod him a little and he shares a few hurtful experiences on condition that we do not share the details that would give away the identity of the persons.

“Why cause them any hurt?” he reasons.

Suffice to say that there have been instances when he had come face to face with people who had come up in life with his help, but who had walked past him as if he never existed.

“These things happen in life. But you can’t let them affect your work, Anna,” he says, smiling.

- See more at: <http://www.theweekendleader.com/Heroism/1786/faceless-wonder.html#sthash.gJcFmEO4.dpuf>