

Life Chennai

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The language of service

This summer, Mrs. Raman took it upon herself to teach English to a few Corporation school children. Her summer course started on May 2 and within a month, her discoveries were startling.



They know the King's language better now.

IT TAKES a crisis to create a hero. For Thavamony Raman, it was the tragedy of losing her husband that started a new chapter in her life. Because she couldn't leave her child alone at home and work outside, she started working from home.

She started teaching children in the neighbourhood for a meagre fee. She started her day with the children at 4-30 a.m, taught them breathing exercises, yoga and learning through practice and fun, for six hours every day in an environment free of TV noise. ``I want to run this institution (Raman Kalvi Nilayam) like a mini-Shantiniketan," she says. It was in the remotest parts of Kodungaiyur and Perambur that the teacher discovered talent and sincere desire to learn.

This summer, Mrs. Raman took it upon herself to teach English to a few Corporation school children. Her summer course started on May 2 and within a month, her discoveries were startling. She realised that the potential among children deprived of quality education was enormous and that their grasping power was incredible.

She hired a classroom in a nearby Matriculation school and took classes for girls from the Madhavaram High Road Corporation Girls Higher Secondary School. The teacher taught grammar and English speaking for the girls over a month, and they were quick to learn.

They made it a point to talk only in English. These were the children who at the beginning of the course couldn't put a sentence together. Now, they are quick enough to play the story-building game.

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``There was a lion in the forest," a student got up to start the story. ``It was very clever," another added. ``Its activities were very bad," the next girl continued. ``It saw a deer," went another girl. ``And then, it ate the deer," another student wound up the story. That might be too simple for city bred elite school students. But for these students who have yearned to learn English all their lives, the course was a giant leap.

``Today's education is too commercialised," says Mrs. Raman. ``There is this student that I have who's a ninth standard dropout for an English medium matriculation school. He joined two months ago on pressure from his parents. And I found that he could not recognise English alphabets. I found it alarming. I could understand if he was a Tamil medium Corporation school student but we are talking about an English matriculation school here," she narrates, quickly sending off one of her students to fetch the particular chap.

In a few minutes, the dropout makes an appearance. He still can't talk English, but thanks to the classes, he now can put together alphabets and words. What's more, today, his desire to learn has been revived.

For two years, her husband fought non-Hodgkin lymphoma, undergone chemotherapy, and the disease relapsed thrice. He died leaving behind an eight-year-old son Visakhan and a helpless but determined wife.

Visakhan who studies in sixth standard, SBOA School today, helps his mother in dictation lessons for the students. He talks to the students only in English just to ensure that it builds conversation skills.

Mrs. Raman (5551653) today, has bigger plans for Raman Kalvi Nilayam. She wants to separate home and school work. The M.Com, M.Phil postgraduate, hence has plans of doing guest lectures in colleges to raise funds for a bigger institution.

By Sudhish Kamath

Photo: S. Thanthoni

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