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TAMIL NADU

A 'seed' transforms lives of children at Karumbalai



Sanjana Ganesh

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V. Elavarasi, Managing Trustee, Madurai Seed.G. MoorthyG_Moorthy

***V. Elavarasi** opens the doors to the first floor of Madurai Seed's office in Karumbalai in Madurai and is greeted with a friendly 'hello anni' (hello sister-in-law) from all volunteers. The president and Managing Trustee of an organisation aiming to provide quality supplementary education to girls and boys of Karumbalai, Ms. Elavarasi tells **Sanjana Ganesh** in an interaction that she is family to almost every adolescent and child in the area.*

Ms. Elavarasi completed her undergraduate degree in Physics in 2007 - the same year her father passed away. "I am from Tiruvannamalai and I planned to study further. However, my father's death forced me to work. After that, my marriage was fixed in 2009," she says. Madurai Seed's founder and Elavarasi's husband B. Karthik would passionately talk about the children in Karumbalai and their extraordinary potential for hours before their marriage, she recalls.

Once she moved to Madurai, she plunged into service and began teaching students. While she pursued her masters in Physics and completed a teacher training course, Ms. Elavarasi would teach science and English to the students of Karumbalai. "Very few girls were part of Madurai Seed then. Even today it is common to see girls washing dishes, cleaning house, watching TV and scrolling the phone at the age of 16 and 18. It has been a struggle to convince the girls and their mothers to begin sending them back to school and the after-school centre. After extensive counselling and assurance, things are finally looking up," she says.

Seed provides special education for students post school hours. The Managing Trustee has inculcated the habit of extensively reading on the weekends. She also encourages students to perform and understand science experiments during their weekend at the Galileo Science Club, a wing of Madurai Seed. She conducts personality development initiatives and invites speakers from across the world to help students understand English better and help them with interviews.

Ms. Elavarasi says the extra-curricular activities have helped in instilling confidence and even created a safe space for children. Many come to the office every day to study as the environment is conducive for learning. They are given the space to discuss issues of importance to adolescent health, including sex education.

Six of the 10 students from the total 250 are girls but Ms. Elavarasi wants the number to rise. "Today, there are girls from Madurai Seed who are engineers, doctors, nurses and professors. This is only because the organisation is constantly encouraged to increase the number of women and empower them," she says. She hopes to have an egalitarian society where men and women have equal access to opportunities and nobody drops out of school.

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