The Macrotheme Review
A multidisciplinary journal of global macro trends

HELPING HANDS (UDAVUM KARANGAL), CHENNAI, INDIA- A CASE STUDY OF A SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR.

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"The day we have not done something for somebody is a wasted day"

-Pappa Vidyakar .

Pappa Vidyakar, when young, asked himself a question often, 'should I not do something to reduce the misery of the people I see around me?". This question was invariably followed by another, "I am just a single person, what can I do?"

Today, Pappa Vidyakar found HELPING HANDS (UDAVUM KARANGAL in Tamil language) which has completed thirty years of service to humanity. The yeomen services of Pappa Vidyaakar to uplift the helpless people neglected by the society are well appreciated and recognized not only by the government and media in India but also in foreign countries. This includes International Award for Most Outstanding Voluntary Organisation in India – in Matsushita, Japan (1992) and Recognition for Outstanding Services – City of Philadelphia (2003). These awards and recognitions made him to pursue his mission with greater vigour.

2. HOW IT ALL EVOLVED

Some decades back, there was a young child in Kollegal, Karnataka, India. More often than not, he found solitude better than company. He lived like an island lost in the sea of people. He started to reach out and help those in need to fill in the vacuum inside. When he was 13, he helped an accident victim, Ramakrishnan. He took care of him till his relatives came to take him back to Chennai. Within a short span of time, the two had bonded well and the boy was in awe of this person, who showered him with love for the first time in his life. Few years later, meaning to escape a fruitless life, the young boy fled to Chennai hoping to meet Ramakrishnan, who took him under his wings and encouraged the little boy to pursue his studies and his dreams. The boy is Vidyaakar, who is affectionately known as Pappa.

It was an incident in 1983, which changed the life of Mr.Vidyaakar as well as many others forever. One evening following a show, Mr. Vidyaakar was handed over a baby that had been abandoned at a cinema hall in Chennai. Unwilling to let the child live without love, he chose to look after the infant, and from that instant, Helping Hands(Udavum Karangal) was formed. From these humble beginnings, over the past 30 years, Udavum Karangal has come to the aid of over 2000 children, all abandoned for no fault of theirs. Currently, it offers a number of services including providing food, shelter and educational facilities for residents irrespective of their age,

sex, religion, nationality, caste or mental capacity. Having dedicated his life to helping others, Pappa Vidyaakar has established an Internationally recognised non-governmental, non-profit and secular welfare organisation, through his dedication and firm belief in the goodness of the society. He added "But how do we manage to feed them, take care of them and rehabilitate them back to where they belong?. We have no political or religious backing but what we have is an unfaltering faith in humanity. The faith has never failed us. Every day, we see strangers walking into our premises, giving freely their time and money. Yes, for the past three decades, everyday, we wake up to see a miracle happen. A miracle that helps us help all those who come home to us".

3. ACTIVITIES OF UDAVUM KARANGAL

Udavum Karangal is having many specialised homes to cater to the needs of every individual. Udavum Karangal was founded because of that one child who needed a home. Today, their little legs walk without fear, for they have a father- Pappa Vidyaakar- to hold them when they falter.

3.1 PASAMALARGAL

Pasamalargal is their home that cares for babies between the ages of six and18 months only. These little ones were either found abandoned on the streets or left at their premises. Most of them were born to women who were suffering from mental illness and who were unable to take care of themselves. There is no greater joy in the world than seeing your child smile. Thiruveni and her mother joined Udavum Karangal as volunteers. Taking a liking to the surroundings and the people, both chose to stay with them for full-time, with Thiruveni's mother living her final days there. For over two decades, Thiruveni has been a caregiver for the children at Pasamalargal looking after more than 200 babies over her time here. She says," I do not do this job for money or for other personal reason other than to nurture these children. It brings me immense satisfaction to see these children blossom and know that they have future that perhaps may not be possible otherwise".

3.2 SISHU BHAVAN

The inmates learn their first lessons here- to share what they have, trust the one above and to believe in their own dreams. From 1983, Sishu Bhavan in Thiruverkadu, Chennai has provided shelter to thousands of abandoned children; currently houses 160 residents between the ages of 4 and 10. Each group is looked after by one trained house mother, two caregivers and one helper, who provide them with the love and affection as any parent would.

Beyond teaching the children basic skills such as how to look after themselves, Udavum Karangal aims to provide them a holistic environment, where they can develop both a healthy mind as well as physique. Yuvaraj was only six months old when his mother threw him off a railway track. With the help of good Samaritans, the boy survived with a leg fracture. Having become a part of Udavum Karangal family, he is a class-stopper at school.

3.3 BOYS TOWN

Since 1986, Boys Town has provided shelter to adolescent boys between the ages of 9 and 18 years with the aim of helping them attain a bright future and groom them to be contributing citizens. Arun (6years old) was referred to Udavum Karangal in 1994 after being found orphaned on the streets of Chennai with his younger sister, Abirami (2 years old). Today a brilliant Arun,

has completed studying BE (Mechanical) in a city Engineering college (Sree Sastha Institute of Engineering and Technology) and is employed well in a Firm thereby helping his sister and other brethren at Boys Town.

3.4 GOKULAM

Even a broken deity is safe but an unwanted child is dutifully disposed.

Gokulam was constructed in 1992 to provide destitute female children a quality education for securing an independent future. Presently 111 students reside at Gokulam. At the age of 4, Aadhira and her mother (suffering from mental distress), hailing from North India, was found roaming the streets of Coimbatore. Aadhira was then raised in Gokulam, who after scoring 95% on her 10th standard examinations found her way to Velammal Matriculation Higher Secondary School who waived her tuition fees fully. After which, on motivation from Pappa Vidyaakar she could complete her Bachelors Degree in Computer Science and is seeking employment to take care of her mother.

3.5 SPECIAL CHILDREN HOME

There is nothing that incapacitates a person more than lack of love.

This home provides shelter for abandoned HIV positive, physically handicapped and spastic children. They are trained in physiotherapy and exercises, speech therapy, toilet training and receive custodial care facilities. Believing that mind has power over the body, they constantly motivate the little ones to explore beyond their limitations.

3.6 AATHMA SHANTI

Established in 1983, it is an exclusive home and rehabilitation centre for female psychiatric patients, who have either lost their way back home or have been abandoned by their family. At Udavum Karangal, these women are given the necessary medical and psychological attention every day. Till now, about 1200 individuals have been restored to their families and lead productive lives. Sushma, the baby was wrapped tightly by her mother was lying in a bus stand. Today, after constant attention and care at Aathmashanthi , Janaki has steadily recovered and her child Sushma is now a young educated maiden, happily married in a loving family.

Udavum Karangal is having many more specialised homes like Dignity Home (for mentally deranged male patients), Karunai Illam (for destitute women who are in the concluding stage of life), Malarvanam(for destitute men who are in the concluding stages of life).

4. COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAMMES

With the community outreach programmes(JEEVAN), Udavum Karangal reaches out to the residents of Thiruverkadu and are helping to build a community whose weaker sections are cared for, trained to be employable, and are gradually equipped to meet the challenges of urban living. More than 300 students have completed their course in the Jeevan School of Nursing and are placed in some of the renowned Hospitals in Chennai.

Jeevan Computer Centre provides training courses on the fundamentals of computer to those who have completed eighth standard and are 15 years old. Jeevan Lending Library helps the students to know the outside world beyond their school text books. Similarly, Jeevan School of Tailoring provides vocational training to less privileged girls to acquire skills to stand on their own legs.

5. SERVING BEYOND INDIAN BORDERS

In 1991, Cecil, a Swedish citizen was found roaming the streets of Chennai with severe mental distress. Udavum Karangal navigated his whereabouts and ensured he received proper medical attention before having him safely sent back home. A similar incident occurred in 2000 when Regina- an Austrian national – was sent back home. From September 1997 to March 1998, Udavum Karangal rescued and provided refuge to 38 children and 32 adults from Bangladesh, who was en route to the Middle East- to be used as camel racing agents. After providing all of these individuals with food, shelter and medical attention, Udavum Karangal ensured that they returned back to their homes in Bangladesh. Udavum Karangal has its two chapters abroad- located in Bedford MA-01730 USA and London, N64DB, UK.

6. OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

Udavum Karangal followed innovative solutions to bring the most vulnerable and marginalized sections of society to the fore-fold of education and simultaneously building their skills for future employability; it can be adopted by other projects as well. The impact of the programme has been manifold. This shows that the model of this social enterprise, which is celebrating its 30 years of continued contribution to the society, has been successful due to the dedication, adoptive leadership, focussed vision and strategy adopted towards that goal by the great Pappa Vidyaakar. This can be replicated on a wider scale in different regions, states and countries in accordance with their socio-economic condition.

7. INSPIRATION FOR THE GLOBAL INVESTORS

Investors in the modern era are heterogeneous group. At one end, we have investors who are having time, efforts and money to invest on a continuous basis; they are able to keep track of stock price movement regularly and are likely to have diversified portfolio of investments within their own country and also in MNC stocks.

On the extreme end, we have occasional investors who are inspired by the performance of some blue chip corporate. Such investors invest due to the passion they develop towards such corporate, their promoters and their profile. They are likely to have emotional attachments. They do not trade frequently in the stock market especially in such stocks. Such investors are not involved on a full time basis. The case discussed falls under this category.

A longitudinal perspective of a real time case in India is being discussed for the benefit of the participants in general and investors in particular. Adding value to the society in terms of yeoman service like that of Mr Pappa Vidyaakar is the need of the hour. With his caring touch, many wounds would heal and many many needy children will fly tomorrow because Mr PappaVidyaakar is giving wings to their dreams.

Annexure 1: Awards and Recognitions

Annexure 2: Press reports