

## HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

THIS IS THE PLACE TO DO IT. REACH OUT TO FELLOW READERS WITH INTERESTING ANECDOTES, INSPIRING STORIES AND HEARTWARMING MOMENTS FROM YOUR LIFE. WRITE IN WITH FULL CONTACT DETAILS, AND MAKE THIS SPACE YOUR OWN.

### BACK TO SCHOOL

As retirement approached in 2001, I wondered what I would do with my life. Typically, people are propelled towards something they were touched by at some point. I naturally gravitated towards helping children with their education, especially in rural schools.

Born in 1944, I had a modest upbringing and was schooled in a nondescript village named Kuruvimalai in Thiruvananthapuram district, Tamil Nadu. The infrastructure was poor and going to school meant walking barefoot for five miles. We had to study in the glow of kerosene lamps and if there was something we did not understand, we had no idea whom to reach out to.

Under the circumstances, I think it's a miracle that I managed to complete high school at all. Still, it was this

education that landed me a clerical job with the Southern Railways in Chennai and I retired as office superintendent!

I started by giving a basic educational kit to every student in Kuruvimalai Panchayat School. The kit includes a dictionary, an atlas, *Thirukkural* (a classic of Tamil couplets) and essential stationery items. I gradually increased the number of schools I help and also contribute items like mats, wooden benches, cupboards and plates. In the past 14 years, I have managed to help around 6,000 children.

Each kit costs ₹ 200 and I allocate around ₹ 50,000 a year for this cause. I make it a point to visit each school and interact with the staff and students. I also usually take a family member along with me in the belief that the more they are involved, the more likely they are to continue this tradition.

It's back to the roots for Subramanian (second left)



My wife has been a pillar of strength, even when I was struggling to make ends meet. My two sons and daughter are now post-graduates and well-settled in their careers. When I discussed spending a portion of my pension on my mission, there was tremendous support from everyone. When my daughter started working, she gave away her first salary to her alma mater and set up an endowment reward.

I know that my contribution is miniscule but when I see the children blooming and making an identity for themselves, I cannot help but feel proud. Many of these children, who began at the grassroots level, have solid careers and can support themselves financially. This is very gratifying for me. I have also worked with nationalised banks that have budgets for corporate social responsibility activities, and guide them in their efforts.

I believe that even if a couple of students return to their schools to help them, it could make a world of difference. There are so many people out there who would like to help other people but don't know how. When people offer me donations, I encourage them to do it on their own. I tell them to choose the schools they studied in, return to their roots and contribute.

I know all this is only a drop in the ocean but if many of us keep adding to it, I believe that, one day, it will make a significant impact on society.

—N Subramanian, Chennai