

A true Eco-Warrior

ACHIEVER

He is quite an exception to the numerous government employees who are not even prompt in discharging their duties. A state bus conductor, M Yoganathan, is a true nature lover. He has planted 52,000 trees all over the state

MATHEMATICS had never really been my strong point. I must confess. Yet my mind did do a bit of a back-flip when the genial gentleman seated opposite me stated that he had planted a whopping tally of 52,000 trees all over the state. The cause of nature has been frequently upheld by numerous citizens of the soil through the last century and before. I somehow doubt though if the city of Coimbatore has ever produced a green prodigy such as M Yoganathan, till date.

Hailing from a rural background, the mild mannered bus conductor with the State Transport Corporation is enigmatic when his forte is brought up. He effortlessly runs through baffling facts and anecdotes about various animals and plants indigenous to the state, collected over the years from several reputed naturalists and nature photographers and stored away in his laser quick memory.

With merely a day a week off from the grueling Route 92 that he has operated for many years now, he devotes that time travelling every nook and cranny of the state with his prized collection of photo slides in an attempt to generate interest among school children and college students towards promoting the cause of nature. He believes that students are the primary base to ward saving whatever bit of the environment can be salvaged. This is why he has built a strong team of students from various colleges united in his passion and regularly organizes tree planting drives, nature hikes and photography expeditions in the reserves in the state.

Examining the root of this near fanatic passion, he explained how, when he was in high school, the death of a nest being destroyed on a tree being felled aroused a deep emotion to prevent it from happen-



Yoganathan during his work

ing and the rest as they say, is his story!

Beyond merely planting saplings, he entrusts it to specific people, predominantly students, and encourages them to bond with the tree and raise it much like a pet, albeit a life-giving one. With such a hectic schedule and never ending agenda, family life hasn't been quite easy for him. Yet, he has explained this facet of his life clearly to his wife before marriage and she has upheld her end of the bargain splendidly, according to him. His children and

immediate family also support his views, going to the extent of refusing to use plastic in any means available, be it a glass of juice at a nearby vendor or a mere straw.

However it hasn't always been a joyous education trip for him as he turns into a fearsome activist when human negligence and lack of concern cause the loss of wildlife or shrubbery. This has led him into potentially life threatening situations from which he has escaped by mere hair's breadth on occasions. With hundreds of camps and workshops under his belt, awards and recognitions are not new to this bustling eco-enthusiast.

Recently the recipient of the 'Eco-Warrior' award from the Earth Matters Foundation, a branch of environmentalist filmmaker Mike Pandey, he was awarded the honour alongside popular Bollywood star John Abraham by India's Vice-President Hamid Ansari. He created quite a stir in those circles as he was the only public serviceman amongst renowned academics and highly credited environmentalists. Quite an achievement for a demure small town man with a large heart and an even larger verve to keep nature's head high, wouldn't you think? In his defence he merely claims he's doing in his way, a small return payment, for all the oxygen and love that nature has bestowed generously upon him all through his life.

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It was a revisit to India's emerald islands in the east embellishing the Bay of Bengal. Reflections of life and times in Port Blair three decades ago flashed through the mind as Indian Airlines carrier touched down Veer Savarkar airport. <http://www.starwebmedia.in/2010/05/andamans-sea-of-change-in-30-years.html>



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Bus conductor zooms in on Lankan Tamils



A working still of Thottachinigi, produced by a bus conductor Yoganathan

M Rafi Ahmed | ENS
Coimbatore, May 16

AFTER Thagam (Thirst), it is now Thottachinigi ('Touch-me-not plant') for Yoganathan, a government bus conductor who has not only penned the story, screenplay and dialogues but also wielded the megaphone and produced the short film.

While his maiden effort revolved around the theme of water scarcity arising from the felling down of trees, Thottachinigi focuses on the sufferings of Sri Lankan Tamils during the war in the Island nation. He has footed the bill for producing both the short films.

Yoganathan who hogged the lime-

light after he was honoured with 'Eco Warrior' award by Vice President Hamid Ansari in 2008 in recognition of his feat of planting 50,000-odd saplings, said, "The ethnic Tamils in Sri Lanka have been suffering for a long time. Though the war may have ended, the scars still remain. My mind revolved around poor Tamils who ran helter-skelter in search of safety even as numerous battles raged all around them. The clippings shown on television channels prompted me to do a short film on their plight."

He informs that the film portrays the nightmarish experiences of a family—a man and his two daughters—living amidst gunshot sounds

and bombs being dropped by the Sri Lankan army.

"Hunger and sadness is writ large on their faces. The father and the two children try to hide in bunkers but still the elder girl ends up losing one of her limbs. When the man dies in a bomb attack, the children are orphaned. The film is in flash-back mode with the opening shot of two children touching the Thottachinigi in front of their house. They enjoy the plant shrinking when touched and blooming after some time, blissfully unaware that the war will soon spell doom for them." Aravind Kumar, who has done 30 short films and has handled the camera for Thottachinigi told Express that the picturisation was done at a location in Somanur on the outskirts of Coimbatore.

"Luckily, the area had both greenery as well as stretches of barren land where we constructed bunker-like pits and some dilapidated houses. A still camera ECOSTD with full High Density resolution was used," he noted.

"Two girls—Suba and Shilva, sisters in real life, enacted the roles of the two children while Chandran donned the role of their father. Nooyal Posumai, Kazhagan Palani-chamy and Nithyanandam helped them in the shoot of the film at a farm house and its surrounding area."

Produced by Mayil Kalai Koodam, Thottachinigi is being released by Kalai Kuviyal. Dubbing, editing, sound and visual effects is being done at Kalai Kuviyal in Coimbatore. Baskar was the assistant cameraman, Prakash handled the stills, Rajkumar is helping in dubbing whereas Satheesh is designing the graphics.

M Yoganathan receiving the Eco-Warrior Award instituted by the Earth Matters Foundation from the Vice President Hamid Ansari in New Delhi

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