

METRO PLUS

The colours of hope



Reji Varghese

FEBRUARY 06, 2018 00:00 IST

UPDATED: FEBRUARY 06, 2018 04:20 IST

Vivid brush strokes and thoughtful art work come as a beacon of hope from the children through ARTKannaginagar

“Fish don’t quarrel when they swim,” says eight-year-old N Arun, beaming from cheek to cheek as he holds up a painting he has just completed.

The painting is of a dark sea with a school of white fish, all swimming in one direction. Arun points to the little fish leading the group and grins, “That’s me, the dark sea is Kannagi

Nagar where we live and the other fish are the other residents. I'm trying to lead them to clearer waters."

Professor Kaustav Sengupta and his wife Shaswati Sengupta of NGO Inklink, who recently organised an exhibition of the children's work at the NIFT Exhibition Centre, Taramani, collaborating with the Chennai Police, greet the children who created them: about 35 kids aged between 8 and 14. Many of the works on display were made by groups of three to five.

There's a painting of a large tiger depicting power and courage, which Sengupta explains is done in a mix of Madhubani and Gond tribal art forms. There's a painting of a smiling elephant floating over a cloud signifying that anything is possible. And one of a yellow horse set against a black background. There's one of a large yellow sun and dying trees depicting the ills of deforestation. Every one of these paintings, Sengupta explains, has a story behind it.

Eleven-year-old duo Nitish and Riyaz, along with 12-year-old Kavya, worked together on the painting of the large yellow sun and dried trees discuss their work. Nitish says, "We initially thought of painting about the state of our homes – overflowing sewers, garbage accumulation... Or we thought we could show our water shortage issues by painting a picture of a line of ladies with pots waiting for water. But when we discussed this we thought that our own plight is not important, as there are much larger issues like the cutting of trees which we could highlight."

Kavya adds, "We drew an extra large yellow sun, which we thought would magnify the effect of heat. Then we added dried up trees. We wanted people to see the painting and realise that this will really happen if we continue cutting trees." Holding up his painting of a yellow horse, Rajesh, a 10-year-old, says, "The horse can go wherever it wants. It is strong and can travel to destinations far away. I want to be like that horse when I grow older so I can achieve whatever I want and will not have to depend on others."

Sengupta says, "Our focus has been to empower the crime affected and underprivileged children and women of Kannagi Nagar, through creativity. We've trained 2,700 children and 400 women of Kannagi Nagar since 2012."

He has been teaching art and colour psychology at NIFT for 12 years now. He explains that the workshops being conducted at Kannagi Nagar over the past six years follow a unique pedagogy which covers colour perception, colour psychology, colour mixing, story telling and team work. He says some children with ADHD relaxed after a few sessions of these workshops. Some children who had trouble interacting with others learnt to work more effectively in teams.

The purpose, Sengupta says, was to encourage creativity and disengage them from crime. He says the drawing of lines, form, colour mixing and concentration required to execute these are therapeutic.

“ARTKannaginagar has been jointly envisioned by our NGO Inklink and the City Police,” he says, adding, “The 35 children who participated in this programme were chosen by the Police Boy’s club at Kannagi Nagar.”

On cue, a young man dressed in khaki walks in. Sengupta introduces him as Rohith Nathan, Deputy Commissioner of Police. Nathan is a 29-year-old IPS officer who has been given the task of policing Kannagi Nagar, reportedly one of the most crime prone areas of Chennai.

Kannagi Nagar is one of the largest slum resettlement sites in Asia and is located in Okkiyum Thoraipakkam Town, just a kilometre off OMR with its glitzy IT buildings.

Around 125,000 people have been resettled here from across the city over the past decade and a half. These people live in challenging conditions: Entire families of between four to eight people live in tiny single room houses. Many of them live on a hand-to-mouth basis with no job security, so a few days of no work means that the family will starve. As a result, crime is rampant, right from petty crimes like stealing cell phones to drugs, kidnapping, prostitution and gang wars.

Nathan explains that most of the parents of kids who’ve participated in the exhibition are daily wage labourers, house maids and gardeners. Some have criminal backgrounds. Some of the children participating are also juvenile delinquents. He adds, “Only 9% of the children of Kannagi Nagar go to school. Our focus is to get the remaining kids to go back to school so opportunities to earn a decent living are vastly increased.”

He continues, “The purpose of ARTKannaginagar is to expose children through art to the world outside. They need to realise that there is hope for a better future if they’re willing to stick it out and go back to school.”

Shaswati of Inklink, adds, “We’ve given the kids an open canvas to dream on. We want them to realise that the possibilities are endless and if they can dream it, they can achieve it.”

ARTKannaginagar paintings will be displayed next at the Design, Art and Music festival at DakshinaChitra, ECR on February 17 and 18. For more details, email inklink.trust@gmail.com or call 9176655090.

(Names of some of the

children have been changed to protect identities)

The purpose was to encourage creativity and disengage them from crime

Kaustav Sengupta

InkLink Charitable Trust

•

Total children trained: 2,700 underprivileged children and 400 crime-affected women of Kannagi Nagar have been trained since 2012.

- ***Ninety children are currently being trained through specially designed weekend creative workshops titled Morning Lights.***
 - ***Fifteen adolescent girls and 18 children are currently being trained in spoken English.***
 - ***ARTKannaginagar Exhibition saw a total of 35 children participate through the Police Boys Club, Kannagi Nagar.***
-