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HELPING OUT SOME HAPLESS SOULS

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One day some wretched souls asked Yama, God of Death, "Our bodies are still on Earth as we still haven't been buried properly. Our family members are helpless for they don't have the cash to even cremate us or bury us as they are all living in utter penury as complete destitute. O God, is our poverty such a big sin? Can't you do anything to save our bodies?" With a sarcastic smile Yama replied, "All those who are alive are complaining that they are not getting any care. So how can I promise your dead body a decent burial?"

But in Coimbatore, maybe there are no such hapless souls. The Thozhar trust here facilitates the burials of even the down trodden in our society. Four years back, five ordinary flower sellers, Shanthakumar, Ibrahim, Jeevanandam, Annadurai, and Sampath Kumar launched the trust after a particularly horrifying experience surprisingly inspired them to find a solution to an age old problem.

Shanthakumar narrates about the incident which sparked their noble initiative. "We all used to donate blood regularly. One day when we had gone to the Government hospital to donate blood, a disgusting foul stench assaulted our senses. It was originating from the mortuary. When we enquired about that, the hospital authorities disclosed to us that on those days, when certain unclaimed dead bodies are left behind, with no one willing to shoulder their responsibility, they tend to rot at the morgue. This naked truth, the very existence of orphans even among the dead, touched our hearts and souls. So that very day itself, we talked with the hospital authorities and the police about whether they will allow us to take care of those unwanted bodies and provided them a decent burial."

Once the Rubicon was crossed, there was no looking back as they started interment of the unwanted bodies. 470 corpses have been inhumed by the Thozhar trust so far including just one-day-old babies, AIDS patients, and unclaimed dead bodies. Recently a prisoner's mother was to be buried and they succeeded in making arrangements for the prisoner to attend the burial. Seven AIDS patients were also cremated by them.

As far as they are concerned, no one escapes unnoticed from the clutches of death. In every person's life, death is an uninvited but inevitable guest. Ibrahim says, "We will also die one day. So how can we close our eyes against others when they die? Some organizations even care for the dead animals but in the case of human beings, there is no such concern shown. Our policy is that no one should abandon their beloved one's dead body due to financial constraints."

After completing the necessary formalities with the police and the hospital authorities, the corpses are taken to the burial ground in Puliakulam. Raja Ambulance helps the trust by providing their services free of cost. Many ladies and school and college going students also aid in this admirable effort.

Generally as a matter of principle, religious ceremonies are not conducted by the trust. "Usually we ignore the particular religious background because, it may hike the cost involved. But if the relatives of the deceased persons demand any such observances, then we allow it." Shanthakumar says.

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Do they get any help from government? Shanthakumar shrugs, “No help at all from the government. Some persons and organizations however assist us in different ways. Lions club gave us an Omni van. Others offer some financial aid.”

‘Adakkam’ or ‘burial’ by Mathi Ananth has documented all these activities of the trust. The documentary highlights their immense social service. Perhaps more aid will now reach the Thozhar trust after this publicity, so far just words of appreciation have been received.

But not withstanding the society’s general apathy, they continue on this sojourn, a journey where only dead bodies are there as co travelers. If you feel the trust is worthy of your help, feel free to contact them and offer your assistance in their mission.

The contact numbers are 09842267700, 0942251523, and 0943347786.

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