



Nagarjun hails from Ambedkar colony which is an urban deprived area in Madurai. The people settled here are predominantly Dalits, engaged as casual labourers. Most of the families are BPL families. Nagarjun is 13 years old and has 2 younger sisters, Sindhumathi 11 years old and Iniyaa 6 years old. Nagarjun is supposed to be studying in 8th standard but for the school closure. Nagarjun's father, Pandiarajan has studied upto 5th standard. His mother, Nandhini Devi has studied up to 9th standard. Nagarjun's father is an unskilled labourer who does not attend to work regularly for reasons best known to him. P. Nandhini Devi does not attend to any work and is a housewife. Nagarjun's grandmother who runs a way side small eatery supports her daughter's family. Though the family faces serious economic hardship, Nandhini Devi (mother) says, "We parents have not studied well, but I want my children do well in studies." With the onset of corona, the mother says that life has become miserable for them. She says that the family is under the grip of ruthless money lenders.

At school, Nagarjun was considered as a slow learner and had difficulties in catching up with others. The mother says that Nagarjun also had serious behavioural issues. She says that Nagaraj could only play with his younger sisters using their toys. Whenever his mother forced him to go out, he refused. He could not relate with boys of his age. He was extremely shy. It he also used to say that he was afraid of ghosts. In the understanding of our program staff, Nagarjun's behaviour was extremely regressive, shying away from every possible situation. This also had a negative bearing on his school studies.

The mother became concerned about this. In spite of her extreme poverty, she sent Nagarjun to a tuition master paying him Rs.200/- (2pounds) a month. But this payment of 200/- a month, she could not manage for long. He had to drop out. Nagarjun was identified by our facilitator as a child who really needed support and enrolled him in Ambedkar Colony CRC.

Though Nagarjun participated in all co-creative activities of the CRC- singing, drawing, theatre etc., only theatre could first open a creative window in him. His penchant for theatre activities was quickly identified by drama teacher Selvam during a combined workshop organized during a weekend. Nagarjun was first given a small comedy role in a drama, staged before a large group of children who came from all Madurai CRCs. Children found him very entertaining on the stage, and his first appearance on the stage was an instant success. This changed the self-perception of Nagarjun and the perception by others, says facilitator Poongodi. He started slowly coming forward. Subsequently he volunteered to be on stage during a school function, and danced. He got the applause of his class teacher. This further stepped up his activities in the children's hub. He became very active in the theatre classes. Joining another child by name Naagavalavan, he started experimenting on writing drama scripts. One that caught the attention of the instructor was, a script for a drama that highlighted the need to motivate children to study well.



(Nagarjun dancing at the Center of the stage)

Again, an incident that brought forth his self fully out, needs to be acknowledged here. There was an Art Fest organised at Madurai inviting all four centres. By some oversight, the

Ambedkar colony centre was not invited to come on stage for a particular performance. Nagarjun dashed to the stage in protest and registered the presence of Ambedkar centre, dancing in frenzy for a while. Though this was not acceptable to many, for those who watched him grow it suggested something significant. He had journeyed a long way.

When I (Ponkundram) met Nagarjun, He told me in clear terms that he wants to make a career as a full-time actor. He was also very specific that he would be taking acting in theatre and not in cinema. He says he is dreaming of big stage performance. When I just mentioned this to her mother asking for opinion on what the child aspires to be, she fully supported. But she also quickly added that he must also do well in his school studies. When I specifically asked what he would do in the next 10 years, without his batting his eyelid he said, in the next 10 years he would teach theatre to others. Nagarjun is now in charge of himself. And is on his way to get what he wants in life.

Ponkundram.I