

Reading. It's something that we all take for granted. Even now, as you read these words, it feels impossible to imagine that there are people to whom these words make no sense. Literacy, particularly the ability to read, opens up the world for us. But for so many, the world of words remains a closed door.

One man who believes that everyone can, and should, benefit from reading is Shri Sathyanarayan Mundayoor. In Andhra Pradesh, he is hailed as a messiah of literacy, someone who has transformed the lives of thousands. His mission began in 1979, when he gave up a secure government job for a position in the Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya.

He was determined to bring about change even within the confines of traditional teaching methods. After a long stint at the Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya, having introduced children to the joy of reading, he decided to move on and spread this joy within the Arunachali communities under the Vivekananda Trust (Mysore).

He was driven by a deep conviction that reading would help children discover new possibilities, which in turn would drive their imagination. To transform this wish into reality, he held book exhibitions for tribal children, where he would personally cart books to remote villages. His determination was unfettered and he spent a decade in pursuit of this cause.

In 2007, Sathyanarayanji's efforts finally bore fruit, with the birth of the Lohit Youth Library Movement in the town of Tezu in Arunachal Pradesh. The Association of Writers and Illustrators for Children (AWIC) and the Vivekananda Trust donated a generous number of books to this cause. This led to the creation of the movement's first library, which came to be known as the Bamboosa Library. Since then, at least 13 libraries have sprung up in the towns of Wakro, Chongkham, Anjaw and Lathao.

Shri Sathyanarayan Mundayoor proved that the light of literacy could brighten every child's future.

Although he has become something of a celebrity, Sathyanarayan Mundayoor's biggest reward has been the love and respect of the children, who call him 'Uncle Moosa'. Today, his libraries organise a number of workshops, where activities such as story-telling sessions, quizzes, book-readings and enactments are held.

All of this, for and by children, who otherwise would not even have been able to read their own names.

