

Once homeless, he provides shelter to others in Bangalore

T. Raja left his home when he was just 15 years old. For a couple of years, he tasted the harsh realities of life in India's IT hub, sleeping on the roads and eating leftovers from garbage bins.

Today, at 41, he offers hope and help to the destitute and dying people as the founder of the shelter Home of Hope. He has rescued and rehabilitated around 3,000 people from the city's streets in the last 12 years.

'I was born and brought up in Bangalore. I left my studies when I was in Class 3. I used to gamble, drink and even steal money from home. My parents were very angry with me. One day I decided to leave and landed on the streets,' Raja told IANS.

'I had first-hand experiences about the harsh realities of life and the large number of poor and sick people living and dying on the streets. I was moved by the plight and suffering of street people. Then I decided to start the home,' said Raja.

After surviving his battle on the streets, Raja took up several odd jobs. He established Home of Hope, located in Doddagubbi Village, 25 km from the city, in 1997.

Raja also founded The New Ark Mission of India, an NGO devoted to rescuing the destitute and dying people of the streets and rebuilding their lives.

He depends on donations to run the home. A half-acre land for the home was donated by India Campus Crusade for Christ. A 3,300 sq ft building on the land now houses 300 destitutes who are also provided with food and medicare.

'In a way the home is overburdened. Every month, around 20 new inmates join us. If our volunteers find someone suffering on the streets of Bangalore, they have no other option but to bring them to the home. So far we have been managing. Hope to expand the home soon,' said Raja.

He was honoured by former governor of Karnataka Rama Devi on the Republic Day of 2002 for his social work.

Although there is no official estimate of the number of homeless people in [Bangalore](#) alone, Census 2001 figures say India has about two million homeless people.

Apart from providing food, clothes and medical treatment to inmates, the home also offers vocational training to them. At present the home has 15 staff members and some are senior inmates.

The oldest inmate of the home is Tatha, a 101-year-old man, who is fondly called 'anna' - meaning elder brother in the Kannada language - by other inmates and staff.

'I am almost blind and had been roaming the city's roads without food for days. I was rescued from the streets by Raja's team members almost a year back and since then I have been staying here. I am lucky to get a home, many are still suffering and dying on the streets,' said Tatha.

The youngest inmate is a one-year-old girl who is yet to be named. She was rescued by the team almost a year ago.

'We rescued her as a newborn from a garbage bin in the city. She is cute and we will celebrate her birthday Jan 30, the day she was brought to the home. We will also name her on that day,' smiled Padma, a staff member.

Some inmates trained in various vocations at the home are now leading independent lives. Around 1,000 destitutes have died in dignity in the home in the last 12 years.

Raja said he was thankful to all the generous people of Bangalore who had helped him carry forward his mission.

'We have been lucky that several organisations, corporate houses and individuals have been supporting the cause of the home for the last 12 years,' said Raja, who also stays in the home with his wife and three children.

'At times we also have to fight a fund crunch. It is not easy to provide food, clothing and medical assistance to hundreds of people. But this is part of the game, I want to continue with my work till I die,' he smiled.

Mother Govindamma, a housewife, and father Ramswamy, a retired state government employee today feel proud of their son.

'We were very much upset with his behaviour when he was a child. We are happy that he has found his calling in life and dedicated himself to helping the needy,' said a septuagenarian Govindamma.

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