



The Dream Man of the Art World

Description

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Even if one doesn't immediately recognize the name Saravana Velu, the affectionate title 'Velu Mama' is known far and wide in the world of children's theatre. Such is the legacy of the remarkable artist and theatre visionary, Dr. Velu Saravanan. This article offers a closer look at his life and lasting contributions to the arts.



Born in the village of Kambar Kovil in the Pudukkottai district, young Velu had no inkling that he was destined to bring joy to generations of children. Though he left his village in pursuit of education, he has never let go of the heart and wonder of childhood.

Guided by the esteemed writer Indira Parthasarathy, Velu Saravanan began his academic journey studying Physics at Madurai Kamaraj University, graduating in 1988. Life, however, had different plans. A shift in direction led him to pursue a path that would fill lives with laughter and imagination. He earned a Master's degree in Theatre Arts from Pondicherry University in 1990 and later completed a Doctorate in the same field at Tamil University, Thanjavur, in 2001.

In the initial days of his theatre career, Velu worked behind the scenes. Even then, he brought his scientific insight into his work, blending logic with creativity. Over time, almost without realizing it, he devoted himself fully to children's theatre. During the devastating 2004 tsunami, he transformed public service into a personal mission, working in partnership with UNICEF to uplift affected communities.

One of his most cherished moments came during a performance of his play Kadal Bootham (The Sea Demon), where a Bill Clinton (former President of the United States), attending as a special guest, affectionately referred to him as Velu Mama multiple times. For Velu Saravanan, this was not just a personal honor but a tribute to his father as well.

He founded the Aazhi Nataka Kuzhu (Sea Theatre Group), through which he continues to passionately create and perform. His written works including Airabasi, Theatricality in Primary Education, Devaloka Yaana, Maalumi, Anga Thunga, and Thibulan Vaaradhi have opened up new directions in theatrical literature and education.

A poignant moment in his journey occurred during a village performance of Kadal Bootham. A child in the audience began to cry, prompting an elderly woman to try and stop the play, thinking it was disturbing the child. But the performance continued. Later, Velu Saravanan reflected that in that child's tears, he saw the true power of theatre. It was then he decided that the stage would forever be his calling.



Over the years, Velu Saravanan has brought immense pride to the world of theatre, earning several prestigious accolades: the Aranthai Narayanan Children's Literature Award (2012), the Federation of Tamil Sangams of North America (FeTNA) Award (2016), the Bal Sahitya Puraskar (2017), and most recently, the Kalaignar Porkizhi Award (2024). Of all these honors, it is the Kalaignar Porkizhi Award from the Tamil Nadu government that touched him the most a recognition he received with love, expecting nothing in return.

In the life of a stage artist, every role is a lesson. And through his heartfelt performances and tireless dedication, Velu Saravanan has brought those lessons to life one child, one audience, and one story at a time.

May his artistic journey continue to inspire, educate, and enchant for years to come.

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1. Campus Buzz

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