

# Grass-Roots Philanthropists: Promoting Solidarity With The Covid-19 Pandemic-Hit People

J. Densingh Rajan<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Arul Prasad<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar Assistant Professor Department of Social Work  
Ananda College, Devakottai, Sivagangai 630303

<sup>2</sup>Research Supervisor Associate Professor Department of Social Work Arul Anandar College  
Karumathur, Madurai Dt.

**ABSTRACT:** *“To remit means to give back what we owe” (Investopedia). Remittance does not depend on only transfer of funds; it has got various dimensions in it that includes political and social remittances (Luin Goldring 2002). As of now we are grappling with the second wave of COVID-19 with the sudden surge in infected cases crossing 3.15 lakh and with fatality rate crossing 2,000 on daily basis (Hindu 2021-04-22). We are already scared of another stringent lockdown which will really devastate the revived economy of the country (Mint 2021-04-16). While analysing the brunt of COVID-19, we are once again reminded of harsh curfew in entire India. More than the people at quarantine centres and the patients in the hospitals it is the stranded people who faced threat to their livelihood due to curfew in transport (NDTV News updated May 28, 2020). The initiatives from the government sector like ‘Tika Utsav’ which bases on Test-Track-Treat (the Hindu 11.04.2021), private sectors and big philanthropists came forward with their initiatives to be in commonality with the pandemic-hit people. But it is quiet astounding to notice people from ordinary walks of life coming forward with initiatives of promoting solidarity with the fellow human being with their minimum contributions comprising of monetary and non-monetary, rightly defined as social remittance by Peggy Levitt (1998). This is a small article that covers those initiatives by people who are of ordinary entrepreneurship during COVID19 first wave. This is an analytical paper on content analysis, exploring multi-dimensional aspects of philanthropy investigating secondary data collected from the Hindu paper from May 2020 – April 2021. The objective of the study is the rationale behind their acts of helping initiative, exploring the fitting dimensions of philanthropy in their approach. Out of fifteen cases only one person has involved in each Community, Corporate and Issue-based Philanthropy. It is observed that two persons have integrated themselves with each vertical, horizontal, education philanthropy and philanthropy through social remittance. A majority of four people out of fifteen are interested in collective philanthropy or collective giving. It is obvious that combined partnership is the trend in the grass-roots philanthropy. There is more transparency and accountability in collective philanthropy with its realization. One more thing that is interestingly looked at is philanthropy with social remittance. These people live in hand-to-mouth existence; still they extended human solidarity with the battered ones through skills and knowledge.*

**Keywords:** *Philanthropist, Covid-19 pandemic, Philanthropy*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

“To remit means to give back what we owe” (Investopedia). Remittance does not depend on only transfer of funds; it has got various dimensions in it that includes political and social remittances (Luin Goldring 2002). As of now we are grappling with the second wave of COVID-19 with the sudden surge in infected cases crossing 2 lakhs and with fatality rate crossing 1,100 on daily basis (The Hindu 2021-04-16). We are already scared of another stringent lockdown which will really devastate the revived economy of the country (Mint 2021-04-16). More than the people at quarantine centres and the patients in the hospitals, it is the stranded people who faced real threat to their livelihood due to curfew in transport (NDTV News updated May 28, 2020). The initiatives from the government sector like ‘Tika Utsav’ which bases on Test-Track-Treat (The Hindu 11.04.2021), private sectors and big philanthropists came forward with their initiatives to be in commonality with the pandemic-hit people. But it is quiet astounding to notice people from ordinary walks of life came forward with initiatives promoting solidarity with the fellow people with their contributions comprising of both monitory and non-monetary. Non-monetary contribution is rightly defined as social remittance by Peggy levitt (1998). This is a small article that covers those initiatives by people who are of ordinary entrepreneurship during COVID-19 first wave. This is an analytical paper on content analysis, exploring various aspects of philanthropy investigating secondary data collected from the Hindu news papers on “Tamil Nadu Smiling” page from May 2020 – April 2021.

## 2. OBJECTIVE

- To analyse the rationale behind their acts of helping initiative, exploring the fitting dimensions of philanthropy in their approach.

### **Various proportions of Philanthropy**

Philanthropy is defined as ‘love for Humanity’ with its etymological perception. The real love should be for deserving humanity. A help is rendered for the welfare of the people without expecting anything in return. This help with love need not necessarily be financial in nature. An aid could be delivered even in non-monetary measurement. Therefore we need to explore the various dimensions of philanthropy. Here are a few types of philanthropy derived from the literature.

1. Big or vertical Philanthropy
2. Horizontal Philanthropy
3. Community philanthropy
4. Corporate Philanthropy
5. Collective Philanthropy
6. Philanthropy with social remittance
7. Education Philanthropy
8. Issue-based Philanthropy

## 3. BIG OR VERTICAL PHILANTHROPY

This type of philanthropy is perceived as top-down philanthropy where rich people volunteer to involve in charity to the poor people in need (Meenaz Hassam 2016). A big millionaires and billionaires undertake philanthropic enterprise to the poor people at large or for social cause with lump sum amount (Peter Kotecki 2018).

### ***3.1 Alumnus donates land property worth Rs. 2 Crores to alma mater***

24.12.2020 The Hindu (Madurai Edition)

The series of lock down has opened many doors of remittances. With the vision of getting Rs. 58000 as monthly rental income at the cost of prime land, Subbaiah Vidhyalayam Girls Higher secondary school lifts its face with pride leading all the government and government aided school in Thoothukudi. “I wish, the US based donor says, to make available consistent education to the under privileged girl children with the tireless and selfless service by the school’s administration”. Another alumnus R. Murali Ganesan a software engineer came forward in developing software to streamline donation and to make its utilization transparent. He himself initiated a scholarship programme through his donation of 6.8 lakh. The toppers are given cash awards out of endowment created. The jobless parents of the children studying in the school were given Rs.1000 each during pandemic. The students who could not afford to purchase smart phone for the online classes were provided mobile with gadgets to make it sure without deterrence. Since the donation of the property was done during the time of COVID19 1<sup>st</sup> wave this case is included for the study. For the welfare of the poor students in pursuing studies, this help is being rendered. This initiative can be termed as big philanthropy (Pushpa Sundar, 2020) or vertical philanthropy (the poor philanthropist) where a huge amount of money is being transferred and also this initiative can be called as vertical philanthropy where a rich people help the poor people (top to bottom model) and Social remittance (transfer of skills).

### ***3.2 Teacher expends her entire saving to help Covid-19- hit persons***

26/12/2020 The Hindu (Madurai Edition)

Vedharanyam, a small town in Nagapatinam district has now become a place for everyone to look out with awe. It is because of the philanthropist Ms.Vasanthha Sithravelu, a primary school teacher who has spent her entire saving of Rs.35 lacks in assisting families hit by the pandemic. At the wake of lockdown her students were asked to stay home abruptly. She noticed many of her students went to bed hungry due to the jobless in the family. She started serving cooked meals to 200 persons every day. Most of the beneficiaries are her students and their relatives and neighbors even across Tamilnadu. On phone calls, she transfers money for medical treatment of pandemic-hit victims. For past 10 months she has spent a sizable amount of Rs.35 lacks which she and her husband had saved for the wedding of her elder daughter. Despite this heavy schedule, she does not forget to visit at least three students in a day and teach them at their homes. Out of the saving done exclusively for the marriage of their daughter, this teacher could reach out many more people battered by the lockdown across Tamilnadu. Her students in need become her children indeed. She has proved that teacher is not bound by four walls for his/her classes. This initiative comes under monetary contribution inclusive of social remittance and as vertical philanthropy in the domain of philanthropy (Susan Wilkinson-Maposa 2017).

## **4. HORIZONTAL PHILANTHROPY**

People from poor milieu mobilize resource among them and share it to fellow poor people. This is a help by poor to poor people. This may be carried out for the mutual support in future. One hand washes the other – a proverb in ancient African studies is realized here in this dimension of philanthropy (Susan Wilkinson 2005).

### ***4.1 A Conductor in a TNSTC in PPE***

06/06/2020 The Hindu (Madurai Edition)

Mr. Karuppa sami, a bus conductor in TNSTC coming from Theni district, provides a quality face mask to the passengers who do not wear the same on board at free of cost. In cognizance of importance of face mask in containing the spread of virus he consulted sness with his house-hold members; this idea of distributing mask to the passengers sparked in his mind to which his family gave a nod. Subsequently he purchased masks in bulk from his collaborators. Using this social capital, he takes with him 200 face masks when he is on duty. Even the passengers who are uninformed of this preventive measure of wearing masks become aware of infection through this small philanthropic initiative. This philanthropist ventures into his duty with PPE Personal Protective Equipment. This type of humanitarian aid is conceptualized as horizontal giving where the benefactor is in equal status with that of the beneficiary, involve in philanthropy (Sabith Khan & Daisha M. Merritt 2018).

#### ***4.2 Small eatery with big heart***

13/02/2021 The Hindu (Madurai Edition)

We are all familiarized to pay at least Rs.100 for dinner at the eateries but Mr. Chinna thamibi is able to comfortably serve one dosa at Rs.2. People who go there for the dinner spend just Rs10 and finish up their meal without difficulty. Mr.Chinna thambi the proprietor of this small eatery is located just away from busy Woraiyur Market, Trichy . He is looked at as a Good Samaritan for the daily wage earners, many youth and kids living in the locality. More than 100 customers throng to the eatery and finish up their dinner comfortably at cheaper rate. The whole family is involved in this great initiative of philanthropy with the objective to see no one goes to hungry to bed. Rising up at 4 am everyday and doing all the preparative works for the night meal and go to bed around 12 am after working hours every day. Mr.Chinnthambi is personally satisfied to serve meal at low-priced rate with the task of doing this as a service to the needy during this pandemic. This enterprise falls into the category of issue-based philanthropy to alleviate hunger during pandemic (Paula D. Johnson 2004) and horizontal philanthropy where poor help poor.

## **5. COMMUNITY PHILANTHROPY**

Community involve in mobilizing and enhancing the resource and share the same for common good of the community. This is not institutional in nature it's practise based philanthropy. Here community does not denote the locality but the shared topography, identity and culture (Dana R.H. Doan 2015).

#### ***5.1 A saviour of the discarded***

14/07/2020 The Hindu(Madurai Edition)

S.Kumar a B.Sc computer science graduate working in construction sector lost his job during the lockdown, he joined as a voluntary in Idhayam Trust in Madurai. A computer science graduate has now become a social worker by taking care of the abandoned elderly people at Kakkai Padiniyar Corporation Girls Higher Secondary school in Madurai. During lockdown all the people suffered financial crunch, it was worse with the case of abandoned elderly people. On receiving calls to rescue the abandoned elders, Mr.Kumar involved himself thoroughly in getting them accommodated in the said school. He started the day at 07:00 am by giving bath to the elderly persons and taking care of them till 11:00 pm every day. He is not a salaried person from the NGO but he is believed to be a saviour of the abandoned. It is noteworthy to mention here that he received Chief Minister's state youth award 2020 for his socially oriented activities at the Independents day celebration. During COVID19 1<sup>st</sup> wave, senior citizens were most affected with virus infection and also anxiety

about their life. Most of them were abandoned by their families. In this case Mr. Kumar, a philanthropist is extending his gesture in taking care of this abandoned people through his community-based philanthropy and issue –based philanthropy (Paula D. Johnson 2004).

## **6. CORPORATE PHILANTHROPY**

It can be briefly explained as Corporate Social Responsibility. This is charitable expenditure by corporate institutions from its revenue for establishing social impacts (wiki.optimy.com). The promotion of their brand image is focussed while involving in social activities through donation of money and property.

### ***5.1 A deal to appease starvation***

03/04/2021 The Hindu (Madurai Edition)

“What one receives from the society has to be given back in whatever way possible” is a simple mantra of S.Paulraj, possessor of BM Restaurant near Pallavaram, Chennai. His mantra is realized in giving quality food at reasonable cost. His restaurant was started in February 2021 exclusively to serve food CIVID19-hit persons. He was well known for his philanthropy activities even before start of the restaurant rendering help to the labourers in his construction site through ‘Annathanam’ (free meal) to more than 20 persons on daily base. He is surprising customers with non vegetarian meal at the cost of Rs.25. The price is covering the cost of running the restaurant. Through giving back to the society in need from the surplus could be labeled as vertical philanthropy (Susan Wilkinson-Maposa 2017) and could be placed under corporate philanthropy rendering assistance for the poor people from the surplus income in his construction company.

## **6. COLLECTIVE PHILANTHROPY**

In order to multiply the gifts from individual, ascertaining greater impacts, collective giving opens up a new domain where there is a variety of many more donors come together. The donors pool their funds and decide together how well they can go about with its expenditure. All the decisions on selection of the beneficiary, expenditure and monitoring is more transparent in community giving (Nithin Coca 2019).

### ***6.1 The beneficiary becomes a benefactor***

04/07/2020 The Hindu (Madurai Edition)

D.Udhaya Keerthika a 21 year old an astronaut-in-waiting stands fit for the caption ‘a receiver should become a giver’. She has become a generous contributor in distributing essentials to the poor people of 400 families to the tune of 4 lacks at Allinagaram near Theni. As a daughter borne to an ordinary painter, she could not afford to find financial source for her education. She made appeals to many people of good will for her higher studies. Having received help from well-known personalities and many other good Samaritans for her education, she is now able to feel the pain of the fellow hungry people who struggle even for a single meal a day during the lock down. Sparing the fund donated to her exclusively for her studies she is now helping the people in need to make both ends meet by obtaining endorsement from the donors. The philanthropist, here is contributing from what she had exclusively for higher studies that too donated by a very few people of good will. Hailing from the family with similar context she could empathize with the hungry people sharing not from surplus but sacrificing even what she had collected. Here the beneficiary becomes a

benefactor doing collective remittance for collective consumption (Min Zhou, Xiangyi Li 2018).

### ***6.2 A team of Constables' gesture***

30.11.2020 The Hindu (Madurai Edition)

Constable Palanivelnathan who was rendering his service to the crime wing of Tallakulam Police station succumbed to Covid 19 and died in October 2020. The bereaved family was left over with insurmountable life challenges. To rescue this family from this horrendous situation, there came his batch mates of police constables that come around 4,985 to take this onus. Each one contributed Rs.500 that the total contribution arrived to the tune of Rs.25 Lakhs. Rs. 9.62 lakh were deposited as insurance separately to his son and daughter which will attain maturity with double the amount at their age 21. Savings bank account was deposited with Rs. 2.87 lakh for his wife on domestic expenditure. Each of his parents was given Rs. 1lakh. Rs.3Lakhs were provided as medical insurance for his wife and children. Here in this case a philanthropy is done with collective remittance for a big cost and an individual cannot afford to fulfil the expectation but through collective involvement of many people the cost can be achieved comfortably. This type of philanthropy falls under the category of peer based philanthropy through collective giving (Paula D. Johnson 2004 & Angela Eikenberry 2016).

### ***6.3 Ordinary children stand in support of special children***

05/02/2021 The Hindu (Madurai Edition)

Visra Vikram, a class 7 student in association with his friends came forward installing food stall to raise funds for the welfare of the special children studying at Akash Special School run by M.S Chellamuthu Trust in Madurai. This small group of children are with compassion in feeling the pain of the special children who are in dire need of support and care. Around Rs.10, 200, raised from this event were handed over to school authorities. Through this small fund, the children extended their gesture to the stigmatized special children for their welfare. It was indeed a memorable moment for these young budding children of philanthropy which will surely motivate others too to work towards the same cause. This initiative comes under collective remittance (Bada, Xochitl. (2015).

### ***6.4 Youngsters from insolvent milieu reach out to the needier***

01/05/2021 The Hindu (Madurai Edition)

A group of people from Big bazaar, Trichy feel enthroned in reaching out the people most affected financially during Covid-19 under of banner "Kanavu Paadhai Nanbargal Kuzhu" a whatsapp group created to reach the most needy. The plights they undergo in their very life push these youngsters motivating them to something good for the people of the same sections. They already grapple with their fiscal crunch. Therefore they could identify one with the destitute living in that locality. All the members in this philanthropic wing are employed in the small scale industries with the minimum scale of salary. The small contributions made on issue-based are pooled together in making donations to the old age homes, home for the disabled children and orphanages. Subsequently they provide at least one meal to the stranded people during total lockdown on Sundays. They even donate blood on their turns and on demand in emergency. The ancient adage "Small drops Make Ocean" perfectly fits to this group of youngsters as there are 300 members in the group generating good amount of funds through collecting giving (Paula D Johnson 2004 & Susan Wilkinson-Maposa 2017) and giving circles (Angela Eikenberry 2016).

## **7. PHILANTHROPY WITH SOCIAL REMITTANCE**

Social remittance in the field of philanthropy is the transfer of skills and knowledge for the welfare of the people in need. This is not delivered with finance capital but with social capital. Social Remittance, a word envisioned by Levitt (1998) absolutely represent to bring to light the skills, aptitudes, ideas are also conveyed between receiving and sending neighborhood (Thomas Lacroix, 2016)

### ***7.1 A busman on road during lockdown***

1/06/2020 The Hindu (Madurai Edition)

Mr. Sakthivel, a TNSTC driver was one among a few who came forward to drive the state transport corporation bus all through 50 days during lockdown on Covid-19 first wave, while many didn't want to turn up for the special duty. Sakthivel drove the bus from Alagarkoil to Government Rajaji Hospital in Madurai without fail ferrying medical staffs working in the hospital. "I took it up not as a challenge but as contribution to overcome the unprecedented crisis" says driver. Despite strong objections from the house-hold members that he would be influenced with the virus, he was reasonably regular taking the bus from wee hours in the morning till late at night getting the staff back to the pavilion. This noble soul became a philanthropist with social remittance which is defined as transfer of skill and knowledge for the benefit of the deserving ones (Peggy Levitt, 1998). This could also perceive as issue-based philanthropy (Stephen P. Johnson 2004).

### ***7.2 Mask 'PAROTTA' fashioned for the safety***

08/07/2020 The Hindu (Madurai Edition)

In June 2020, Madurai, so called Temple City, became the second hotspot for the spike in COVID19 cases. Despite repeated warning from the government sector, the people on the street were found walking freely without mask not knowing the spread of the corona virus. In order to make innovative awareness drive Mr.Kumar, a proprietor of restaurant at Mattuthavani Bus stand, felt the same with the people entering into the restaurant without mask. Initially a free mask was given to the customers at the door steps of the restaurant, subsequently with the help of Parotta master S.Sathish started serving parottas exclusively designed as surgical mask involving the technique of Traditional Veechu Parotta which involves vigorous spinning. People loved mask parotta which created awareness of wearing mask at the public place. Making people aware of the importance of wearing mask was the primary goal of the philanthropist here. Transferring the skills and knowledge for the benefit of the people is technically called as social remittance for public good (Jung, Tobias & Harrow, Jenny. (2015). Therefore these initiatives could be called as philanthropy through social remittance (Thomas Lacroix, 2016).

## **8. EDUCATION PHILANTHROPY**

Any monetary help delivered from private source to the deserving students for the completion of higher studies is registered as education philanthropy (Alyssa Rossodivita and Gerry Pantoja 2019).it is all-encompassing of giving by foundations and individuals of alumni and non-alumni to stabilize significant impact in the higher education in the universities.

### ***8.1 Children look to Athai (aunty) for fortunes with better futures***

12/12/2020 The Hindu (Madurai Edition)

Ms.Sankareswari who is addressed as aunt, mostly in Tamil as chithi or athai, by the children, stands as a worth mentioning person in the field of philanthropy at Gomaspalayam in Madurai which is largely known as the area where conservancy workers and scavengers are residing. Being born as a daughter to a father who is a septic tank cleaner and a mother a conservancy worker could not complete higher studies due to financial crisis. Not willing to take up the work of their parents, Ms.Shankareswari works as helper in transporting the children in the private school for a meager income of Rs.3000 in a month. In the evening she runs a tuition center by the name Dr.Ambedkar tuition centre. Her sole aim is to educate the children in the area and get them employed in the work other than their parents' conservancy and scavenging work. At the outbreak of COVID19, children run to the tuition centre by 10:00 am every day. R.Nantha kumar a former student in the tuition centre, presently a law student feel proud in saying 'I was able to stay away from the habit of substance abuse which is pervasive among adolescence in our area, this tuition centre helps me on that.. A.Akshaya a class 11 th student boldly says that she would continue her studies not getting married after 10<sup>th</sup> which is usual thing on our area because of 'Athai' who insisted the importance of education to her parents. Ms.Shankareswari never charged the children in the tuition centre which will not become a burden for their parents. The unqualified academician Ms.Shankareswari is found be a quality service provider. Qualification does not nearly come from the course completion certificate. The real meaning of education is to light a lamp in the darkness. Through her relentless service the philanthropist is educating the children in the absence of their physical classes in the school. This initial is done through social remittance which is called as transfer of skills and knowledge for the benefit of others. As envisioned by Izabela Grabowska (2018), this initiative is potentially life-changing and equilibrated element for social change through education philanthropy.

### ***8.2 He makes use of the clouds to guide the farmers to the organic cloud***

09/01/2021 The Hindu (Madurai Edition)

Mahendira M.Manivasan, an apostle of organic forming echoes his voice on virtual platform for past 10 months covering at least 220 virtual meets by the name 'Velam Mutram' meaning a junction for agriculture. He was earlier giving lectures on All India radio, Trichy and Coimbatore based on his field visit .Due to the pandemic situation he could not do his field visit and continue his lectures on radios. He switched over to online platform with cloud based classes since regular listeners communicated to him that they miserably missed his lectures on radios. It comes around Rs. 30,000 per month to do the online classes which is borne by himself. Organic forming, which is believed to be the way for sustainable agriculture is propagated by himself for 1 hour every day with another 20 minutes for clarifying their doubts of the participation. His initiative is looked at as philanthropy through social remittance. Virtual platform for the classes became famous during the pandemic era. When the physical classes were cancelled and discouraged to contain the spread of virus, the online classes were in full swing making .use of this virtual platform the philanthropist here does not stop his propagation of organic forming which is the need of the hour in the field of agriculture. This voluntary action by the philanthropist is definitely aimed for public good (Payton, R.L. & Moody, M.P. (2008).

## **9. ISSUE-BASED PHILANTHROPY**

Triggering the fundamental desires of the people of good will to address specific issues of environmental factors, health concerns and welfare of the weaker sections, contributions are



organized at local to global intensity. This is perceived as issue-based philanthropy (Paula D. Johnson 2004).

### ***9.1 An alms-seeker in philanthropy***

24/07/2020 The Hindu (Madurai Edition)

Mr.Pandian used to sleep outside the small temples in Madurai. He said to have survived with the food the people provide to him. He is an alms-seeker travelling in and around Madurai town. He feels happy and content in contributing Rs.10,000 collected from public to the Chief Minister public relief fund to combat COVID19. Mr.Pandian has donated to Government schools in Thoothukudi, Tanjore and Pudukottai for infrastructure development. To give we need not have money but heart, he stands as the best example for that. A receiver should become a giver it is the crux of Philanthropy. Mr. Pandian, the alms-seeker has contributed not out of his surplus resource but from that which he had for his sustenance. This initiative could be turned as bottom-up philanthropy where the people of low standard of living extend their gesture in benefit of the people with average standard of living (Panda, Biswambhar. (2007). Also this undertaking comes under issue-based philanthropy helping in tackling the spread of the Corona virus.

## **10. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION**

‘Tamil Nadu Smiling’ is an endeavor by The Hindu Group to document the philanthropic initiatives by the ordinary folk helping the fellow poor people during the pandemic. These small efforts by the philanthropists are note worthy to register that the people of Tamil Nadu are still with compassionate heart. Analyzing the above fifteen cases on philanthropic point of view there are some important findings in it. Out of fifteen cases only one person has involved in each Community, Corporate and Issue-based Philanthropy. It is observed that two persons have integrated themselves with each vertical, horizontal, education philanthropy and philanthropy through social remittance. A majority of four people out of fifteen are interested in collective philanthropy or collective giving. It is obvious that combined partnership is in the trend in the grass-roots philanthropy. There is more transparency and accountability in collective philanthropy with its realization. One more thing that is interestingly looked at is philanthropy with social remittance. Benevolent people with no money in hand involve themselves with the transfer of their skills and knowledge. Here they prove that we need only heart not money for doing philanthropy. People are concerned in helping fellow people out of nothing in their hand when we take the case alms-seeker. As one adage goes, “A beneficiary should become one day become a benefactor”. Philanthropy will not end with one case but continues as the receiver feels the responsibility of become a giver. It is realized in the case of an astronaut-in-waiting helping out form the resource that had been already donated.

## **11. CONCLUSION**

This paper with secondary data has taken efforts to scientifically analyze the various dimensions of philanthropy embedded in each case study. Covid-19 has ravaged both lives and livelihood and has halted the administration of the state. But this pandemic can never destroy the altruistic attitude of Tamil people. The philanthropic stance is strong and stupendous in Tamil culture. This is verified in the humane activities taken for this study. These activities of solidarity with altruistic heart will motivate for sure many more people of good will to help people battling make both ends meet.

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