



5 Jananeethi be visionary

- 1 To help people access the justice system
- 2 To protect and promote nature and natural resources
- 3 To provide free legal aid and legal consultancy
- 4 To conduct mediation and reconciliation
- 5 To conduct clinical legal education for healing and justice

OBJECTIVES

- To provide a helpline to victims of domestic and gender-based violence and to abused children. To train para-legal volunteers and field activists
- To promote the true spirit of democracy, peace, public accountability and transparency in governance and public transactions that involve public money
- To undertake fact-finding studies and prepare alternate reports

Justice is a dish best served HOT and FAST

Azmia Riaz speaks to Jananeethi's George Pulikuthiyil about starting his battle for human rights as an answer to big establishments and how he created a safe space for women and nature

The world's answer to human rights came years before today's champions of equality came into the scene. **George Pulikuthiyil**, an advocate in the high court of Kerala, realised the need to protect our most fundamental rights before most of us realised that they could be questioned. In 1991, he founded **Jananeethi**, registered as a charitable society, to help people get free legal aid.

Pulikuthiyil, who is now officially the secretary of the organisation works as its eyes and ears by looking into their policy and development. "I wanted to create

a free legal aid centre for those who could not afford a lawyer. For me, it felt important to lend my voice to people who were in the margins."

Perspectives on gender

When the organisation first started out, their primary visitors were women. They began dealing with a range of issues such as domestic violence, dowry, manhandling and disputes about the custody of their children. Pulikuthiyil explains, "After handling these cases, I realised that the problem was deeper than I expected because women would reconcile to their circumstances and had taken it on themselves to

suffer because of their identities and considered that they were not supposed to be criticising the system. Wherever these women turned, be it the government, the courtroom, religion, the police or even their own mothers, they would ask them to accept it as their fate." The national legislation for the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence came in 2015, long after Jananeethi delved into the issue in 1991.

Women helping women

Pulikuthiyil says that some cases needed a different orientation, "I realised that these issues had to be dealt with from a woman's perspective. A man would never

know the complexities that are involved. That's why the staffers here are specially trained."

He began by trying to change the mindset of the women first. He says, "I started visiting anganwadis where there are 25-30 children each from the poorest families of the village. I worked with the teachers and the helpers there who were better at dealing with the legal rights of these women than most officials were at the time." He started talking to women in low income communities. Whenever there was a violation of women's rights, domestic abuse or sexual violence, the anganwadi teachers would bring them to the Jananeethi office,

from where their trainees would accompany them to the police station and register a complaint.

Green concerns

By 1995, Jananeethi started to take in environmental issues as well. It was a time when activities such as quarrying, mining and deforestation were first catching up with people's lives. Pulikuthiyil says, "We agree on one thing: that everyone has a right to life. According to the Supreme Court, this is the right to a clean environment. How do you live without this? Your right to life should protect the rights of the environment as well."

Reach Out: jananeethi.org

