

CHENNAI, MONDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2014

THE



HINDU

INDIA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER SINCE 1878

Regd. TN/ARD/17/2012-2014 • RNI No. 1001/1957 • ISSN 0971 - 751X • Vol. 2 • No. 284 • ANDHRA PRADESH EDITION • 18 Pages • Rs. 4.00 • www.thehindu.in

## Couple on a mission to fight for child rights

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**CHITTOOR:** Protection of children from multiple ways of exploitation is possible and will be more effective when they are rescued during the formative years of their life, so goes the philosophy of a Chittoor-based couple.

The couple now in their early fifties — K. Dhana Sekaran and P. Srilatha — are familiar with over thousands of families in hundreds of villages in the western mandals of the district which they had extensively visited during the last 25 years, establishing rapport with grass root communities of tribal hamlets, Dalitwadas, and urban slums.

The Rural Organisation for Poverty Eradication Services (ROPES), operating from Bangarupalem, 20 km from here, and the brainchild of the couple, is going to celebrate its silver jubilee this



*Dhana Sekaran and Srilatha campaigning for child education at a tribal hamlet near Palamaner in Chittoor district. — PHOTO: BY ARRANGEMENT*

year. Dhana Sekaran, a product of Sri Venkateswara University (SVU), was moved at the rural poverty and high dropout rate among school-children, when he was working as warden at a social welfare hostel in Tiruvanna-

malai of Tamil Nadu in 1984. Quitting his job, he concentrated on developmental studies, and detected that the western mandals of Chittoor district, a few kilometres away from the district headquarters, were infected with

the social evils of child marriages, child abuse, trafficking and poverty. He knocked thousands of doors and pleaded with illiterate parents not to expose their children to any kind of exploitation by denying them their right to education.

His spouse working as lecturer at a government nursing college too left her job and joined the mission, travelling with him.

During the last 25 years, the couple had brought remarkable change in the mindsets of thousands of vulnerable families, and protected their children, most of whom are now settled in various walks of life.

Their purview also covered oppressed women, unemployed youth, small farmers and communities below the poverty line in Chittoor district and the north-western parts of Tamil Nadu.