



# SEMMA STORIES OF SUCCESS

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If you ask why we named it Semma Podcast, we don't have an answer. *Semma stories panrom, athuku dhan* (We are doing great stories, that's why)," quips Ramkumar Natarajan. Bharadwaj PV is quick to follow, "*Ethu pannalum semmaya pannanum nu* (Whatever we do, we should do the best), we named it Semma Podcast. Ultimately, all the stories featured are *semma* success stories." This is a *semma* story of how an IT guy, who moonlights as a stand-up comedian, and an entrepreneur came together to bring this Tenglish podcast to life and present to the world the remarkable journeys of many a pioneer.

## Inspiring stories

Averaging at the one hour mark, each Semma episode features a guest whose life story is retold for the benefit of those waiting to be inspired. From Sriram Manoharan and his brainchild GudSho to Dinesh's road to SIP Abacus and helping educate 7,00,000 children, you hear it all from the horses' mouth. "There's a famous podcast called How I Built This with Guy Raaz. He features start-ups from California and San Francisco and lays out their journey of starting from scratch to building a multi-billion dollar brand for themselves. We have many such stories in our backyard. If you take Adyar Ananda Bhavan origin story...he was dragged out of school and made to work in a sweet shop," elaborates Bharad. And Ram picks it from there, "From there, he came up in life and now look how many people he is providing employment to.



Not a lot of people realise this. We want to bring out the story behind the brand."

Not wanting to stick to the limits of the IT sector start-ups or the food industry giants, Semma Podcast has strived to keep its guest list as diverse as it can. Be it Sangeetha Mohan making it to the South Asian Games and returning with a record to her name or naturalist Yuvan Aves' work in the Save Vedanthangal campaign and the fight against Adani port expansion in Pulicat, you'll find stories that have much to offer but aren't told as often. "We do a lot of research before featuring a guest. And we pick them only when we think the listeners will have something to take away from their story," points out Ram.

And there has been plenty of it for the taking, even for the hosts, it seems. Ask Bharad about it and he goes, "*Itha oru book ah ve ezhuthalam* (It can be compiled into a book). There are a lot of common traits among many of these people — be it a businessperson, sportsperson, educator or environmentalist. One is that they are all so focused and clear on what they want to achieve and so are extremely goal-oriented. Take Sangeetha's story: when she was a kid, someone asked her what she wanted to do at her first



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high jump game. She said that she wanted to represent India in the Asian Games and she did it. At the age of 8 or 9, she had the clarity and she achieved it when she was 18 or 19. That journey is what we want to cover."

"Every story has perseverance in it," begins Ram. "However much they drop, they take a break, sit back and think about it, and then they come back to do it. This happens to us with the podcast too, when we have trouble getting guests on to the show. Besides, every story has something to offer. Like there was a lot of awareness we got from Yuvan's story. We didn't know about a lot of things — *yaaro engayo port katraanga, yaaro marshlands ah occupy panni irukaanga; nammakku enna?* (Someone's building a port, someone is occupying the marshlands; how does it matter to us?) That was the idea. And we also had an aversion to the term 'activist'. It was after talking to him that there was so much learning, enlightenment," he explains.

## Sound of appreciation

On the part of the listeners —



**Q**  
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Ramkumar Natarajan



coming in from around 20 countries (there are Tamil people everywhere no, quips Bharad) — too, the room for learning has been diverse. The duo has heard from parents and kids taking inspiration from these stories for career decisions. A serendipitous side-effect, it seems.

It's these things that have made this three-month-old podcast a veritable success. After having helped many others narrate their success story, it was time for them to be doing it themselves for this interview. And their coming together was not without a story of

its own. A Telugu-speaking Chennai *vaasi* and a self-confessed linguaphile, Bharad had worked around the world before settling down in the city to start his venture in the technology sector.

Born and raised in Tirunelveli, it was Chennai's burgeoning IT sector that brought Ram to the capital. After stints in Bengaluru, Mumbai and the US, he is back in Chennai with Ford Motor Company. But, it was the neighbourhood of OMR and the search for fitness that brought the two men together. "We created a running group and that's where we became friends. We have one called OMR Dreamers — it is part of a chapter of Dream Runners Half Marathon," they recall. Ram's creative streak had had him pursuing blogging (even writing for a Tamil magazine from time to time), YouTube and stand-up comedy. Bharad's eagerness to collaborate resulted in this baby.

Eight episodes later, they are extremely satisfied with their progress. "Before we release the podcasts, Bharad and I listen to it and we talk about how intense it had been. Even we have goosebumps," shares Ram. Perhaps, a few more episodes down the line, they might be releasing a compilation of video snippets from the podcasts — capturing key, intense moments from the discourse. Well, there's sure to be an audience for that too.