



# Photographer and Activist go Hand in Hand

By Virginie Vlaminck

For those of you who have not heard of the 'Namma Beach, Namma Chennai' initiative nor of the photography courses and workshops of Virginie Vlaminck, let me explain this concept to you.

Virginie is a mum at school and a keen photographer, she organizes photography courses and workshops and funds with that the 'Namma Beach, Namma Chennai' activities. The courses are a real success as they open the mind about composition, light and techniques and allow the students to make better use of their camera during their stay in India. The workshops take the students out onto the streets of Chennai and teach them to actually practice in real life situations, select good pictures and analyze the pictures all in one day.



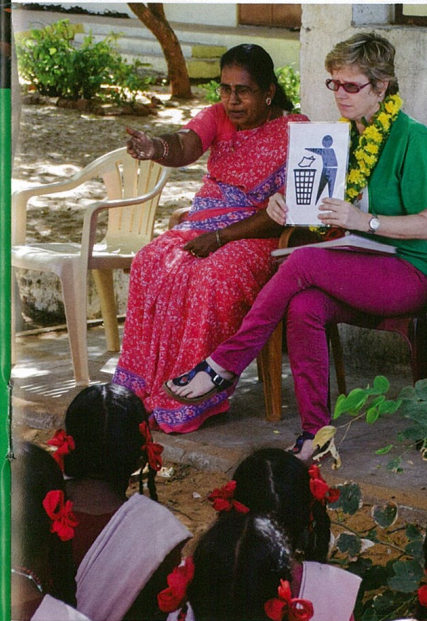


'Namma Beach, Namma Chennai' stands for 'MY Beach, MY Chennai'. It's a group which aims to clean up Chennai. Initially they concentrated on the daily cleanup of a stretch of beach between Injambakkam and Akkarai. A team of eight workers collected garbage spit out by the sea and left behind by careless visitors every afternoon. Regular Sunday morning beach clean ups and street clean ups are also organized with volunteers, celebrating the work done over a nice breakfast.

Due to the push of a local social worker, Mr. Sekar, 'Namma Beach, Namma Chennai' started also to visit Local HS Government Schools to spread awareness about cleanliness at the school, in their home and on the streets and the beach.

Photographs of clean and dirty situations and games are used as method to reach the students. What started as an initiative of Virginie cleaning up the beach on her own grew to a higher level involving the daily maintenance of a 2 km stretch of beach, neighborhood cleanup mornings, collaboration with Chennai Cooperation and local police corps and sensitization of schools along ECR.

Recently over the weekend of 8th March, the ECO Club from AISCH collaborated with Namma Beach Namma Chennai in organizing OPERATION 'ICE CREAM' at Akkarai.



AISCH student Lavishniakri Sekaran wrote about this activity:

"Environmentalists are often portrayed as idealists, and we are idealists who make a difference. The essence of beach clean ups are to take a stand against the despicable habit of throwing trash everywhere, without any precautions. Yes, maybe the next the day the beach will be filled with trash again, but at least the beach clean-up initiative would have provoked a small feeling of guilt.

As an incentive to encourage people to trash waste and collect waste on the beach, we are partnering with the local ice cream vendors to provide a free ice cream to each child, in exchange of a bag filled with trash. This afternoon activity aimed to educate the local community about the impact of the environment being polluted and the role that we, the citizens, play in cleaning our beaches.

During the beach clean-up, when the kids arrived, they were filled with joy being at the beach, and got really excited when we told them that they were going to get a free ice cream for each bag of trash collected. They motivated each other and eagerly collected the trash in order to receive a free ice cream. It was wonderful to see students from AISCH and the students from Uthandi Community HS and Christian Advent School of Injambakkam working so collaboratively together. We look forward to further and greater collaborations with Chennai's local community. At the end of the beach clean-up we had two representatives of the local police force thanking Ms. Virginie for her efforts in improving and maintaining the natural care of our environment."