



Role model...
Mr Suresh (in blue T-shirt) with students at the Umar Pulavar Tamil Language Centre during a workshop conducted with SINDA (left and below).

PHOTOS: KARNAN BALAKRISHNAN

BHAVNA VASNANI

NOT many young men would take up part-time degrees while doing their National Service (NS). Fewer still would take one up when they already have a scholarship to pursue computer engineering at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

Yet that is exactly what Kaushik Suresh did. As banking is his passion, he took up a three-year part-time degree in banking and finance with the University of Wales, doing it while he was in NS. He continued studying for the degree as he did his degree in NUS, and graduated from the University of Wales last year.

He also won the 2008 Yaar Antha Star, a singing competition organised by local TV channel Vasantham, and has been a regular with Vasantham ever since. He has also represented Singapore on the international stage twice, started his own non-profit organisation and sung for the SG50 celebrations.

Mr Suresh was born in Chennai. However, due to his father's job, the family moved from Chennai to Botswana and, finally, when he was five, to Singapore. It was also at the age of five that his mother, who used to be a singer, discovered that he had a talent for singing. She taught him for a few years before he enrolled in an academy and attended formal singing lessons.

Yaar Antha Star was not his first competition and it has not been his last. Before that, the Singaporean had taken part in competitions islandwide, mostly in community centres, and had won almost all of them. He has since represented Singapore internationally twice – he was the runner-up in Superstar Asia Challenge 2013.

He has also been working with the Singapore Indian Development Association (SINDA) since winning Yaar Antha Star, talking to students on what it is like to be on TV while doing well academically, advising them and encouraging them to not just be academically strong, but also pick up another talent – like singing, dancing or sports.

Most recently, SINDA invited him to conduct a Tamil Through Music workshop for 70 students at the Umar Pulavar Tamil Language Centre, aiming to create a passion for the learning and internalising of the Tamil language and culture and empowering the students to be responsible in owning their futures.

Having multiple talents is something that the 22-year-old holds dear to his heart. "If we could make Singaporeans as a whole multi-talented, that would make us an integral part of any society, even if we migrate, even if we switch jobs. This is something that kids have to start developing at a very young age, and something that I myself developed at a young age because my parents pushed me to do so," he told *tabla!*.

He feels that this is where he can step in and make a difference. "I am not as famous as, say, Gurmit Singh. But even so, if someone well-known and reputable in the community tells the students that he sees something in them, the chances of them taking it to heart are a lot greater than if they hear it

Reaching out to Tamil youths



Chennai-born Singaporean has started a non-profit organisation and is a regular on the Tamil music scene

"Nowadays, people will do anything to get on TV, but not every path is viable or credible," he explained, adding that some people may not deliver what they say they will. "I wanted to provide a platform for them to get on YouTube and gain some kind of fame by saying that they performed next to me."

The videos that Singai Thamizhan produces and uploads on YouTube are seen by producers, which means that the people who feature alongside him are already in the eyes of the producers.

As an example,

Mr Suresh talked about keyboardist and composer Jordan Joshua. He was part of Just Feel, a band which performed at places like community centres and polytechnics, but the exposure was limited. "He didn't have the opportunity to start out because he didn't win a competition – but what kind of competitions are there for people who play the keyboard anyway?" he asked.

After performing in a video with Singai Thamizhan, Mr Joshua began getting calls from MediaCorp. He now composes for MediaCorp regularly and has also composed Thesathin Ithaya Thudipu, or Heartbeat of the Nation, with Mr Logapreyan Renganathan, for the SG50 celebrations.

But Mr Suresh makes it clear that he is not expecting everyone to join Singai Thamizhan. "A lot of people are following in my footsteps and starting their own groups, which is fine. When someone like me starts a non-profit organisation, when someone like local Indian artiste Shabir Tabare Alam starts a music school, we're all trying to move in the same direction, trying to help the community move in the right path towards their future by building their extra-curricular talent.

"Not everyone can become an artiste in Singapore, but when your resume shows that you have talent, apart from getting 7 As in your A levels, it speaks for itself," he said. "This is where we're heading to as a community, as a collective unit."

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from their parents or their teachers," he said.

Talking is not all he does, though – Mr Suresh also walks the talk.

"If it wasn't for SINDA, I wouldn't have been able to see the parts of the Indian community that need a boost," he explained. This was why, in 2012, he started Singai Thamizhan, a non-profit organisation that leverages on his fame to bring undiscovered talent to the attention of producers.