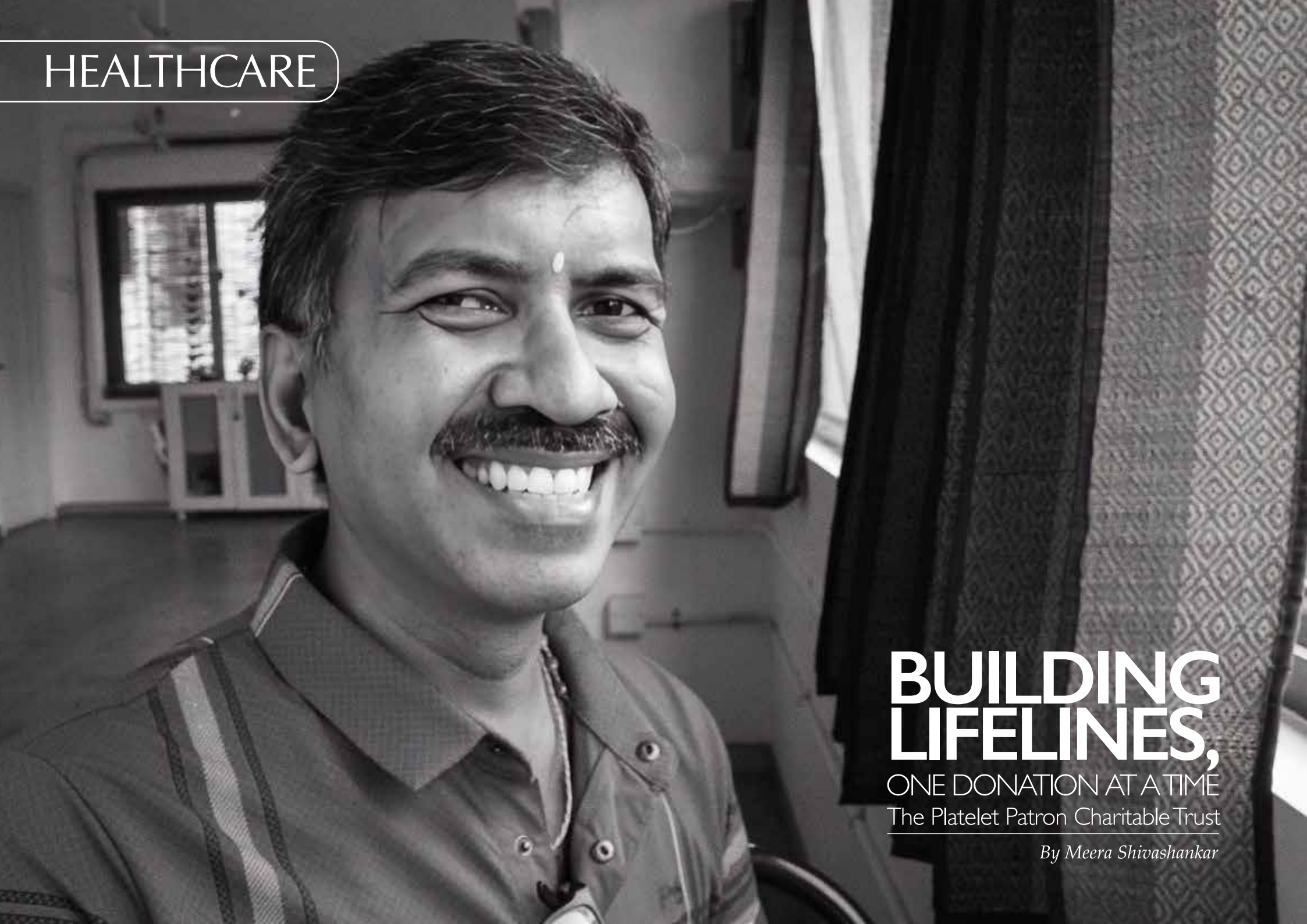




HEALTHCARE

**BUILDING
LIFELINES,**
ONE DONATION AT A TIME
The Platelet Patron Charitable Trust

By Meera Shivashankar



At any given moment, in a hospital somewhere in India, a family is waiting. Waiting for a blood donor. Waiting for platelets. Waiting for a phone call that could mean the difference between hope and despair. For most of us, these moments remain invisible.

We notice appeals for blood only when they arrive as messages on our phones, and our instinct is often to forward them, hoping someone else will respond. Rarely do we stop to think about the frantic search unfolding behind every request. Yet for the volunteers of the Platelet Patron Charitable Trust, popularly

known as the Platelet Club, these emergencies are part of everyday life.

Founded by Vema Srivats and a group of committed donors, the Chennai-based non-profit has become a vital support system for patients battling cancer, blood disorders and other life-threatening illnesses. Officially registered in 2018, the trust has grown into a movement powered entirely by compassion, commitment and the belief that no patient should lose precious time because help arrived too late.

"It is just about sensing a need and trying to see what has to be done," Vema says with characteristic humility.

"The idea was simply to help. We saw families struggling to find blood and platelets during emergencies, and we felt there had to be a better way."

That simple desire became the foundation of one of Chennai's most respected volunteer networks.

The early days were far from easy. "We had to rely on BlackBerry phones to pass information," Vema recalls. "Today, social media has transformed connectivity." Even with better technology, convincing people to donate platelets remained a challenge.

Unlike whole blood donation, platelet donation is carried out through a specialised process, in which a machine separates platelets from the donor's blood and safely returns the remaining components to the body. The procedure usually takes between 90 minutes and two hours, but the platelets collected from a single donor can be life-saving for patients undergoing chemotherapy, bone marrow transplants, or treatment for severe blood disorders.

The team realised that awareness was the missing piece.

"Most people genuinely want to help," says Vema. "They simply need accurate information and reassurance. Once they understand how critical platelets are for cancer patients and children undergoing treatment, they become eager to contribute."

Gradually, one donor inspired another. Volunteers brought in friends, relatives and colleagues. What began as a handful of committed individuals evolved into an extensive network capable of responding to emergencies across Chennai and beyond.

Today, the trust coordinates Single Donor Platelet (SDP) donations that are often life-saving for patients undergoing chemotherapy and children battling blood disorders. For countless families, a call to the Platelet Club has become a source of reassurance during moments of overwhelming uncertainty.

"We often receive calls from people who are exhausted and frightened," says Vema. "By the time they reach us, they have already contacted several hospitals and blood banks. The least we can do is tell them they are not alone."

What distinguishes the organisation is not only its ability to connect donors with patients but also the remarkable speed with which it responds. Emergencies do not

respect office hours. Requests arrive at midnight, during festivals, weekends and public holidays. Yet the volunteers remain ready.

"Some of our donors have travelled across the city after a full day's work simply because someone they had never met needed help," Vema says proudly. "That willingness to help a stranger is what inspires me every day." Among those inspiring volunteers are Mr. Rohit and Mr. Natarajan, who have each donated blood well over a hundred times. For them, blood donation is not an occasional act of charity but a way of life. They speak of it not as a sacrifice but as a privilege, believing they are fortunate to be healthy enough to help another human being. Rather than seeking recognition, they feel humbled that they are able to serve mankind in such a meaningful way.

Their commitment extends beyond their own donations. They actively encourage friends, colleagues and young people to become regular donors, believing awareness must begin at the grassroots. They hope to dispel myths surrounding blood and platelet donation and inspire a new generation of voluntary donors. Their dream is simple

yet profound—that no family should ever have to run from pillar to post searching for blood or platelets while a loved one waits for treatment. Their dedication perfectly reflects the values upon which the trust was built.

The trust's commitment is perhaps most evident when dealing with rare blood groups. Among the rarest in the world is the Bombay Blood Group, for which finding a compatible donor can be an enormous challenge.

"When a request for a rare blood group comes in, there is no room for hesitation," says Vema. "Everyone begins working immediately. Volunteers make calls, donors contact their networks and hospitals coordinate logistics. It becomes a collective effort."

The organisation has repeatedly helped connect rare blood donors and recipients across cities, states and occasionally even international borders, earning the confidence of both patients and healthcare professionals.

Yet blood donation is only one part of the trust's story.

As volunteers worked closely with patients and caregivers, they noticed another heart-breaking reality. Many families travelling to Chennai for treatment came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Medical expenses had already drained their savings, leaving little for accommodation or food. Parents slept on hospital floors, caregivers skipped meals and families struggled simply to remain close to their loved ones.

Witnessing these hardships led the trust to ask an important question: Was medical assistance alone enough? Their answer was a resounding no.

This realisation gave birth to Magizh Illam, one of the trust's most meaningful initiatives. The facility provides free accommodation and nutritious meals for Below Poverty Line families who travel to Chennai seeking medical treatment.

"We met families who had come to save their children but were themselves struggling to survive. You realise healing requires more than medicine. People need dignity and support." Vema says.

Magizh Illam offers exactly that - a safe, welcoming space where families can rest, eat and find comfort during some of the most difficult periods of their lives. It embodies the trust's belief that compassion must care for the whole person, not merely the immediate medical emergency.

That philosophy has naturally expanded the organisation's work into other areas of social welfare. Educational scholarships help deserving students pursue their dreams. Persons with disabilities receive mobility aids, while elderly residents in old-age homes receive support and care.

For some organisations, such diversification might appear to be a departure from their original mission. For Vema, it is simply another expression of the same principle.

"Every act of service begins with noticing someone's need," he says. "Whether that need is blood, education, mobility or emotional support, the principle remains the same. If we can help, we should."

Despite its expanding reach, the trust remains firmly rooted in volunteerism. Doctors, engineers, students, entrepreneurs, homemakers and retirees all contribute according to their abilities. What unites them is the shared conviction that kindness can transform lives.

He is also quick to point out that the trust's achievements belong to an entire community. He says. "This organisation exists because thousands of people chose to care."

That spirit of collective compassion is perhaps the Platelet Patron Charitable Trust's greatest achievement. In a world often defined by differences, it reminds us what becomes possible when communities unite for a common cause. Every donation represents a stranger helping another stranger. Every volunteer embodies the belief that humanity is strongest when it stands together.

As Chennai honours the Platelet Patron Charitable Trust, it honours not merely an organisation but an idea—that compassion can be organised, kindness can be mobilised and ordinary people can accomplish extraordinary things when they choose to act.

In hospital wards, blood banks, shelters and homes across the country, the impact of that idea continues to be felt every single day.

The Platelet Patron Charitable Trust is a lifeline, a community and a movement - one built by ordinary people who quietly choose humanity over indifference.

And that is what makes it a true Champion of Chennai.

