

## G.Balakrishna Das brings stamps closer to kids

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 Balakrishna Das

**Chennai:** The house of 83-year-old G.Balakrishna Das in Kilpauk Garden looks like a post office as it is full of stamps and postal cancellations from 1837 to the present day. Balakrishna Das, president of the South India Philatelists' Association (SIPA), who started collecting stamps at the age of 15 way back in early 1950s says lack of parental support, encouragement and proper guidance to children have turned out to be biggest challenges to attract kids to philately.

Every weekend, Balakrishna Das sits with fellow enthusiasts to figure out ways to get children interested in the world of stamps. "With the advent of technological advancements such as television and cell phones, we face lot of challenges to attract kids for hobbies like philately. Parents want their children to excel well in academics rather than involve in stamp collection. Parents too lack awareness about the hobby," Mr Das lamented.

It was Balakrishna's elder brother Madan Mohan Das, a philatelist, who motivated him to collect stamps from an young age. "Collection of stamps is also a good stress reliever because once you start collecting stamps your mind will get into it giving you peace," the philatelist, says. He is proud owner of stamps from 1854 to the present day. To create awareness in kids and motivate them to take stamp collection as a hobby, Balakrishna Das has conducted several seminars and workshops in schools attracting children to philately. SIPA started with five members in 1956. It has 800 members today.

Pointing out that philately should be included in school curriculum to attract more youngsters, Mahesh B. Parekh, another philatelist, said China had included stamp collection as an activity in schools and encouraged more kids to take philately as hobby. With these kind of initiatives they were able to create more awareness about the hobby among youngsters and attract them. The story of 74-year-old V. Balasubramanian, a philatelist from the age of five, is different.

To increase his pen-friend base to collect more stamps from foreign countries, he started listening to various programmes on foreign radio stations like Voice of America and Radio Australia, which featured the details and addresses of pen friends from various countries. "In 1950, Voice of America had a Tamil service which had a special weekly programme on stamps. I was happy that they sent me a stamp card for my letter. This was my first stamp from them," he said.