Progress with Compassion

The SNM Journey

70 years of Service to the people

Sree Narayana Mission (Singapore)

Artist – SNM Residents Creative Art Club

Progress with Compassion

- The SNM Journey

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SNM Community Programmes

Project Smile – Lantern Making

SNM Art at ITE, AMK with President Halimah Yacob

Share a Pot Programme, Exercising

Share a Pot Programme, Exercising

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Whichever the religion,
it suffices if it makes
a better man.

One in kind, one in faith,
one in God, is man.

Devoid of dividing walls
of caste or race or hatred
of rival faith,
we all live here in
Brotherhood.

Sree Narayana Guru

President's Message

Mr Shanavas Vijayan
President
Sree Narayana Mission (Singapore)

Sree Narayana Mission (Singapore), took its roots officially in Singapore on 18 June 1948, when it became a registered society.

The story of SNM is similar to the other local community organisations. Individuals from different ethnic communities arrived in Singapore in the hope of building better lives for themselves and a brighter future for their children. These groups then organised themselves to help one another and became a source of strength for the community.

The defining moment for SNM was in the early-1960s when our members embarked on welfare programmes for the benefit of the larger community around the Sembawang area. These included free tuition classes, bursaries, counselling and food relief programmes. All these services are in line with Sree Narayana Guru's teaching; "Acts that One Performs for One's Own self must also be for the good of others". The annual flag day which began in 1961 was the rallying call to all our members to join forces to raise funds to run these welfare programmes.

Over the years, we focused our attention on expanding our programmes. Today, we are proud to acknowledge that SNM plays an integral role in the eldercare, mental health and community services sector, complementing our government's efforts to uplift the lives of the under privileged in our society.

The theme for SNM's year-long 70th anniversary celebrations, started on 18 June 2018, is "Progress With Compassion". This special publication captures the personal experiences and memories of individuals who have been connected with SNM over different periods in its journey. We hope that these stories will inspire our younger generation to come on board to serve the larger community.

For SNM to continue to stay relevant in a dynamic and ever changing society, our members, volunteers, donors and staff must work hand-in-hand.

We are truly grateful to all for accompanying us on this journey, a journey to empower all individuals to live dignified lives and create a more inclusive and compassionate society. Let's continue to be an asset to the community, and love and serve all with our hearts.

Artist - Mr. Oh Lye Seng, Resident of SNM Home

CEO's Message

Mr S Devendran
Chief Executive Officer
Sree Narayana Mission (Singapore)

It is an honour to be able to pen a few words in Sree Narayana Mission's 70th anniversary commemorative publication as its Chief Executive Officer.

SNM' 70th anniversary year has been a memorable one; the 2018 Charity Transparency Award ,One Gold and 23 Silver Singapore Health Quality Service Awards, a mention in Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's speech at the Singapore Bicentennial Opening, and renewal of our IPC status and all operating licences – nursing home, senior care centres and psychiatric welfare home.

Singapore's demographics and its social needs are changing. A 'greyer' Singapore with low total fertility rates has implications for the Singapore society of the future.

The government has recognised this and is putting into place the 'scaffolding' where the government together with the community and the individuals come together to ensure that the needs of the less privileged and the elderly are taken care of.

SNM is an active player in this ecosystem and we believe that the best way to make this ecosystem stronger is by forging partnerships, be it with the government or other organisations such as charities and religious organisations. We will continue to forge new partnerships and do our part to support and serve the community.

One of the strategic decisions that SNM will have to consider is where our weight of effort ought to be going into the future, as the eldercare and social service sectors evolve.

It is also clear that the charity landscape is changing. Productivity, establishing new revenue streams and leveraging technology are imperatives for the future.

Another key requirement of governance is planning for future, especially with respect to succession planning and this is where building up strong and committed vibrant cores of youth is vital to the future wellbeing of the organisation. I am happy to report that a very active SNM Youth wing is working hard to develop this core of the next generation of leadership for this mission.

I am positive that SNM will continue to strive forward through its institutions - our nursing home, welfare home, senior care centres and community programmes, to support national initiatives and most importantly, doing good for the needy.

Achieving this success would not have been possible without the unwavering support of our partners, trustees, Exco, volunteers and staff, who play an instrumental role in driving SNM forward towards a common goal.

I thank all of you for your support through the years and look forward to your continued support as we write the future chapters of the SNM story.

Chathayam, Sunday 12th September 1965
Guest-of-Honour: Mr Lee Kuan Yew
Singapore's Founding Prime Minister

"I want to say how delighted I am this morning to be able to join you in presenting these scholarships to 10 students, $100/- each, and not only to Indian students. The money probably came all from Indians because they are members of your Mission but the scholarships are also being given to Malays and to Chinese too. It is these little gestures which make for harmony and understanding ….

Here we make the model multi-racial society. This is not a country that belongs to any single community: it belongs to all of us.....

This was a mud-flat, swamp! Today, this is a modern city. Ten years from now, this will be a metropolis.

Never fear!

May I congratulate you for having made progress since I last visited your mission in 1963, and especially commend you for having made a symbolic gesture in giving scholarships not just to Indians. But Indians who contributed to the Narayana Mission took this money and gave it to Malay and Chinese students as well. In that way, we must prosper..."

Exerpts from his speech

Message

Mr K Shanmugam
Minister for Home Affairs
and Minister for Law

My heartiest congratulations to Sree Narayana Mission and its members on its 70th anniversary. Sree Narayana Mission is an organisation with a big heart.

It offers a wide range of social service programmes for the less privileged among us, regardless of race or religion.

The Mission runs a 224-bed nursing home and two senior care centres for the elderly. It also manages Meranti Home, a 200-bed psychiatric welfare home for male destitute individuals in need of psychiatric care.

To meet the needs of the wider community, the Mission also offers social assistance programmes such as Lend-A-Hand, a support programme for single parent households, providing monthly disbursements of household items and groceries.

Other community outreach programmes include educational financial assistance, counselling and befriender services.

Your dedication to serve the elderly and those in need is commendable.

The Mission was one of 47 Charities who received the Charity Transparency Awards 2018. This is testament to its high standards of corporate governance and transparency.

Members of the Mission work actively with the Nee Soon community partners. I would like to express my appreciation to the staff and volunteers for your tireless efforts in uplifting and improving the well-being of the community.

I wish the Mission every success in your future endeavours.

Message

Mr Gan Kim Yong
Minister for Health

I offer my heartiest congratulations to Sree Narayana Mission for achieving a milestone – 70 years of serving the less fortunate with care and compassion.

Sree Narayana Mission has been a steadfast partner of the Ministry of Health in supporting the needs of our seniors in the community through a range of programmes and initiatives. Sree Narayana Mission has cared for the frail at its nursing home in Yishun, and supported seniors, including those with dementia, to age-in-place by providing day care services at its two senior care centres in Yishun and Woodlands.

In addition to seniors' healthcare needs, I am heartened to see that Sree Narayana Mission has served the social needs of seniors as well. The Share-A-Pot programme, a community outreach initiative by Sree Narayana Mission, promotes active and healthy living amongst seniors by presenting them with the opportunity to exercise, socialise and bond with one another over a nutritious meal. Your efforts create an environment for seniors to keep healthy and stay connected within the community.

Thank you for 70 years of unwavering service. I look forward to Sree Narayana Mission's continued contributions to the community.

Message

Mr Ong Ye Kung
Minister for Education

My warmest congratulations to Sree Narayana Mission (Singapore) on commemorating 70 years of social service in Singapore. The Mission is an institution in the northern part of Singapore, supporting the community, helping the needy, upholding its values and culture over the decades.

I have to put on record the Mission's social contribution. Today, the Mission runs a 224-bed nursing home, the psychiatric welfare home Meranti Home @Pelangi Village, and two Senior Care Centres in Yishun and Woodlands. Recently, the Mission extended its services to the Sree Narayana Mission Care Centre at Race Course Road. Every year, the Mission's Onam celebration is well attended by Malayalees all over Singapore, and I will always make it a point to join in the festivities.

We should also remember the historical significance of the Mission. Days after Singapore gained independence, Mr Lee Kuan Yew made his famous speech envisioning Singapore's transformation from mudflats to metropolis, at the Sree Narayana Mission. The Mission has since moved from that original site, but plans are in store to lay a marker to commemorate the site of that historic speech.

May the Mission continue to grow with our nation and society. Together, we will progress with compassion. I wish Sree Narayana Mission (Singapore) continual success.

Message

Mr Desmond Lee

Minister for Social and Family Development,
Second Minister for National Development

My heartiest congratulations to Sree Narayana Mission on your 70th anniversary.

From your early days gathering funds from the Malayalee community to help residents in Sembawang, you have grown to provide a wide range of social service programmes for vulnerable Singaporeans across all races and religions.

You continue to look at ways to improve social service delivery. You have made good use of technology to improve the quality of care that you provide. For example, you have adopted the use of automatic electric hospital beds to aid nurses and residents in bed transfers at Sree Narayana Mission Nursing Home, and brought in a medication machine to pre-pack medications for residents at Meranti Home@Pelangi Village. You have also planned for more integrated services at your new building facilities, such as a caregiver resource centre and mentoring activities for youths-at-risk.

Such efforts at innovation and coordination are important in developing our social service sector. An ageing population and competition for a smaller workforce will mean that we have to adapt to a future that is leaner in manpower, even as our needs increase.

While the Government continues to invest in and strengthen our social service network, close collaboration with community organisations and volunteers is critical in our collective work to uplift families. We must continue to work together to organise and integrate our community efforts better so that they lead to more impactful and sustainable improvements.

My colleagues and I look forward to continued partnership with Sree Narayana Mission so that we can do more together to support and uplift the vulnerable.

Message

Sim Ann
Senior Minister of State,
Ministry of Culture,
Community and Youth &
Ministry of Communications
and Information

Since 1948, Sree Narayana Mission (SNM) has remained steadfast in serving the needs of the community, through its many programmes for the elderly and the disadvantaged.

I had the pleasure of attending the So Woke Youth Symposium in October last year, organised by SNM and its community partners. It was an opportunity for our youths to have conversations on issues that matter to them, such as social inclusion, mental health, and social harmony. I commend SNM for collaborating with different segments of the community to make Singapore a better home for all.

A caring society ensures that no one is left behind. This is what we hope to build through the Singapore Cares (SG Cares) movement, where we show kindness to people around us, support one another, and contribute to a culture of care.

The dedicated SNM staff, members and volunteers have made a difference to the lives of many Singaporeans. Thank you for serving with a heart, and growing the spirit of SG Cares.

Congratulations to SNM on your 70th anniversary! May your efforts encourage more people to step forward and care for others.

Message

Associate Professor Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim
Senior Parliamentary Secretary of Ministry of Social and Family Development and Education

I am honoured to write for Sree Narayana Annual Magazine and would like to extend my heartiest congratulations on your 70th Anniversary. It is indeed an achievement to have grown over the years. Sree Narayana has contributed significantly to the Nee Soon community and Singapore at large.

The Sree Narayana Mission Home has met its primary objective of providing long-term care and support for elderly residents. With your facility in Nee Soon, residents in our GRC have benefited from your services. This is further supplemented with your senior care centre which alleviates the load of many families through your day-care services.

Besides running a nursing home, your organisation has adopted a holistic framework to support residents in need. With your robust network of donors, my constituents have benefited from the short-term financial assistance which Sree Narayana offers to help them ride through tough times. Your strong presence on the ground has advocated for the rights of the old and destitute.

You have also worked closely with my colleagues from the Ministry of Social and Family Development in managing Meranti Home@Pelangi Village. Besides rehabilitation therapy for male destitute persons requiring psychiatric care, you have set up recreational clubs and interest groups in the Home for residents to focus on their strengths and passions.

Once again, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation for your services and congratulate you on your 70th Anniversary.

The SNM Journey

Artist – Mr Lim Kim Kwang,
Resident of SNM Home

THE SNM

1946

Immigrant followers of Sree Narayana Guru sets up SNM in a small hut with barest of necessities. It houses a portrait of the Guru.

1947

Mr. Lim Chong Pang, a philanthropist donates land @ 48 Soon Keat Road, Sembawang. The land where the small hut was located is reverted to the owners.

18 Jun 1948

Officially registered as Singapore's 109th Society with Registry of Society.

11 Jul 1948

Officially opens the centre @ 48 Soon Keat Road, a simple wooden structure where members meet to stage various activities.

1961 - 1962

Initiates Flag Day events for raising funds for welfare activities in 1961.
Embarks on welfare programmes: Free Tuition, Food Relief, Scholarship Awards.

1967

Becomes a member of Singapore Council of Social Service. Gains support from various agencies.

19 Aug 1956

A new two storey building @ 48 Soon Keat Road is officially opened by Mr. Lim Yew Hock, then Chief Minister of Singapore.

12 Sep 1965

Mr Lee Kuan Yew visits SNM, just after the separation of Singapore from Malaysia.

22 Feb 1979

Sree Narayana Mission Home for Aged Sick commences operations @ Block 87/89 Canberra Road.
It provides residential and institutional care for the aged sick and destitute.

JOURNEY

15 July 1990

Ground breaking ceremony for a new 3 storey SNM Nursing Home facility @ Yishun.

The facility commences operations in Feb 1994.

26 Nov 1994

The facility @ Yishun with 224 beds opened officially by Dr. Tony Tan, then MP for Sembawang.

1995 to 2002

Initiates several new community welfare outreach programmes.

Gains IPC Status.

18 March 2002

Appointed managing agent for Meranti Home@ Pelangi Village, a psychiatric welfare house for male destitute.

2012

Opens a Senior Care Centre (SCC), co-located within SNM facility @ Yishun.

2013

Opens its 2nd SCC @ Woodlands Street 62. It provides Dementia Day Care & Enhanced Elder Care services.

2015

Launches new Community Programmes in collaboration with Partners:
Share-A-Pot Programme with Khoo Teck Puah Hospital.

Helping Hands with Agency for Integrated Care.

Share Programme with SN Volunteers.

2017

Acquires a facility @ 394 Race Course Road to serve a new community.

First Nursing Home to be designated 24x7 Dementia Go-to-Point.

Launches 100=50/Lend-A-Hand Program with Heartwarmers Volunteer Group.

2018

Wins the prestigious Charity Transparency Award in Oct 2018.

Expands its Community Programmes portfolio:

- Smile with You @North West
- Educational Financial Assistance

THE GROWTH

Sembawang Naval Base (Credit: NAS)

Chong Pang Village (Credit: NAS)

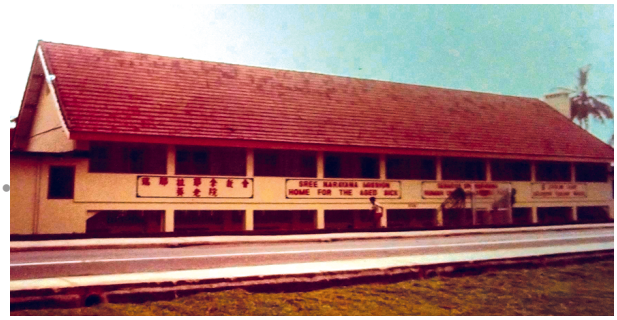
SNM Building @ 12 Yishun Avenue 5, 1994

OF SNM

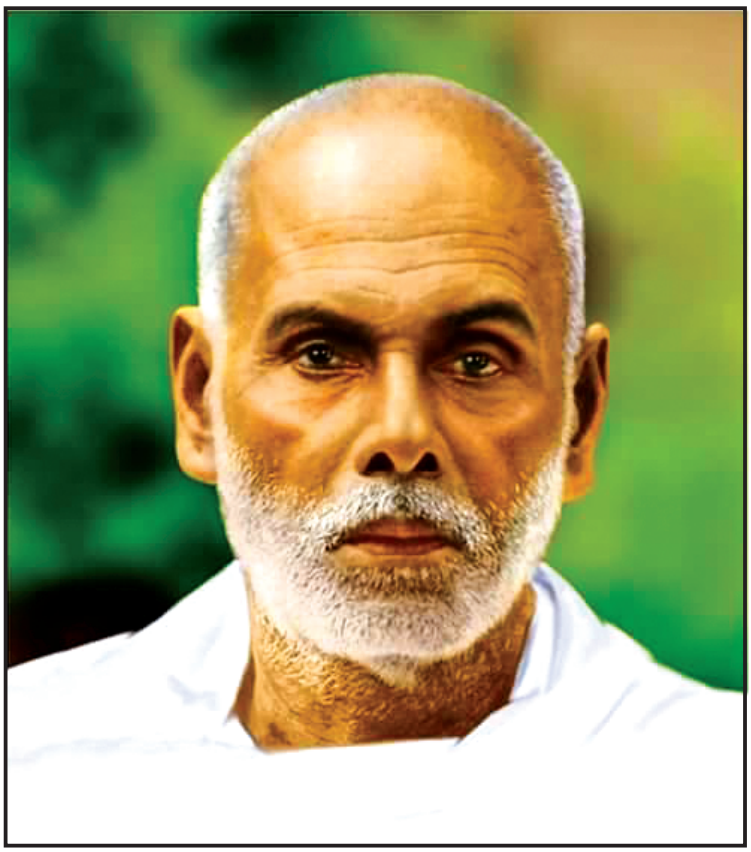
SNM Hut @48 Soon Keat Road, 1948

SNM Building @48 Soon Keat Road, 1956

SNM Office@ 100 Kowloon Road, 1979



SNM Home for Aged Sick @ Block 87 & 89, Canberra Road, 1979



"What is dear to another - that should spell endearment to me also. This is the correct policy. Therefore, what one does for his own good should be for the benefit of others."

Atmopadesa Satakam Verse 22.

"A compassionate man without any vested interest works both day and night for the welfare of others. On the other hand, a selfish man, desirous of his own good, toils day and night and comes again and again to frustration."

Atmopadesa Satakam, Verse 23.

"Kindliness, Love, Compassion – these three in essence are one. It is life's (guiding) star. Only those with kindliness are (really) living. May these words be chanted (remembered)."

Anukampa Dasakam, Verse 3.

- Sree Narayana Guru

SNM: An Institution Inspired by the Life and Teachings of Sree Narayana Guru

Jayadev Unnithan

They came with just their shirts on their back, their hearts full of hope, to make life better for kin in faraway places.

Difficult times loomed, but they pressed on, inspired by the teachings of a Venerable Saint from their native place.

The end of World War II changed the political and economic landscape worldwide. In Singapore, people were picking themselves up to rebuild lives after the ravages of the war. Our pioneers were inspired by the teachings of the revered saint, Sree Narayana Guru (1856 to 1928), who had emancipated the oppressed in Kerala. Revered Sree Narayana Guru instilled in the masses a sense of self-worth and system of values to live by.

'What is dear to another - that should spell endearment to me also. This is the correct policy. Therefore, what one does for his own good should be for the benefit of others.' Atmopadesa Satakam Verse 22.

Staying true to the Revered Guru's teachings, our pioneers organised themselves to form a body that will promote social and welfare programmes to uplift Singapore's society. Sree Narayana Mission (SNM) was registered as a society in 1948, and its programmes were open to all, regardless of race, language or religion, in keeping with the Revered Guru's teachings of embracing universal brotherhood. Our pioneers imbibed Revered Sree Narayana Guru's teachings as enunciated in Verse 22 of the Atmopadesa Satakam (One Hundred Verses in Self Instruction). They lived by the principle that any action performed must be for the betterment of fellow men and society as a whole.

'A compassionate man without any vested interest works both day and night for the welfare of others. On the other hand, a selfish man, desirous of his own good, toils day and night and comes again and again to frustration'. Atmopadesa Satakam, Verse 23.

The SNM has stayed true to the principles of the teachings of the Revered Sree Narayana Guru in providing selfless service to society. Sustaining this drive to serve is Verse 23 in the Revered Guru's expositions, Atmopadesa Satakam (One Hundred verses in Self-Instruction), which sets the direction for the SNM to execute its services with full dedication and commitment, having its primary focus fully on the interests of the beneficiary.

'Kindliness, Love, Compassion – these three in essence are one. It is life's (guiding) star. Only those with kindliness are (really) living. May these words be chanted (remembered)' Anukampa Dasakam, Verse 3.

The SNM continued to serve Singapore's society by enlarging the scope of its services and reaching out to many. The expanded services included a Nursing Home, a Home for the male destitute persons who require psychiatric care, a Senior Care Centre and Eldercare/Dementia Care centres. The outreach to the public at large was through programmes like meals-on-wheels, helping hands, educational bursaries and financial assistance. Verse 3 of Revered Sree Narayana Guru's works, Anukampa Dasakam (Ten verses on Compassion), states that human life is meaningful only if we are able to internalize 'kindliness'. Kindliness refers to a state of mind where we are able to see our 'Oneness' with everyone; never will I punish my finger if it accidently pokes my eye, because the finger and eye are part of myself. If we are able to see every person as part of ourselves, then their pain becomes our pain. This empathy will drive us to continue serving our fellow men. This is the principle that guides the SNM to embark on programmes that give a helping hand.

How It All Began

The story of Sree Narayana Mission (SNM) in Singapore has its roots firmly embedded in the teachings and values of Sree Narayana Guru from Kerala. Sree Narayana Guru was a sage and teacher ahead of his time. He encouraged openness, diversity and inclusivity, and spearheaded social reforms in an era steeped in hierarchy and traditional practices that discriminated based on caste and religion. Many of the Malayalee immigrants who left Kerala for Singapore, in search of greener pastures, would have been ardent supporters of the Guru and his teachings.

SNM was officially registered as an association on 18 June 1948. Many of the pioneers who were instrumental in setting up the SNM were immigrants from different districts in Kerala. They came to Singapore in search of a livelihood that would sustain themselves and their families back home as the British Naval Base and Singapore's thriving entrepot trade opened up ample employment opportunities for these immigrants.

For 40 years after the SNM's inception, 48 Soon Keat Road, provided a home away from home for many of the Malayalee immigrant workers. It fulfilled a sense of community as it looked after their welfare while preserving their cultural roots through the various activities that were organised by the immigrants for the immigrants.

For 40 years after the SNM's inception, 48 Soon Keat Road, provided a home away from home for many of the Malayalee immigrant workers. It fulfilled a sense of community as it looked after their welfare while preserving their cultural roots through the various activities that were organised by the immigrants for the immigrants.

With the growing membership, expansion of the building was in order. On 19 August 1956, a new building, erected on the same plot of land, was officially opened by Mr Lim Yew Hock, the then Chief Minister of Singapore. SNM continued to play a pivotal role in the Malayalee community. Social and cultural events were organized and it was a meeting place for workers to gather after work, or with their families on weekends. Enrichment classes that taught Malayalam were also held for members' children as a way of preserving their native language.

Most of these Malayalees, being pragmatic and progressive, would have enrolled their children in mainstream schools where English would have been the medium of instruction, with Tamil or Malay as the second language, as Malayalam was not offered as an option in the system.

SNM also played a critical role in the moral and spiritual growth of the community through the discourses that focused on the Guru's life, philosophy and teachings, and centred on the values of charitable actions, education and self-improvement.

SNM was officially registered as an association on 18 June 1948.

Many of the pioneers who were instrumental in setting up the SNM were immigrants from different districts in Kerala.

They came to Singapore in search of a livelihood that would sustain themselves and their families back home as the British Naval Base and Singapore's thriving entrepot trade opened up ample employment opportunities for these immigrants..

New Beginings in Singapore

Pioneers

Artist – Mdm. Chia Seng Noi, Resident of SNM Home

Leading SNM

M.K. Bhasi

His village had been just a couple of miles from where Sree Narayana Guru had spent his last days. Thus, M.K. Bhasi had grown up influenced by the Guru's philosophy. "I was interested in his teachings, because of the secular nature of his teachings. He went against all the old convictions and beliefs of the communities and society. I was guided by his main teaching, 'That the human race is one'. It is a unique teaching - to be a good human being, you can still be without a religion. How many others have said it? No one has said it so openly. He built temples - not to propagate religion but education".

It was, therefore, natural for Bhasi to gravitate towards the Sree Narayana Mission (SNM) when he landed in Singapore in 1953. The SNM had been registered just five years prior. Not only was it a familiar entity, it was in keeping with his own secular values, "I have never worshipped in a temple. My wife used to go but I never entered". At SNM, Bhasi could apply the Guru's principles, which resonated with him. The SNM operated oblivious to its members' religious beliefs. In due course, Bhasi was elected into its Executive Committee. "I had Muslims in my Committee and all others in my Committee," he recalls.

Bhasi has held the position of SNM Ex-Co President for a total of 17 years; a record in Singapore's social service circles. He had also been its Vice-President for two years and one of its Trustees for a few years. "My name was proposed at meetings and there were no other proposals. So, I found it difficult to decline," Bhasi explains his extensive years of leadership in the SNM. His sense of wanting to live according to the Guru's values must have also prompted him to continue leading the SNM despite any hurdles he faced. "I always believed that in public service, you won't get anything in return. Instead of thanking you, people will be blaming you. That has been my attitude from the beginning. I did what was necessary. I tried to do my best. I am happy that the SNM has become a very well-known institution in Singapore. It has become bigger and better and I am happy about that. I made friends that I would not have come across had I not been involved in the SNM. We ensured we did not expand too much; concentrate on one thing and do it well. That was the advice from Dr Vasoo and the officials from the Ministries who were helping us." Dr Vasoo was a high ranking and active social worker who became a Member of Parliament in Singapore from 1984 to 2001.

Despite challenges in juggling his teaching job with his responsibilities at the SNM, Bhasi had not only successfully held things up at both ends, he had also ensured both flourished. He had also nurtured his passion for poetry, writing several Malayalam poems and publishing anthologies of the same. Through the years, he has indeed walked the path of a leader true to the Guru's tenets.

'That the human race is one'. It is a unique teaching - to be a good human being, you can still be without a religion. How many others have said it? No one has said it so openly. He built temples - not to propagate religion but education.

In conversation with Naleeza Ebrahim

Committed to the Ideals of Sree Narayana Guru

R Raveendran

At age 91, few people would have the stamina for any project that requires committed effort and dedication over a sustained period. But Raveendran is of a different ilk from most people. He regularly drives 25 kilometres between his home in West Coast and the Sree Narayana Mission (SNM) in Yishun to sit through meetings that last from 7 pm to 11 pm.

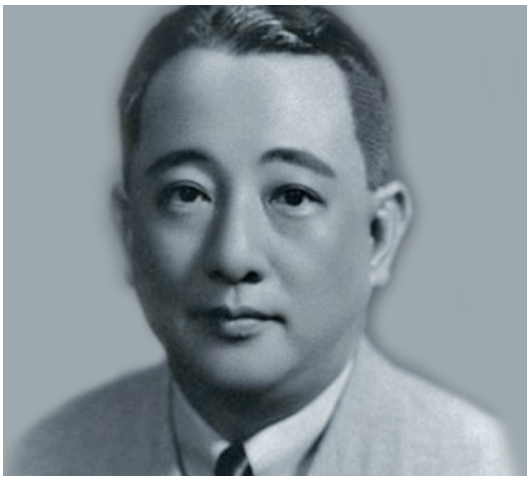
This octogenarian is an active member of the SNM and was a member of its Building Fund Committee until 2018. For him, this is just another lap in his lifelong journey of serving Narayana Guru's vision to uplift communities through education, empowerment and service. "I believe in the Guru's principles and wanted to do welfare service," he reasoned.

He had come to Singapore in 1950 from Kerala, India, already steeped in the Guru's teachings. Thus, he was willing to do his bit in his new home country and propagate the Guru's drive for community improvement, even though it is a world away from where the Guru had preached. Despite the fact that work and family commitments both weighed on him, Raveendran joined the SNM in Singapore and took on heavy responsibilities, such as being Secretary of its Executive Committee for a few tenures. In the early days, he had unstintingly knocked on doors for donations in aid of SNM's activities, gratefully accepting whatever little the people could spare then. Over the years, his duties have evolved as the SNM transformed into a larger, more recognised and established organisation. He continues to support as many of the SNM's initiatives as he can, stepping forward when he deems it necessary, to uphold its values and further its aims and objectives.

Raveendran celebrated his 90th birthday in 2017, but his advancing age is not slowing him down in any way, nor has it dampened his spirit to serve. "The SNM members always tell me not to drive so far to our meetings and they always offer to drive me home late at night after a meeting, but I still continue with what I'm doing. I am still able to do all this because of Guru's grace. Because of the Guru's teachings, I always want to be doing service for the people. I feel happy to serve. I believe the Guru has a lot of power, and if you sincerely work for the SNM, you will prosper. But you must work sincerely. So I am still fit because of the grace of Guru and I will continue to do this until I die."

In conversation with Naleeza Ebrahim

Pioneers Who Shaped SNM



Mr. Lim Chong Pang
Donated land for SNM Building at Soon Keat Road
(Credit: NAS)

New Beginings in Singapore

Family Ties

Artist – Mdm. Soon Soh Tee,
Resident of SNM Home

Dad and I

Openness. Diversity. Inclusion. Peace.

Shalini Damodaran

My father, K. Damodaran, had left his home in Kadaikavur District, Chirayankil, as a budding adolescent. Unaccompanied by family members, except for an acquaintance from the same village who was returning to Singapore for work, my father boarded a steam ship in pursuit of opportunities for a life that was beyond his imagination at the age of fifteen.

How did a fifteen-year-old boy from a small homogeneous village in Chirayankil adapt to and assimilate into a country which would have been shockingly diverse? How did he come to be so fearless and open to differences? How did he come to embrace diversity? He seemed to have been comfortable with the idea of oneness, and that we are more alike in spite of our different religious, social and ethnic backgrounds.

His choices in life, I realised, reflected his openness. He chose to live and work in a neighbourhood that was multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual. It was not a predominantly Indian enclave. There were mostly Chinese, Indian Muslims and Malays in Kampong Bahru then. It was a bold move, considering that he spoke only his native language, Malayalam, when he landed in Singapore. But to be a part of the community, he learnt Malay without hesitation and could communicate day to day with not only the Malays and Chinese, but the Indians, too, who spoke Punjabi, Telegu or Hindi. It enabled him to assimilate quickly into the local culture and be one with the neighbours.

How did he come to be so comfortable with people who did not look, speak or dress like him? He did not allow unfounded fears to debilitate the connection he could have with the people he encountered in his daily interactions. He wanted to be included and respected in this country and was prepared to reciprocate. He understood the importance of being a part of the community as an immigrant rather than being apart. Thus, he made assimilation his priority, to build friendships and business connections that were mutually supportive.

I think, one of the major influencers that gave him the confidence and faith to do what was right, regardless of race, language or religion, goes back to his adolescent days in Travancore. My dad was an ardent follower of Sree Narayana Guru, who hailed from an area close to Chirayankil. The Guru's creed, 'One Caste. One Religion. One God. Is Man' must have caught the imagination of this adolescent waiting to spread his wings and go on an adventure. I also discovered, to my amazement, another connection my dad had with Sree Narayana Guru. My dad was fed his first solid food by this lean and austere looking guru. His parents had plied a river on a small wooden boat, with a four month old infant in arms, to reach the guru's home for the auspicious occasion.

Sree Narayana guru was driven by a deep sense of justice and spearheaded the democratisation of some of the unjust religious practices inherent in Hinduism at that time. He fought established religious practices that discriminated against the underclass. In his teachings, he emphasised the common humanity of Man rather than the rituals and traditions of the day that were designed to give Brahmins alone the power to interpret and dictate scripture. His response to such elitism was to build a Sanskrit school. He

educated poor boys and orphans to lead a spiritual life of service, regardless of their caste, and gave the underprivileged opportunities to seek vocations lost to them in the historical and political struggle. He proved that one no longer needed to be a Brahmin to be a priest; you needed, instead, to learn and understand the Hindu scriptures, meditate, and lead a life of service to others. The Guru demonstrated, through his actions, that performing rituals and chanting mantras alone maketh not a saint. Sree Narayana Guru soon came to be revered as a spiritual teacher or 'assan', especially among young men like my Dad who must have felt empowered by his teachings.

I knew that what my Dad admired most about Sree Narayana Guru was his courage to push the boundaries and create a new world order. We understood where my Dad got his spunky attitude. He was not one to slavishly accept his lot in life. He didn't believe in destiny, astrology or superstition. He believed in utilising one's "thandedum" or capabilities to steer and shape one's life.

In my childhood days, my Dad would take us to Sree Narayana Mission, which was established mostly by immigrant workers from Kerala who worked at the British Naval Base in Sembawang. The Mission came to represent the Guru's teachings that emphasised humanity and the importance of fair treatment for all human beings regardless of racial, religious or social differences. The Mission started off by raising funds for the needy by organising flag days once a year. The funds were then used to offer educational bursaries to children from all races and religious groups.

Every year, for many years, my Dad offered his shophouse in Kampong Bahru to be used as a distribution centre on flag day. The empty tins would arrive at five in the morning, carrying the picture of the Guru and his creed, 'one caste, one religion, one god is Man'. It was a call to embrace diversity and respond to our common humanity. The volunteers comprised mostly students like my brother and I, and some adults, most of whom lived in the south of the island. They would gather at our shophouse to collect the empty tins and little paper flags. Then, we would hit the streets at around six, before daybreak, to catch port, railway and hospital staff on their way to work. As it was Saturday, we would find most people in a good mood; they were only working half day. Most of them would stop to give us their loose change of ten, twenty or fifty cents, while others would give us a princely dollar or two. Some would even engage us in conversation. They would want to know how the money would benefit others, and whom it would help. On such days, I remember how my Dad would go to market early in the morning for Mum to prepare a generous lunch and tea for the volunteers at our home. All day long, Dad continued to paddle away at his sewing machine, greeting everyone and chatting with the volunteers as they walked in and out of our shophouse. This was the highlight of our lives for many years.

About a month after Flag Day, we would celebrate the Guru's birthday at the Sree Narayana Mission. It was a big event for us. The entire family would start in the wee hours of the morning, cooking 'pachadi', a yoghurt and water-gourd dish, for at least a hundred people. We would then catch a taxi from Kampong Bahru to the Mission in Sembawang and deliver the dish in time for lunch. The celebration was called 'Chathayam', named after the Guru's Indian astrological sign. It was potluck; a number of families would each contribute a dish for the celebration, at their own expense. They would bring vegetarian dishes, such as 'sambar, yellow dhal, pachadi, inji pulli, thoran, prathaman' and others, which made for a day of feasting and camaraderie.

But it was also a day to acknowledge the hard work of the volunteers and sponsors for their support. On this day, with bated breath, we would listen for announcements on the top collectors of Flag Day. My Mum's older sister, Aunty Letha, would inevitably walk away with the trophy every year. Then came the presentation of educational bursaries. Every year, my brother and I observed Chinese, Malay, Indian, Eurasian, and Christian, Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu students walk onstage proudly to receive their cheques. The Mission provided financial assistance for students to further their studies. Simple gestures such as these brought so much happiness to my Mum and Dad.

It became very evident where my Dad acquired his moral gumption and courage. He raised us to be upright and, most of all, he showed us what it meant to be inclusive in a diverse community. There were many subtle ways in which my Dad's values were imbued in us.

Excerpts taken from 'Dad and I' by Shalini Damodaran

Celebrating Chathayam at SNM

Chathayam Lunch

Chathayam Lunch

Dance Performance

Kathakali Dance

Group Dance

Play

Our Family, Our Service to the Mission

Raghavan Family

Without the Mission, my family would have been different," Asokan Raghavan declares.

His family's association with the Sree Narayana Mission (SNM) spans decades, from the 1950s, when his parents were active members, particularly in cultural events. His sister, Ambika Raghavan, shares, "Mum was always involved in SNM, in the singing and drama". Their father had been a leading member of the Cultural Committee. Brother, Mohandas Raghavan, reminisces, "Family outings would be to SNM. On Sundays, we'd dress up and go there. We looked forward to that, because in those days of 'kampung' life, there were not many things to do. Sometimes, we even took a taxi to the SNM. So, it was very thrilling".

The seven children in their family saw the SNM as their second home and the members as their extended family. "The SNM was very supportive and got our family more settled in Singapore. The members were always coming to our house, singing and recording songs," Mohandas remembers. Like family, the SNM was there for them in their time of need, "They financed Mum's funeral and they also gave me a study loan for my university course in Australia," Mohandas adds.

The exposure to SNM during their impressionable years has left an indelible mark on the siblings. Asokan has taken Sree Narayana Guru's teachings to heart, "His words, like, 'Gain freedom through knowledge, strength by organisation,' had a profound impact on me. These have been core values to me. The children of the members who did well in school and life became our role models. Mum never wavered in her beliefs and service to the SNM, so all of us grew up with that belief. Twice a week, from 5.30 to 10 pm, she'd be at rehearsals in the SNM with Dad, and since there were people who felt Mum is doing it for a good cause, they didn't mind looking after us at home".

Gain freedom through knowledge, strength by organisation' had a profound impact on me. Mum never wavered in her beliefs and service to the SNM, so all of us grew up with that belief.

Twice a week, from 5.30 to 10 pm, she'd be at rehearsals in the SNM with Dad, and since there were people who felt Mum is doing it for a good cause, they didn't mind looking after us at home

The virtuous cycle of service that the siblings witnessed in the adults around them instilled the same values in their own psyche. Asokan revealed, "Dad was a storekeeper in the British Ordinance Department and

earning a meagre salary of $400 monthly, for all of us. Despite that, what helped us move forward were the values of the SNM. He made sacrifices for the SNM and made do on the meagre salary. Making sacrifices for the good of the organisation bonded us as a family. I became a Life Member in January 1972, with the salary I received from National Service upon my promotion to Lance Corporal – I paid $50". Through the years, Asokan has filled several roles on the Mission's committees.

"It was drummed into us that no matter how poor you are, you must share with people – even if you have one slice of bread, share. We went to the SNM's Home for the Aged and I learnt the value of empathy for people," Ambika adds. She too continues to serve the SNM, even after moving to Perth, Australia, by editing its numerous publications.

Mohandas had picked up subtle lessons from the way the SNM was run, "It was important to be clean, and studies and education are important. There was food after activities and we learnt to serve food". As an adult, Mohandas has served the SNM on its Ex-Co and in other capacities.

"All of us are inspired by the Guru's teachings; the family is united, there is a bonding among us," says Asokan. "We never strayed from the Guru's tenet, 'One in kind, one in faith, one in God, is man' and as a family we are united in the same way of thinking," Ambika explains. Mohandas sums it up, "We are all over the world but we are very close," attesting to the strong ties that develop when families make the Mission part of their extended home and family.

In conversation with Naleeza Ebrahim

Bonding through Cultural Activities

Sabu Family

He had spent ten years in Singapore, from 1979 to 1989, without his family but they are now making up for lost time by pursuing their mutual passion together every weekend. Their love for music and dance seems to be the glue that keeps Sabu and his family together.

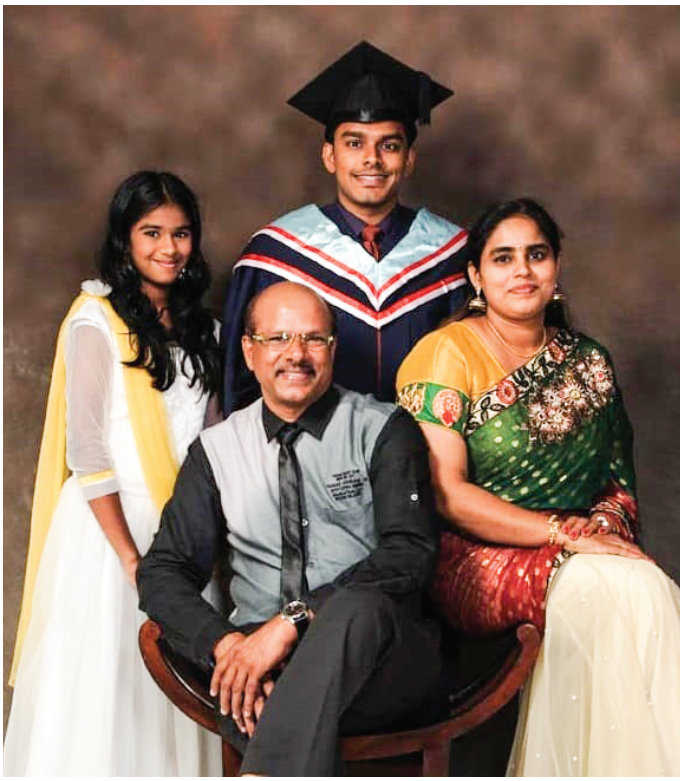
Already acquainted with Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy in his homeland, Kerala, Sabu had no hesitation in joining the activities of the Sree Narayana Mission (SNM) in Singapore when he arrived in 1979. "One of the Guru's teachings is that we should strengthen through organisation, including cultural activities. Our members love these cultural gatherings – the annual Chathayam celebration is like a festival for members and bonding between the members strengthens during Chathayam, all of them gather then," he asserts. Sabu finds this so fulfilling that he intends to continue, "Until I die".

Sabu's wife, Sheeja, iterates his sentiments, "I am very happy to come to the SNM, I feel good and there is a very good feeling here. We like to do these activities for the members. And doing this together improves the family bonding".

Sabu has been the Chairman of SNM's Cultural Sub-Committee since 2001, unfailingly and diligently holding activities for Chathayam and other important occasions in SNM's calendar. Sheeja joined him since emigrating to Singapore, and even their daughter, Priyanka, made her debut on SNM's stage in childhood. Priyanka recalls, "I was exposed to all this from young. When my parents were singing, I'd go up on stage and dance – I was three years old then. I started formal dance classes at the SNM when I was eight. This involvement in the SNM has been a part of my life from young."

She realises that the cultural activities help to further SNM's objectives to nurture the self, the community and a communal spirit. "It has shaped me as a person. I knew about my culture earlier than other children. Dance is my passion and through dance I've learnt many values – determination, endurance, patience, how to be confident. In organising all this, my father has taught me much; he spends a lot of time on this and that shows his dedication – I admire that. He does it even though he doesn't get paid for it. That's a selfless thing to do. It has helped us spend more time with each other, so we've grown as a family. Through this, we also spread our culture; it unites the Malayalees, and with more Malays and Chinese coming for Chathayam, more people know who the Malayalees are," Priyanka reasons.

The 16 year-old sees herself eventually stepping into her parents' shoes, "Hopefully, I'll be like my father and help out. I'm in the Youth Wing and I hope to contribute more to the SNM in years to come. I have also learnt the Guru's values – to treat all races as one – and I definitely connect to the Guru in a spiritual way. This involvement helps me to be with my family and their presence means a lot to me. I'm lucky that my family is closely involved in this; I would want more families to come together like this, because we are all so



busy otherwise. It will help the SNM and themselves when families come together; in unity there is strength".

In conversation with Naleeza Ebrahim

Integrating into the Larger Community

Friendships, Community

Artist – Mdm. Shanmugathai, Resident of SNM Home

Flag Day
Fund Raising for SNM's Welfare Programmes

Lady Donating

Lady Smiling

Youth Donating

Collection Booth

Reminiscing about the Old Days

R Asokan

Ever since I was a child, I have always been associated with the Sree Narayana Mission. There are lots of memories and some remain etched in my minds even after all these years. Some of my memories can be traced back to the 1950s & 1960s at the Sree Narayana Mission. I would like to share these memorable moments with others.

Kadhaprasangam

Kadhaprasangam (lyrical narrative or story telling performance) is a performing art of Kerala, India. It combines speaking, acting and singing while presenting a story. My late mother, Mrs Sarada Raghavan, was a talented artiste and an exponent of Kathaprasangam. During the 1950s there was a sizeable proportion of Malayalees in the Indian community in Singapore. Many of them were migrants from Kerala and a large number of them were living at the Naval Base and Sembawang area. Kadhaprasangam was popular entertainment amongst them and had a large following. During this time, my mother gave at least two performances to raise funds for the building of Sree Narayana Mission. I remember one was held in Pasir Panjang and the other was in Sembawang. Attendance was by purchase of tickets and the events were well supported by the Malayalees.

Chief Minister David Marshall's visit to the Sree Narayana Mission

During the mid-1950s, the then Chief Minister of Singapore, Mr David Marshall was a guest-of- honour for one of the Guru's birthday celebrations. I accompanied my father to the event and it was held in an open field. A stage was erected at the edge of the field and chairs were placed in rows for the audience to sit. There was a huge crowd present. I remember seeing four men seated on the stage as a forum was in progress. It was dark, about 7.00 p.m. Chief Minister of Singapore, Mr Marshall Minister arrived. I remembered my father telling me that the person is Mr David Marshall. He was brought to the stage, garlanded and invited to speak. He spoke in English for some time and left thereafter.

L to R: Miss K Ganga Devi, Mrs Philo Augustine, Mrs Saradha Raghavan and Mrs Vasanthi Pillai

Malayalam Drama

On 3 December 1960, a Malayalam drama, Puthiya Akasam, Puthiya Bhoomi was staged to raise funds for the Sree Narayana Mission. What was significant about this drama was that for the first time since the founding of the Mission, female roles were played by women. Prior to that, men had always portrayed women roles in the plays put up by the Mission. The pioneering female actresses were Mrs Sarada Raghavan, Mrs Vasanthi Pillai, Mrs Philo Augustine and Miss K Ganga Devi Menon. The drama was well received. Attendance was by sales tickets, which were all sold out. The local Malayalam paper gave a rave review of the drama and praised those ladies who participated in the drama

Flag Day

In 1961, I was a primary three student at Nee Soon Primary School. The first Flag Day of the Sree Narayana Mission was held in May that year. It fell on a Saturday, and in those days Saturday was a school day. However, I did not go to school that day with parental permission. Early morning, my sister and I started the street collection in the Nee Soon area, accompanied by an adult volunteer. There were many other children and adults who participated in the event as well. We carried a tin for the collection of coins and a box hung around our neck containing saffron paper badge with a pin attached to it, bearing the message of the Sree Narayana Guru. It was a tiring day for us, having to walk around, greet people and ask for donations. Some people were very nice but others not so. The officials asked us to stop our collection at about 6.00 p.m. The tins were then taken to the Sree Narayana Mission building for counting at night by officials and volunteers. The total collection that year was about $8000.

Mr Lee Kuan Yew at the Sree Narayana Mission on 12 September 1965.

I first met the then Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew in March 1963 when I was a primary five student. He visited my school, Nee Soon Primary School and I remembered shaking his hand. I was over the moon with excitement.

Mr Lee Kuan Yew, had visited the Sree Narayana Mission on three occasions. His first visit was in 1963 which was part of the General Elections campaign. The other two visits were in 1965 and 1967. These visits were made during the Onam and Chathayam celebrations at the Sree Narayana Mission respectively. Mr Lee's visit in 1965 went down the annals of the Mission as this was the first public engagement the Prime Minister attended after Singapore gained independence on 9 August 1965.

The Sree Narayana Mission celebrated Onam and Chathayam from 6 to 12 September in 1965. The packed programmes included prayers, music, dance, drama and a public forum. The latter was held on the last day, a befitting climax to the whole celebrations. I went with my father on that day and witnessed a huge crowd, mostly Indians, waiting for the arrival of the guest-of-honour, Mr Lee Kuan Yew. He arrived at 11am and was led away to meet members of the Sree Narayana Mission's Executive Committee before proceeding to the Auditorium. The programme started off with a welcome address by Mr K Devadasa Panniker, the General Secretary, and this was followed by a speech by the President of the Sree Narayana Mission, Mr M K Bhasi. Prime Minister Lee addressed the audience in Malay and in English. Though, I was very young then, I admired his oratory skills. He was very articulate and

Mr Lee arriving at Sree Narayana Mission

Mr Lee presenting scholarship to a student

spoke with deep passion. The audience listened with rapt attention and gave him a great applause.

After his speech Mr Lee presented scholarships, valued at $100 to 10 students and left the Mission at about 12.30 p m

I had been involved in the activities of the Sree Narayana Mission over the years. I became a member in 1972. I served in the Executive Committee of the Mission continuously from 1978 to 2002. During these years the Mission made tremendous progress. It was at the end of 1978, that the Executive Committee was pondering on running a Home for the Aged Sick.

Sree Narayana Guru's teachings has had a profound impact on my life. His words,

"Gain freedom through education"

"Gain strength through organisation"

"Gain prosperity through industry"

is still relevant to us in Singapore. It is about acquisition of new skills, teamwork and enterprise, all key factors to the progress of our nation.

What the SNM Means to Me

GP Sashidharan, V Srinivasan and D Sambasivam

Their friendship was so apparent and strong that they earned the nickname 'The Three Musketeers'. It strengthened in the Sree Narayana Mission (SNM) and has stood the test of time, for they are still fast friends today.

D Sambasivam, GP Sashidharan and V Srinivasan all held office in various posts in the SNM with their friendship as the glue to bind them as well as the grease to ease them through challenging times.

Sashidharan recalls, "My association with the SNM began in 1968, when my good friend, Srinivasan, who was then its Secretary, persuaded me to become a member of the Executive Committee. A year later, I became the Secretary and served in that capacity for the next four years, as Srinivasan took on the unenviable task of organising, and very successfully executing, the annual flag day. The importance of the flag day could not be over emphasised, as at that time, the SNM depended solely on the proceeds of the flag day to finance the welfare and social services that the SNM, was providing to the community".

Sambasivam was then roped in by his two friends, "Sashi told me that being a member of the SNM was an opportunity to do something good for everybody. The people then had social awareness that went beyond religion; they wanted to see other men improving, so there were Christians and Muslims in the SNM contributing to the Guru's core values. I still feel indebted to Sashi because of that – he has been a good friend, since 1959 when I was about 20".

Already deeply conscientious, Sambasivam relates that their interaction within the SNM had helped refine his sharp edges. "The SNM taught me Kerala values, the Malayalam language, and I also learnt about doing the right things – the core values – those I learnt from the SNM too. And my two friends built the family values within me; my father did not use a kind word on me and my mother did not know how to express love, but in the SNM, there were values like, 'ask for forgiveness, take care of each other, stay as a friend, live with differences, it is wrong to quarrel and stay as enemies'. I applied all this while in the SNM and this existed between the three of us, this kept us together. It built trust in us. Srini is a good and responsible person in his household and Sashi is also responsible and kind, and I learnt all this from them," Sambasivam, who was also Secretary of the Mission later, acknowledges.

Sashidharan echoes, "This association with the SNM bonded the three of us closely and strengthened our friendship. We were in our late twenties at that time and were the youngest members in the Exco. Soon, a few older members labelled us 'The three Ss'. I fondly recall that we were even called the 'Thrimoorthi' by another 'new' friend, the late Mr N Valalan. To some others, we were 'The Three Musketeers.' Though, as members of the Exco, we often differed on principles and methods to be employed, the friendships formed remained steadfast. I am also grateful to Mr R Raveendran, with whom I've argued on many issues but who has remained a good friend over the years. At 92 years of age, he is probably the oldest member of the SNM today".

Most people would consider it a blessing to be able to mix the duty of service with the pleasure of friendship. As Sashidharan relates, "I've often been asked what I have gained from my association and 'work' with the SNM. I must stress that none of us ever considered it work. It was truly a learning experience that enriched us morally and spiritually. We learnt the various ways by which we could serve the local community. We had to raise funds and in the process, we learnt valuable lessons in managing such funds, the varied ways we could help the community, form meaningful friendships and how to interact appropriately with the community at large. The icing on the cake was that our friendships strengthened, new friendships were formed, all of which have stood the test of time. Perhaps, Sree Narayana Guru's guiding hand was directing us towards what the SNM has become today; an organisation in the forefront of providing the best in welfare services to the needy of all races in our nation".

The three friends are now in their 80s, and Sashidharan sums up their sentiments, "I am grateful for my 50 years of association with and service to the SNM. The one axiom of Guru's teachings that is forever embedded in me, and which I pray that all of society will one day accept and abide by, is, "Whichever be the religion, it is enough that it makes a better man."

3 Senoritas

Indu Suresh, Sneha and Indulekha

Marriage had brought the three of them to Singapore, but the Sree Narayana Mission (SNM) brought Indulekha, Sneha and Indu Suresh together to forge a special friendship.

Indulekha was the first to arrive in Singapore and had joined her Singapore-born husband's family in their regular activities at the SNM. "My children enjoy attending the classes here and mingling with the others; my daughter who first came here at age two is now 23 and she's teaching the small children today. I made friends with the other two ladies in the SNM and we became close, like a family; we share our problems, we share our happiness, we share ideas with the older ladies. During the Chathayam festivities, this feels like our ancestral home, so much so that we don't even want to go back to India for those celebrations. We started to dress alike even, and became like sisters. The bonding feels great and we even have activities outside of the SNM."

For Sneha, the friendship was life-changing. "I had been in Singapore for 10 years before I first came to the SNM. I had no interaction with anyone in that time. My mother-in-law's friend had 'forced' me to visit the SNM one day, saying I'll make a lot of friends here. When my Singaporean husband visited the SNM with me, he renewed friendships with his childhood friends, including the husbands of my two friends. I am very happy about that, this feels like home. It's as though the three of us have one mind, we have the same wavelength and we have great teamwork. Onam celebrations means being at the SNM to us. We'll even discuss our Onam attire two months ahead, to dress alike and match everything. I cannot imagine what I'd be without the SNM. There is a huge difference in me – from the first 10 years and now; I used to be serious, now I'm jovial; I was always at home before and interacting only with my children and husband, but now I go shopping with my friends. I appreciate the big exposure I had after coming to the SNM, so when I became a Singapore citizen five years ago, I immediately signed up for membership. I became a voluntary Malayalam language teacher here."

Indu Suresh had been attending the SNM events since 1998, and says she will never miss its Onam and Chathayam events. "It's the homely atmosphere here," she reasons, and

Indu Suresh, Sneha and Indulekha

adds, "Our children have also become very close, we are like one family. The children have formed their own group; they play soccer together, they go out together on Sundays, they have meals. Sometimes we don't even know that they have made their plans to meet and go out. I hope this friendship in the second generation continues, I am happy they are continuing the friendship."

"This friendship is priceless, and our children's friendship too; I get goose-bumps thinking about it. It will grow stronger over the years. It is all the Guru's blessings – he gave us the unity," Sneha adds.

Indulekha highlights the positive traits their children have gained from the Guru's values upheld by SNM. "It makes us a better person, and our children also. They learn the Guru's teachings – they learn about their own religion and how to respect other religions – that's very important. My son even represented the SNM in an Inter-Religious talk last year when my husband was out of town. They also see the old folks at the SNM Nursing Home and learn about palliative care," Indulekha relates. "Every weekend we look forward to coming to the SNM. I can't imagine life without the SNM," Indulekha quips.

"Even when there is no event, we come to the SNM to help others in their activities. It's our second home," Indu Suresh concludes.

In conversation with Naleeza Ebrahim

Giving & Growing

Moving Forward

Artist – Mdm, Ong Ah Kiow
Resident of SNM Home

"The Happiness of another that is my happiness; one's own joy is another's joy; this is the guiding principle. That action which is good for one person should bring happiness to another."

"Empower through Education, Strength through organization, Prosperity through industry"

Sree Narayana Guru

Getting back through Giving

Swapna Dayanandan

Take this as an opportunity to give back; it's a privilege and you should be very honoured. And by doing it, you will be an example to the younger generations, so that the children and grandchildren of members will come forward to serve in future." Those were the words that propelled Swapna Dayanandan to become the President of the Sree Narayana Mission (SNM) in 2011.

She remembers her father giving her that advice soon after she was approached by senior members to join the SNM's Executive Committee and serve as President. "They said, 'Your parents have given a lot to the SNM, so why not you?' and since it was difficult to say, 'No,' to them, I shared it with my father and he encouraged me," Swapna shares.

She herself was also inclined to accept the task as she had fond memories of the SNM and its activities that she had taken part in from childhood. Taking on the responsibility of leading the SNM was a daunting prospect at first, but she overcame her misgivings, "It's never a one-man show, it's teamwork. So, I tapped on my team, on the staff, and I asked questions. I reminded myself to be humble, knowing that people have been running the SNM for a long time – 'Don't be cocky' I reminded myself all the time".

What also helped was the fact that she had been doing a great deal of consultations for the public sector in her own profession. "I was familiar with what fundamentals an organisation should have, the Standard Operational Procedures, the external stakeholder requirements. I wanted to help to articulate the next curve for the SNM, to go forward."

She harked back to the pioneering spirit of the early members, "They were connected to the ground, they had

foresight. So, the SNM should always be relevant, even to non-members – we can be more inclusive." That sentiment also has its foundations in Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy of treating all men equally, as one, without discrimination.

While most of her peers with demanding professions would find it hard to commit to community service, with some perhaps even eschewing it, Swapna extols its beneficial impact on one's professional development. "I have grown professionally from my experiences in the SNM Exco. I have learnt the sensitivities of different stakeholders, understand why people ask the questions they do, learnt how to reassure people so that they walk away feeling they have been heard. I have also become deeper in my people engagement, more sensitive, more understanding."

On the personal front, Swapna has also reaped nothing but benefits. "You can never satisfy everybody, but I have gained good friendships, good networks – people I wouldn't have known. I have no regrets," Swapna enthuses.

In conversation with Naleeza Ebrahim

Growing Spiritually through Volunteering

Foo Say Thye

He was an institutional stock dealer, caught up in the fast pace of the stock market every day, always on his toes, and with a short temper to match.

It all changed one day for Foo Say Thye. He had an epiphany during a friend's wedding in 1994. "My friend was a volunteer with disabled people and had invited all the beneficiaries to his wedding. I felt inspired when I saw them at the wedding. I realised that what he was doing was meaningful, and interesting," he explained.

That was a pivotal day for Say Thye. "I felt that my life had been meaningless. I wanted to help people. So I told my friend that I wanted to be a volunteer as well." Say Thye's friend advised him to contact the National Council of Social Services for training. As part of its orientation course, Say Thye visited the Sree Narayana Mission (SNM). There was no turning back for him after that.

The Sree Narayana Volunteers group had been formed in 1992 as a team who visit residents in the SNM Home for the Aged every weekend. Say Thye joined them by the end of 1994.

But it was a rough start. "In the stock market, you have to think quickly and make quick decisions, so your temper is also quick. After becoming a volunteer, I had to change – because initially we had a lot of misunderstandings since the volunteers come from all walks of life. Monday to Friday, I have my quick temper and then on Saturday and Sunday, I have to change myself. I learnt a lot."

Say Thye also grew spiritually, learning to harness the Guru's grace. 'When I started, we only had eight volunteers. I was a new volunteer then and didn't know much about the Guru. One day, I just started praying in front of his picture at the SNM and asked for help to get more volunteers. I said to him, 'If you want me to help you, you must help me.' By our tenth anniversary, we had 300 volunteers. Whatever I wish for started to come true slowly. I feel that when you look upon the Guru, he will help you."

Say Thye now helms SN Volunteers. His genuine wish to serve the residents at the SNM Home keeps him committed, "If you don't go and visit them, the elderly will miss you. So we must find ways to sustain our activities. The benefit that we get is greater than what we are doing. People think that we are doing a lot but the benefit that we get is a lot. My temper was the first thing to change. It has also turned me in to a person with a better character. I am more approachable, I have more friends, more contacts, more people come to you for help, and people trust you more and are willing to help you more when they see you helping people. Even though you don't start volunteering with this in mind, but this is the result. I am lucky. I am glad I went this way, for otherwise, I'd be a different person. I like the way I am now. Even my whole family is doing this. My son and daughter are the second generation running this group of SN Volunteers."

In conversation with Naleeza Ebrahim

Glimpses of SNM Activities

Photo 1: 70th anniversary cake cutting ceremony

Photo 2: Birthday Celebrations - Residents

Photo 3: Care Master Table Tennis Game

Photo 4: Celebrating Chinese New Year

Photo 5: Celebrating Deepavali

Photo 6: SNM resident, Mdm Yeo's 107th Birthday

Photo 7: Residents with National Youth Council Volunteers

Photo 8: Orange Ribbon Walk with President Halimah Yacob

Photo 9: Celebrating Pongal festival in traditional attire

Photo 10: Residents @ the sensory gardens

Photo 11: Student volunteers from Raffles Institution

Photo 12: 70th year anniversary, prayer

Photo 13: SNM 70th anniversasry celebration

Photo 14: Celebrating Christmas

Changing Landscapes

Empowering Lives

Artist – Resident of SNM Home

A Love Story

Ravi Subramanian

There is no me without her, just like, there is no her without me", says Mr. Velappan Vellaiyan with his eyes lit, looking intently at his newly betrothed, Ms. Savithiri Kaliappan. They are sitting close to each other on his bed at the Sree Narayana Mission (SNM) Nursing Home.

"I was lost in life, but found meaning when I started visiting him" responds Ms. Savithiri thoughtfully, holding his hands.

These may read like lines from the romantic Mills & Boon novels. Novels people read, enjoy and possibly forget.

However, Mr. Velappan's romantic story is not meant to be forgotten, for it is real, as it signifies a societal change, one of empowering individuals to lead dignified lives. A transformation that makes our community more compassionate and inclusive.

Firstly, this is a story of two elders, both over 70 years, coming together to help each other. Something rare.

Secondly, the hero, a wheel-chair bound resident in a nursing home, is motivated to walk when he finds purpose in life. Something miraculous.

Thirdly, the couple decide to get married with the hero moving to a home of their own, to lead a life of dignity.

> *"In the three years that I have been the CEO of this nursing home, we have said goodbye to our residents when they pass on. Today we are saying goodbye to a resident who is moving on to a new phase in his life. This is a rare occurrence. So each time such an occurrence takes place, it's for us that one starfish moment and we celebrate it."*
>
> *S. Devendran, CEO, Sree Narayana Mission Nursing Home*

Something blissful.

For SNM, it's a new first. An incredible experience in supporting a resident to fulfil his dreams and empowering the couple to lead a life on their own terms.

And the upshot, they are re-integrating back into the community. Can the script get any better?

It all starts in the 60's. "We are buddies from the same kampung. I remember him as an energetic and charming young person" recalls Ms. Savithiri, nostalgically thinking of her Silat Road home and Mr. Velappan's Henderson locality.

Mr. Velappan, a first-generation immigrant, is a movie buff. "I have even watched English and Mandarin movies without understanding anything, in my younger days". Tamil film songs were his best friend.

They go their ways and lose touch. She marries a Ceylonese Tamil and he marries a girl of his choice. Their families grow, she has a son and he, a daughter. He works as a helper at coffee shops and at construction sites. She works as an administrative assistant in schools.

Mr. Velappan and his wife separate. He stayed with his married daughter initially, but things do not work out well. He suffers a bad fall. And the struggle shows on him.

Serendipity brings them back together. In 2004, while

participating in a skills training workshop he meets his old kampung friend.

Recollecting, Ms. Savithiri says "I was shocked. He was very weak, not the youthful, energetic person that I had seen". They reminiscence about their childhood days over a coffee and the conversation drifts to the current situation. She realises he is alone, struggling with a weak body and painful knees.

Her kind-hearted instinct takes over. She begins meeting him regularly.

Ms. Savithiri helps him through his lowest point when he was bedridden and hospitalized. He recalls emotionally "She saved my life, she is my god, I would not have survived without her".

In 2008, Mr.Velappan moves into SNM when his health worsens. Ms. Savithiri lives in her Bukit Merah rental flat by herself after her husband passes away in 2009. Her son is estranged. She visits Mr. Velappan regularly, despite the one-hour bus ride from her home.

Mr. Vellapan says "She was the only visitor. She would cook my favourite dishes, buy vadai, kerapu, nasi goreng". He would eagerly wait for her visits. With her continual affection and SNM's care, his health improves. Their bond grows deeper.

They decide to take the next bold step, to get married.

"I am excited to start this new life with him. What else do we need other than each other's company in our twilight years" Ms. Savithiri says with conviction when probed. Adding on, she declares "I will take him home, cook for him, take care of him. He has simple needs. I intend to go out with him and enjoy our last years together".

SNM supports their decision after reviewing the case carefully. It is made easier, as the staff have been working on his health and see an improvement. Ms. Illamaran Kalaiselvi, from the social work team, becomes a mentor guide to them. She has been supporting him for close to a year.

"In this true-life story, the lovely moments are not counted by age, but by the wrinkles and affection. This is a saga of two individuals, trying to fathom the meaning of their life with a steely determination to walk back into the community."

Friday, April 12th, 2019 arrives. It is their big day, their wedding.

SNM puts its weight behind the wedding. The staff rises to the occasion. It is a family wedding in their own home.

It is an elegant affair with the couple donning traditional attires, taking their marriage vows. Dignitaries grace the occasion and join the celebrations. Cake cutting, heartfelt toasts, buffet lunch, photo shoots and trishaw rides with Cycling Without Age Singapore to a nearby temple, all culminating in a happy farewell, as they are chauffeured to their 'new' home.

There are tears of joy. Mr. Velappan's best friend Ms. Vanitha, a SNM resident, cries "You were my best friend. I will miss you now".

The couple's newly spruced up home is ready to welcome them.

They are aware life will present its challenges, and marriage is only an initial step. But they are wiser, for they have been through it all. Their needs are simple. They understand each other. And they will make it happen for they have shown they are alchemists.

In this true-life story, the lovely moments are not counted by age, but by the wrinkles and affection. This is a saga of two individuals, trying to fathom the meaning of their life with a steely determination to walk back into the community.

#1747 (Level 1/Room 7/Bed47) will be immortalized in the walls of SNM. This is where a new life began, "The Love Story of SNM", a shining example of human triumph.

We wish the lovely couple a blissful life. We will continue to support. We want Shakespeare's words to come true in their lives - "All's Well, That Ends Well".

Empowering Residents

Ravi Subramanian

The operative ethos of SNM is "This Nursing Home is the Home of our residents; we the employees are here to support them in their Home".

Towards this, ideas, initiatives are discussed and implemented regularly at SNM.

The establishment of a Resident Committee (RC) is one such initiative. The purpose is to empower the residents by having them play a greater role in the way Nursing Home is run.

The residents chair run the committee. They meet regularly and make decisions.

There are various sub committees that are chaired by other residents. These are formed based on the interest levels for certain activities amongst the residents. Dance Club, Creative Arts Club, Gardening Club are a few examples.

SNM staff supports with the implementation of these recommendations.

"I, too am a resident of a caregiving home like you and me and we are the best resource to help the management recognize why we are now residents of caregiving homes away from home." says Major Ishwar Lall, a resident of SNM to other residents during a meeting.

Major Lall is the Vice Chairman of the RC.

Major Lall further elaborates "Living in caregiving homes requires us to make some adjustments. I found that there are residents who require more attention than others and it is necessary at times to intervene and make other residents feel and understand".

Major Lall and the other RC members shared a similar message when close to 100 participants from various social services organization attend a forum organized by NCSS. This was held in Jan 2019 at SNM. Some of the participants are from a specially set up work group team formed as a part of an "Empowering Seniors Project" initiative. This project is a two-year effort to identify the way seniors can be empowered. This was established in recognition of the fact that, in an aging society, the empowerment of seniors is no longer an option but a necessity.

For SNM, all these are very reassuring, it is taking the right steps.

The residents are supporting, actively engaged and want very much to be a part of this process. The sharing of these practises as a learning journey to the work group members from the NCSS initiated project is seen as an endorsement.

So how does this RC help?

It enables residents to age in place with activities and outings of their choice, rooms and corridors maintained to meet their needs, food menu tailored to their inputs and other aspects that impact their daily life.

The result, the quality of their life is enhanced, their aspirations are fulfilled, just as the way it happens at an individual's home.

SNM's pursuit is to make its Nursing Home a "Home away from Home" for its residents. Empowering the residents to lead dignified lives is a way forward. Resident Committee is one solution. SNM's pursuit is not a dream, it is becoming a reality!

Monthly Resident Committee Meeting

Residents' Dance Club Led by: RC Chairperson, Mr. K Ramachandran

Residents' Creative Art Club Led by: RC Member - Mdm Pungavanam

Resident Gardening Club Led by: RC Member, Mdm Vanita

Changing Landscapes

Forging Partnerships

Artist – Mdm. Chia Seng Noi, Resident of SNM Home

Residents Enjoying Trishaw Rides with Cycling Without Age Singapore Volunteers.
Credit: Cycling Without Age Singapore for the photos

Forging Partnerships

SNM has always been strong in building partnerships, and our brand positioning statement underscores this strength. The social needs of the underprivileged are varied and often go beyond the assistance they receive, requiring the assistance of multiple agencies and community organisations. This is where SNM leverages on our strong partnerships, where we connect our beneficiaries to further interventions by our partners, or where beneficiaries are directed to our programmes, where relevant.

Therefore, partnerships and collaborations with government agencies, grassroots organisations, other charities, welfare organisations and volunteers are critical. Adopting this "many-hands-on-deck" approach ensures that interventions administered to the vulnerable are not done in isolation, but rather, in collaboration with other agencies. Opening our doors to other organisations also means that information and resources are shared, allowing us to tap on innovative practices and technologies – all of which, ultimately benefits the vulnerable.

With these overlapping safety nets in place, help can be delivered to all who need it in a timely manner. Strong partnerships, like the ones SNM have with Lighting Hearts Lighting Homes (LHLH), Cycling Without Age (CWA), Project Smile, the Sri Senpaga Vinayagar Temple (SSVT) and the Roman Catholic Church of Our Lady Star of the Sea ensure that the vulnerable do not fall through the cracks, and that multiple interventions are put in place to complement and address multiple needs.

This comprehensive approach to helping the vulnerable within our community remains as SNM's core strength, we will continue to build and leverage on partnerships to expand our reach, and empower the vulnerable to lead dignified lives.

A Socio-Spiritual Community Partnership

Ravi Subramanian

Any community outreach initiative that improves the emotional wellbeing of elderly residents is laudable. And, if it fosters social consciousness and inclusivity, especially the youth, it must be encouraged. And, if it is simple and sustainable, it becomes priceless. It must be supported.

One such initiative is the monthly temple visit, a collaborative effort between Sri Senpaga Vinayagar Temple (SSVT) at Ceylon Road and Sree Narayana Mission (SNM).

These are socio-spiritual visits to the temple, wherein wheel-chair bound elderly residents from SNM are hosted by volunteers from SSVT. The residents, numbering around ten to twelve, perform a circumambulation of the temple, followed by prayers and blessings. Later, the residents enjoy a simple temple cooked vegetarian meal in the company of volunteers.

The residents experience the richness and vibrancy of the temple with all their senses through colours, rituals, smells and sounds. Some get to maintain the practices they may have followed when more able-bodied. There are opportunities to interact with other worshippers facilitating a profound social cohesion.

The participating youth volunteers also benefit. They gain insights from the life lessons of elders, realise the richness of the local culture, understand the values of respect and compassion, and learn about eldercare.

These visits have impacted the residents positively. A brief study that analysed the mood, sleep patterns and the distress levels of the participating residents were encouraging. The feedback from the surveys reflects it. Here's a sample:

The program's success and consistency come from its simplicity. There is little financial investment. Families and professionals find it convenient to participate, as it is held once a month on a Sunday for about 2 hours.

Volunteer - Feel a sense of fulfilment and happiness following the monthly visits.

Resident - After coming back from temple, I am having a peaceful mind now. I feel happy praying to God and look forward to the next temple visit.

Staff - Whenever they go to the temple, they feel happy emotionally and spiritually. They are excited to go back. They will ask us when their next visit will be. They really want to go and pray every month.

Naturally, this collaborative work was recognises.

SSVT won a Special Merit Award for the "Most Creative Community Partnerships" at the Asian Elderly Care Awards, 2019, organised by Managing Elderly Care, Asia's Premier Learning Conference and Expo for professionals, managers and organisations to Get and Serve Elderly Clients. This coveted award will be presented in March 2020.

In conclusion, a community collaboration of this kind helps to build an inclusive society. It is worth replicating. In this partnership, SNM benefited immensely. SSVT was the reason for its success.

Spreading Festive Cheer to Underprivileged Families

Ravi Subramanian

Festivals are cultural manifestations of community bonding, one of shared feelings, one of coming together to celebrate. It is a pinnacle of human bonding. So, when a partnership emerges that spreads this spirit of festivity to the underprivileged, it is the pinnacle of both human spirit and human bonding.

This is the spirit behind the Lighting Heart Lighting Homes (LHLH) - Sree Narayana Mission Singapore (SNM) partnership, launched in 2017.

For LHLH, it all started when a group of like-minded individuals had a calling. A call to make a small difference in the lives of underprivileged elderly and families. And a door opened, the festival of lights was around the corner.

These benevolent individuals came up with a novel way of spreading festive cheer. They decided to lighten up the festive moods of these underprivileged by visiting them and by giving festive goodies and "ang bao's".

Their initial target was modest - raise $2000, help 20 families. But the response from the donors was overwhelming. The team realised that many people in the community wanted to help, but needed a platform for this. Thus, LHLH was born. This was 2013.

They ended up sprucing several elderly homes, helping 80 households, 60 migrant workers and 28 boys at the Ramakrishnan Mission during its maiden initiative.

Today, LHLH continues to provide a platform for those who want to make a difference and connects them with those who will benefit from the help extended.

SNM's mission is to serve with care and compassion, regardless of race, religion and language, all anchored on the profound philosophies of Sree Narayana Guru. It has been serving the community for 70 long years.

SNM understands community welfare work is a team work. It has been building partnerships assiduously.

In all these partnerships, the end goal is the same - let each member of the community lead a dignified life, empower each member to live a life to their full potential; where required, support to make this a reality.

And, there are many paths and each path can have many stages to reach this end goal. Once a path is identified, it is like a relay race; the partners hand over the batons. Each partner brings their best into the play. There are two winners in this race, the community member and the community.

So how does this SNM/LHLH partnership work?

LHLH benefits from SNM's infrastructure to raise funds and to deliver longer term support to the needy. SNM benefits from LHLH's last mile connectivity with the underprivileged family.

Once LHLH identifies a family, SNM brings its resources and taps into its own partner network to deliver succour to the family. There is a hand holding for a period of time.

A partnership of this kind lights hearts, lights homes and lights community. The ultimate winner is mankind!

Feeling the Wind in their Hair

Ravi Subramanian

Is there a partner who could run a programme where seniors face no social isolation, and get an opportunity to feel the wind in their hair?

Yes, there is. It is Cycling Without Age Singapore (CWA) under the Temasek Foundation Cares Moving Generations programme. The Sree Narayana Mission Singapore (SNM) - CWA partnership was facilitated by the Agency of Integrated Care (AIC). The MOU was signed in 2017.

This is a programme that gives youth opportunities to engage with seniors in an active setting, allowing them to have a meaningful dialogue with them and to learn from them about the past. The settings are the one-hour trishaw rides piloted by trained youth volunteers from CWA.

At SNM, a trishaw waits on the weekends. This is an opportunity for the residents to dress up, to go out, to snack, to enjoy nature, to wave to the gallery, to engage the community, to chat with the youth, and to walk down the memory lane. It's opportunities galore, and it means a lot to the residents!

The vintage three-wheeler trishaws with their conspicuous red coloured seats have become a common sight in Yishun, especially on weekends. They can be spotted at the parks, near the lakes or the play areas with regally seated and well-groomed elderly passengers, some sporting floppy hats, being safely pedalled by cheerful youngsters. These are some real selfie, wefie photo moments and the youthful volunteers revel in that!

In fact, a buzz was created when the 107 year-old SNM resident, Mdm. Yeo Iu went on a CWA trishaw ride. Apparently, a world record for the most senior resident taking a ride on a trishaw. A truly amazing feat!

There is synergy in this partnership. The partners have a shared mission and their values are aligned. Both are exploring ways to improve quality of life for elders and empower them to lead dignified lives.

For youth volunteers, these trishaw rides are a bridge that connects the past with the future. SNM is the best place to put this to practice.

And it shows. The partnership has blossomed. The number of rides has grown. More volunteers have joined, more are getting trained and elders are enjoying more rides than before. People are noticing it.

Happy memories create happy association. Owen, a regular volunteer from CWA is a shining example. He has developed a close bond with some of the residents. They seek each other and the camaraderie they enjoy during these scenic rides speaks volumes of what these rides can accomplish.

It's not only feeling that wind in the hair, it's also experiencing that enduring joy of life!!

Let this community keep growing. It benefits all.

Empowering Dignified Lives

Artist – Mr. K Ramachandran,
Resident of SNM Home

Diversifying Community Services

In this last 70 years that SNM has been in existence, its focus has always been on helping the less privileged in the community and it started out in Sembawang, which included initiatives such as flag days to raise funds to provide bursaries for children, going to the school in the vicinity.

It included tuition classes and even for a short time, meals-on-wheels programme which was quite ahead of its time back then. Since then the community interventions offered by SNM has evolved over time and in keeping with the initiatives launched by the government and the needs of the community.

Today, we offer a slew of community programmes such as the 'Share-a-Pot' programme and we were one of the first to launch this is the Sembawang area in collaboration with the Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, which initiated this wonderful intervention.

From the modest beginnings, 'Share-a-Pot' today is shared at two locations, Farrer Park and Sembawang area and the number of beneficiaries who are subscribing to the programme has increased and we believe this will continue to grow higher in the years to come. 'Share-a-Pot' is one of the initiatives, which is targeted at the elderly, providing them the platform to learn about the nutritional needs of the elderly and to also socialise and stay active.

After a long time, we have moved away from bursaries to proving financial assistance to students pursuing tertiary education in institutions of higher learning like the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) and Polytechnics in courses of studies, which are of relevance to the eldercare sector, including nursing, occupational therapy and physio therapy.

Last year, we had two recipients of the financial assistance and this year, more students stand to benefit from this programme.

SNM believes in partnerships and collaborations to ensure that the web of interventions is robust and varied enough to cater to the needs of the community and ensure that no one gets left behind. One such intervention is the 'Smile with Me' programme, which is targeted at single mothers, in collaboration

with Project Smile. A very successful island wide outreach programme called Lighting Hearts, Lighting Homes, the sow in being to harvest from this outreach programme, people who can benefit from this programme. In 2018, a hundred such potential beneficiaries were identified from the 2018 LHLH exercise.

Initiatives like the Community Network for Seniors, new initiatives that the government has launched and we are working closely with the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) and Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) to see how we can offer this at both in Race Course Road at the SNM Care Centre, as well as in Yishun at the SNM Nursing Home. Ministry of Social and Family Development has also announced that they are putting into place, an initiative to create platforms for interaction by the various organisations operating in a particular precinct.

Beneficiary to a Volunteer

Ravi Subramanian

"The gem cannot be polished without friction, nor man perfected without trials" says a proverb.

Life is the test bed where these trials are conducted continually. attitude is its tool and character is the surface that gets polished, until that precious gem reveals itself as a gem of a person! This gem of life begins to radiate that true colour and brilliance. A facet change that not only makes that life purposeful but also serves as a beacon for others to follow.

In these trials, SNM as a social good organization, serves as the laboratory. A lab, where these trials could be shaped to polish those angles of life that make that gem brilliant. The angles of empowerment to lead dignified lives.

The 38-year-old, Ms. H is one such gem from the SNM community programmes laboratory.

Raising a family of seven young children in one room is handful by itself. As a single mother with little support from the extended family, the situation gets more challenging. And to top it, if the health conditions does not allow that bread winner to hold onto a full-time job, life is very daunting.

This is the situation with Ms. H. It requires an enormous resilience.

SNM reaches out to these families, as community care provider. It has several community outreach programs to help these less privileged families. These social assistance initiatives not only help to tide over the difficult phases but also equip them with skills to make the best out of what life presents. It takes them on a path that enables them to lead a life of dignity.

Ms. H has been a beneficiary of some these Community programmes, such as the "Lend a Hand", "Smile with You" and the monthly "Heartwarmers 100=50" programme.

The "Lend a Hand" programme aims to uplift the well-being of the household through regular contact, befriending and support. The monthly "Heartwarmers 100=50" programme, held on a monthly basis, carries a range of household provisions for the family to select and take. These alleviate part of their financial burden. This also allows SNM to engage with the beneficiaries to understand and address their ongoing concerns.

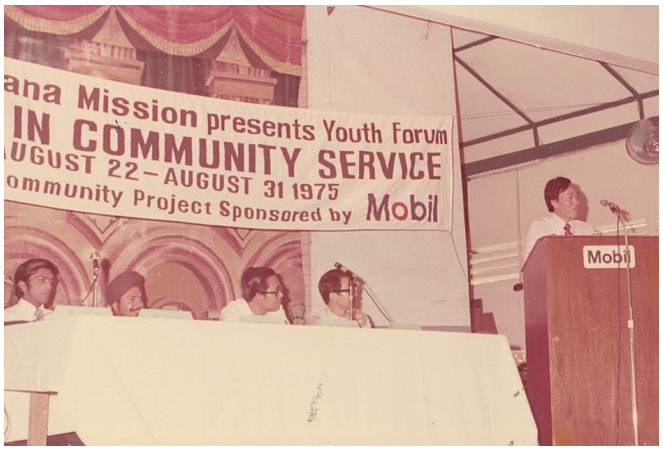
Recognizing Ms. H's family situation, SNM encouraged her to enrol in "Smile with You" programme. This programme empowers participants to understand their own life challenges, become financially prudent and, learn new skills for income earning opportunities. Vocational training along with Arts and crafts skill development programmes that were more suited for home-based employment were offered to her.

Since then, Ms.H has been given homebased assignments. She is part of the single mum team participating in a project to make hand painted door gifts for SNM 70th Anniversary.

Ms. H is establishing her groove steadily. A regular at SNM, one can discern a higher level of enthusiasm. The best news, she is on the pathway to be a trainer for the Project Smile art and craft activities.

She may have been a beneficiary and may have to be supported for some more time. However, there is a new-found confidence in her. She wants to engage more actively. She is keen carry this transformation forward, there is a desire to help others from the community facing similar situations.

This is what empowerment does. The rough, unpolished stone as we may see them is just an illusion, they are real gems who will adorn this community as jewels of empowerment. They make our community "A garden of empowered jewels"!

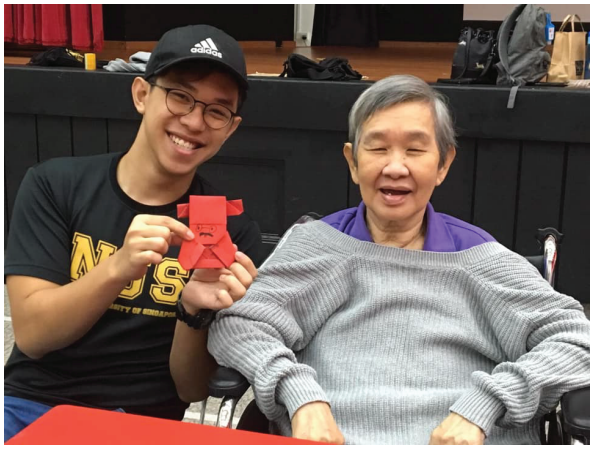


Forum - Youth in Community Service

Youth Train-in Camp, 1975

Resident enjoying an outdoor trip with a Youth Volunteer

Youth Volunteers chit chatting with the Residents



Youth Volunteer engaging the Residents in Activities

Changing Landscapes

Passing the baton, Voices of the youth

Artist – Mr. Oh Lye Seng, Resident of SNM Home

The Next Generation
Foo Ci En

Being a volunteer for nine years is long by any account. But for nineteen-year-old Foo Ci En, that equates to half her lifetime. "When I was in Primary Four, I started going with my parents for their volunteer work every Saturday. I've been volunteering since then because of my parents' influence." Her parents are Foo Say Thye and Teo Ling Ling, part of the Sree Narayana Volunteers group.

In fact, the spirit of volunteering forms the very foundation of their family, "My parents met and got married when they were volunteering at the Sree Narayana Mission (SNM) Home for the Aged Sick," she reveals. "So, from young I've been going with them to the SNM Home for the Aged Sick. And I really enjoyed it – it's very meaningful."

The initial interest instilled in the young and impressionable Ci En could have easily fizzled out as she grew older and developed other pursuits. Instead, her childhood passion for volunteering only strengthened and became more entrenched with maturity and the passage of time. "When I was a young kid I didn't understand what I was doing – I just followed my parents and felt happy doing it. But now I realise that it helps people and makes their day. And so, I want to continue. I feel the elderly will not enjoy their Saturday if we don't hold our activities for them. Even on days when I am not well, I will still go down. I feel like it's a mission that I have to carry out".

Nowadays, Ci En is a more frequent face than her parents within the SNV group. "I became an active volunteer in 2015 and since my parents started other volunteer groups, I am now more active than my parents at SNV." She is currently on the SNV Committee, creating more programmes that will bring joy to the elderly residents of the Home, "If you don't go for one Saturday, the following week the elderly will ask you why you were not there." Thus, she persists in ensuring that the SNV's objectives are achieved even when challenges arise, "Passion is needed for volunteer work, passion is important to sustain this – to continue to do this on weekends instead of enjoying the weekend with your family."

Perhaps, that is why families tend to be roped into volunteering – it allows them to be together while the volunteers pursue their passion, which happens with a lot of the SNV members. In fact, Ci En's brother is also part of the SNV Committee and is equally committed as her. This practice of 'family volunteers' holds a deep significance for Ci En, "Parents are imparting values to their children from young when they do this," she reasons. Ci En's parents had patiently done that with the two siblings and Ci En hopes to extend the tradition, "I will continue even when I go to University, and after I marry, I will bring my husband along to volunteer and later, my children. We will continue into the third generation."

In conversation with Naleeza Ebrahim

Growing up with SNM

Aathira Jeyadev

Having practically grown up as a 'child of the Mission', Aathira Jeyadev firmly believes that the Sree Narayana Mission (SNM) can have something for everyone, and mean something to everyone.

Aathira's connection with the SNM can be traced to her grandparents, Mr and Mrs Unnithan, who were among its early members. Her sprightly grandmother still actively participates in its events. Thus, it is no surprise that the motivation to serve the SNM was seeded in young Aathira, naturally and unconsciously, in the course of the time she spent there. She recalls, "I have grown up, and grown with the SNM. From enjoying the games as a child, I started organising them and, and then performing for the events. Every time we went to the SNM, I saw the elderly at the SNM Home for the Aged Sick, and always wanted to interact with them. It was always at the back of my mind. So, after my 'A' Level Examinations, I asked my father whether I could volunteer at the SNM. That's how I ended up serving at its Dementia Care Centre first. I realise that being there for the elderly is something that I enjoy". After that encouraging start, Aathira has taken on other roles in the SNM.

This deeper involvement with the organisation has opened Aathira's eyes to the scope of its activities. "I now realise that the SNM caters to single parent families, low income groups, and others – not just the elderly. So, anyone with a heart to volunteer can come to the SNM and find something that they can do," she shares.

Aathira feels that all this bodes well for the SNM's ability to attract more likeminded people, and, thus, continue being an integral part of the evolving Singaporean society, as it has done since its very foundation. "The SNM has the facilities and the people to do much more, and I would like to see it grow in that way. There are more youth coming in. We recently had a Youth Symposium called SOWOKE, as part of the 70th anniversary celebrations, and we heard the youth on their take regarding volunteering and service. So, we are also learning what drives today's youth, to stay relevant."

That includes staying relevant to the layman, who should be able to view the SNM as a place they can enjoy being at. "It

is nice to have events that can attract the everyday person to chill out at the SNM, like boardgames, etc." These are, indeed, the plans in the pipeline for the SNM's new premises at Race Course Road, where activities can be held without intruding on the operations at the Nursing Home in Yishun. "I am looking forward to hanging out at the SNM in Race Course Road; we can have workshops, the guys can plan soccer games, we can hold one-day events to attract people," Aathira enthuses, as she envisions the future of the SNM.

In conversation with Naleeza Ebrahim

Connecting with Values

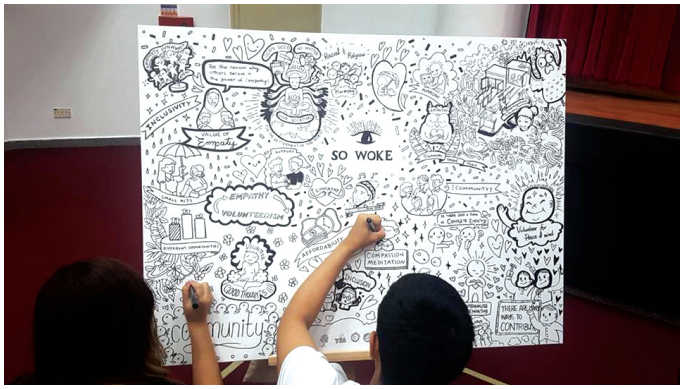
Anusha Senan

During her late teens, Anusha had witnessed her mother keenly serving the Sree Narayana Mission (SNM) as Treasurer of its Executive Committee. When Anusha was roped in to help in some of the SNM's activities, little did she foresee that it would spark a lifelong passion.

"Mum was active and would let me know when things were happening at the SNM and when I joined her at those events, people would tell me to get involved. So I got involved. It was fun, I like fun – activities and parties and events – and I would organise the games. Rather than just being there with not much to do, at least by organising the games, I was involved," Anusha recalls.

Even while overseas for her Masters degree, Anusha held the SNM in her heart. "I stayed connected through my mother. Many of the people in the SNM are family friends as well and they encouraged me to be more involved." Anusha did precisely that when she returned to Singapore. She joined the Executive Committee of the SNM to focus on its Youth Committee, "Because prior to that, the Youth Committee did not actually comprise youths. I started out to get the youth more aware of and connected to the SNM and I feel fulfilled that we have been able to do that. Our next step is to get more youths aware of SNM at a national level. We have a good platform because we are a secular organisation where people can come and share values. I want to see the SNM as a thought leader. This is a very exciting phase."

Anusha's involvement stems from her deep connection with the SNM. "My Mum's values and the Guru's values are aligned, so I can connect with the values – that is, it doesn't matter what your race or religion is so long as it makes a better man, and the values of humility, respect, compassion. All these, I see in the SNM. And as we come together, we pass on these values subconsciously. At our meetings, I see how the committee members handle issues, how they treat each other, how we have a minute of silence before the meetings. It's recognising that what we are doing is greater than our personal issues. We don't verbalise it, but the SNM allows us to do all this. Anyone who comes to the SNM walks away knowing that people are getting together to do things for a higher purpose."



She is motivated by the result of their efforts, "People have heard of the SNM but not met many young people from there. We are now attending more national events and people are becoming aware of us. Our forefathers had set up the SNM, and we are aware of its values, and this shapes us. I will be involved with the SNM for as long as I can contribute to it one way or other, even if I live as long as Ravee Uncle (Raveendran). I like being a part of the SNM, I like the people, and I like the vibe – it's very positive and calming.

In conversation with Naleeza Ebrahim

Youth in Action

SNM Youth Committee

The Sree Narayana Mission Youth Committee (SNMYC) has been increasingly involved in the welfare services and community outreach programmes of Sree Narayana Mission.

In 2016, together with the SNM Welfare Committee, the SNMYC helped to set up and deliver the monthly Lend-a-Hand programme. Meant to provide food, financial, emotional, and psychological support to single parent families, the programme saw huge success in achieving its objectives of getting struggling individuals and families back on their feet.

In October 2018, together with other youth groups in the country, SNMYC developed and organised the inaugural So Woke Symposium. It was well-attended by youth volunteers, members of the public and SNM members. The participants explored the themes of Identity in ageing and social inclusion, the myths of mental health, racial and religious harmony, and elitism and social mobility.

Good friendships were developed during the various volunteering activities. Finding a common space and interest was conducive in drawing us together activity after activity. Like minds to share thoughts and desires with combined with a nurturing atmosphere helped us bring our community building ideas into life. There was a mutual understanding and appreciation that no reason is bigger or better than the other. As long as the effort and time is taken to volunteer, it is noteworthy.

The welcome, appreciation and acknowledgement in policies and plans by the elders and greater society gave us the realisation that our actions are playing a part in the betterment of society. This gave us further motivation beyond every activity.

SNM has a good and welcoming space that youth respond well to. With our clean governance, transparency, and an intellectual yet empathetic approach, our youth and guests often comment on how comfortable and freed they feel to think about their impact on society and share causes that they can empathise with.

We would like to do more regular events for the youth. We also see positive growth and learnings from collaborations with other youth organisations, and would like to see this continue.

Love of others is my happiness. Love that is mine is happiness for others. And so, truly, deeds that benefit me must be a cause for others' happiness too.

Stepping out of the Zone

Winnie Yong

She is not new to social services, having worked in the sector for several years, yet, Winne Yong found the brand of social service at SNM refreshingly different.

She had joined the Home's staff in 2018 to take charge of Volunteer Management but found herself doing much more than that. "The Mission is not only running a Home, it does a lot of community programmes and community engagement. It is not restricted to the elderly sector, so it's not like other Homes. It's even helping ITE students in their education," she recalls her initial surprise.

SNM provides bursaries for ITE students pursuing the nursing vocation, with the intention of channelling these students into the elderly care system in the Home. Winnie liaises with the students. "I feel it's meaningful; as I do the groundwork to reach out to these students and provide them the financial assistance for their studies, I feel that we are really doing something impactful in their lives because they can study without worrying about money," she elaborates.

Appreciating how SNM extends its services beyond the ordinary, Winnie is similarly inspired to go beyond the call of duty. "I don't see it as a single role, I don't only do volunteer recruitment and management, I step out of the zone to help in the community programmes, you see, an additional hand is always helpful. My work is Monday to Friday, but I am motivated to join the Saturday programmes for the elderly at Pek Kio Community Centre. These programmes are outreach services for the elderly who are not residents of SNM. "The elderly used to just sit in the parks or void decks but now they look forward to our programmes. When you see people being happy with your help and services, when they thank you and they get better, you feel that whatever you've done is worth it."

Volunteers play a critical role at SNM and Winnie acknowledges how they enrich its range and scope of activities. The volunteers are at the core of what SNM does, the time, effort and generosity they contribute is what allows SNM to help as many beneficiaries as they can. Annually, SNM organises a "Volunteers and Donors Appreciation Day", aimed at highlighting the generous contributions made by SNM's volunteers and donors.

Winnie also speaks for her fellow colleagues who also jumped in to help at the Volunteers and Donors Appreciation Day 2019, "The staff here appreciate what the volunteers are doing. We take on more, because we see how much effort the volunteers tirelessly contribute. Other staff put in their hearts to do the events and take on a different role; for example, we have finance people doing stage lighting, and HR staff doing ushering".

Winnie sees this extending into the future, "When beneficiaries are happy, we feel 'I want to do more for you, I want to do better for you'. We hope to help more people to age gracefully; to extend our branches to Chinatown, Ang Mo Kio and other places. And also to help more students, not just at ITE level but even at Secondary and Primary School levels".

SNM's way of doing things has become a personal principle for Winnie. "I look forward to stepping up to more roles. It makes a difference not just to my work but to my life."

In conversation with Naleeza Ebrahim

Malayalam Articles

Artist – Mdm Soon Soh Tee,
Resident of SNM Home

ദൈവ ദശകം

ശ്രീ നാരായണ ഗുരുദേവൻ

ദൈവമേ കാത്തുകൊൾകങ്ങു,
കൈവിടാതിങ്ങു ഞങ്ങളെ
നാവികൻ നീ ഭവാബ്ധിക്കോ-
രാവിവൻതോണി നിൻപദം

ഒന്നൊന്നായെണ്ണിയെണ്ണിത്തൊ-
ട്ടെണ്ണും പൊരുളടങ്ങിയാൽ
നിന്നിടും ദൃക്കുപോലുള്ളം
നിന്നിലസ്പന്ദമാകണം .

അന്നവസ്ത്രാദി മുട്ടാതെ
തന്നു രക്ഷിച്ചു ഞങ്ങളെ
ധന്യരാക്കുന്ന നീയൊന്നു
തന്നെ ഞങ്ങൾക്കു തമ്പുരാൻ.

ആഴിയും തിരയും കാറ്റും
ആഴവും പോലെ ഞങ്ങളും
മായയും നിൻ മഹിമയും
നീയുമെന്നുള്ളിലാകണം

നീയല്ലോ സൃഷ്ടിയും സ്രഷ്ടാ
വായതും സൃഷ്ടിജാലവും
നീയല്ലോ ദൈവമേ , സൃഷ്ടി-
യ്ക്കുള്ള സാമഗ്രിയായതും .

നീയല്ലോ മായയും മായാ-
വിയും മായാവിനോദനും
നീയല്ലോ മായയെ നീക്കി
സായൂജ്യം നൽകുമാര്യനും.

നീ സത്യം ജ്ഞാനമാനന്ദം
നീ തന്നെ വർത്തമാനവും
ഭൂതവും ഭാവിയും വേറ-
ല്ലോതും മൊഴിയുമോർക്കിൽ നീ.

അകവും പുറവും തിങ്ങും
മഹിമാവാർന്ന നിൻപദം
പുകഴ്ത്തുന്നു ഞങ്ങളങ്ങു
ഭഗവാനെ, ജയിക്കുക.

ജയിക്കുക മഹാദേവ
ദീനാവന പരായണാ
ജയിക്കുക ചിദാനന്ദ
ദയാസിന്ധോ ജയിക്കുക .

ആഴമേറും നിൻ മഹസ്സാ
മാഴിയിൽ ഞങ്ങളാകവേ
ആഴണം വാഴണം നിത്യം
വാഴണം വാഴണം സുഖം.

Getting back through Giving: Swapna Dayanandan

"ഇതു നിങ്ങൾക്ക് തിരിച്ചുകൊടുക്കുവാനും ആദരിക്കപ്പെടുവാനും കിട്ടിയ അനുകൂല അവസരമാണെന്നു കരുതുക. അങ്ങനെ ചെയ്യുമ്പോൾ നിങ്ങൾ ഇളം തലമുറകൾക്ക് (വരും തലമുറകൾക്ക്) ഒരു നല്ല ഉദാഹരണമായി മാറപ്പെടുകയും ഇപ്പോഴുള്ള അംഗങ്ങളുടെ അടുത്ത തലമുറകൾ ഭാവിയിൽ മുന്നോട്ടുവരികയും അംഗമായി സേവനമനുഷ്ഠിക്കാൻ സഹായിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യും." ആ വാക്കുകളാണ് സ്വപ്നാ ദയാനന്ദനെ മുന്നോട്ടു നയിച്ചത്.

അധികം താമസിയാതെ Mission – ലെ (നിയുക്ത സംഘത്തിലെ) പ്രായവും കുറേക്കൂടി ഉയർന്ന പദവിയുമുള്ള ചില അംഗങ്ങൾ സ്വപ്നയെ സമീപിച്ചത് Mission – ന്റെ (പ്രസ്ഥാനത്തിന്റെ) ഭരണനിർവഹണ സമിതി (Executive Committeee) അംഗമാകുവാനും, അതിന്റെ അധ്യക്ഷൻ (President) ആയി സേവനം അനുഷ്ഠിക്കുവാനും ആഹ്വാനം ചെയ്തു. തന്റെ അച്ഛനും ആ ഉപദേശം തന്നെയാണല്ലോ തനിക്കും നൽകിയതെന്ന് സ്വപ്ന ഓർമിച്ചു. "അവർ പറഞ്ഞു", "നിങ്ങളുടെ (നിന്റെ) മാതാപിതാക്കൾ മിഷനുവേണ്ടി വളരെ അദ്ധ്വാനം ചെയ്തു; എന്തുകൊണ്ട് നിങ്ങൾക്കും (നിനക്കും) ചെയ്തുകൂടാ?"

"അവരോട് "സാധിക്കില്ല" എന്നു പറയുവാൻ പ്രയാസമായതിനാൽ ഞാൻ അച്ഛനുമായി അതേപ്പറ്റി സംസാരിക്കുകയും, അച്ഛൻ എന്നെ പ്രോത്സാഹിപ്പിക്കുകയും ചെയ്തു" സ്വപ്ന പങ്കുവച്ചു. ബാല്യം മുതലേ (ചെറുപ്പം മുതലേ) Mission – ന്റെ പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങളിൽ സ്വപ്ന പങ്കെടുത്തിരുന്നു. Mission – ന്റെ ചുമതല (ഉത്തരവാദിത്വം) ഏറ്റെടുക്കുകയെന്നത് ആദ്യം പേടിപ്പിക്കുന്ന (വീര്യം കെടുത്തുന്ന) ഒന്നായിത്തോന്നി; എങ്കിലും ആ ദു:ശ്ശകകളും സംശയങ്ങളും പുറകോട്ടുതള്ളിമാറ്റി മുൻപോട്ടുപോകുവാൻ തന്നെ നിശ്ചയിച്ചു. "ഇത് ഒരാൾ തനിയെ ചെയ്യുന്ന വേലയല്ലല്ലോ, ഒരുമിച്ച് (ഒരു Team ആയി) കൂട്ടായി ചെയ്യുന്ന വേലയാണല്ലോയെന്ന് ഓർത്തു. അങ്ങനെ, ഞാൻ എന്റെ കൂട്ടുസംഘത്തോടും അവിടെ വേല ചെയ്യുന്നവരോടും ഓരോ ചോദ്യങ്ങളും

അഭിപ്രായങ്ങളും ചോദിച്ച് പണി ചെയ്യുവാൻ തുടങ്ങി. ഞാൻ എന്നെത്തന്നെ താഴ്മയും വിനയവുമുള്ളവളാക്കി മാറ്റുവാനും, ധാർഷ്ട്യസ്വഭാവം മാറ്റുവാനും നിശ്ചയിച്ചു." അവിടെ (Mission) നടത്തിക്കൊണ്ടുപോകുന്നവർ എത്രയോ വർഷങ്ങളായി അത് സ്തുത്യർഹമായി നടത്തിക്കൊണ്ടുപോകുന്നു. അവരോടുകൂടി ആലോചിച്ച് Mission മുന്നോട്ടുകൊണ്ടുപോകുവാൻ സാധിക്കുമെന്ന് മനസിലാക്കി. എന്റെ ധാർഷ്ട്യസ്വഭാവം മാറ്റി, വിനയവും താഴ്മയും ഉള്ളവളായി സഹകരണത്തോടെ വേല ചെയ്യുവാൻ എന്റെ മന:സാക്ഷി എന്നെ ഉപദേശിച്ചു.

"പൊതുക്ഷേമവും ജനക്ഷേമ താൽപര്യവും മറ്റും കണക്കാക്കി നടത്തുന്ന ഒരു സംഘടനയിലായിരുന്നു ഞാൻ വേല ചെയ്തിരുന്നത്. അത് വളരെ സുപരിചിതമായ തൊഴിൽ ആയിരുന്നു. അടിസ്ഥാനപരമായ, മൗലികമായ, മുഖ്യ നിലവാരം നിലനിർത്തുവാൻ ആവശ്യമായതെല്ലാം തന്റെ സംഘടനയിൽ നിന്നു പഠിച്ചിരുന്നു. അത് മിഷൻ വേലയിൽ വളരെ സഹായമായിത്തീർന്നു. അങ്ങനെ, Mission അടുത്ത ഘട്ടത്തിലേക്ക് നയിക്കാൻ ഞാൻ നിശ്ചയിച്ചു.

ശ്രീനാരായണ മിഷന്റെ ഒരു പുന:പരാമർശം നടത്താൻ നിശ്ചയിച്ചു. പുരോഗമന ചിന്താഗതി ഉണ്ടായിരുന്ന പൂർവികർ സ്വപ്നയ്ക്ക് മാർഗദർശികളായി ഭവിച്ചു. അവരുടെ ആന്തരികശക്തിയും ധൈര്യവും ചുണയും എല്ലാം എനിക്ക് പ്രേരകശക്തി നൽകി. അവരുടെ ദീർഘവീക്ഷണവും മുൻകരുതലുകളുമെല്ലാം മിഷനു മാത്രമല്ല അംഗത്വമില്ലാത്തവർക്കു കൂടി യോജിക്കുന്നതായിരിക്കണം. എല്ലാം ഉൾക്കൊള്ളുന്ന, എല്ലാം ചേർന്നുള്ള ഒന്നായിരിക്കണം ശ്രീനാരായണ മിഷൻ". അതുതന്നെയായിരുന്നു ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരുവിന്റെ ജീവിതദർശനവും. എല്ലാ മനുഷ്യരേയും വിവേചനം കൂടാതെ തുല്യമായി പരിഗണിക്കുക.

സ്വപ്നയെപ്പോലെ വൈദഗ്ദ്ധ്യം നേടിയ ജോലികൾ ചെയ്യുന്നവർക്ക് വളരെ ക്ഷമയും സാമർത്ഥ്യവും ആവശ്യമായ സമുദായസേവനം വളരെ പ്രയാസമുള്ള കാര്യമായി തോന്നുമ്പോൾ, സ്വപ്ന സേവനത്തെ ഗുണപ്രദമായ ഒന്നായി ഉയർത്തിക്കാട്ടുകയാണ്. അതിന്റെ സ്വാധീനവും, പ്രയോജനവും, ഗുണവും കൊണ്ടാടുകയാണ് ചെയ്യുന്നത്. അത് തങ്ങളുടെ ഔദ്യോഗിക ജീവിതത്തിലും ഗുണം ചെയ്യുമെന്ന് മറ്റുള്ളവർക്ക് കാണിച്ചുകൊടുക്കുകയാണ്. "മിഷന്റെ ഔദ്യോഗിക നിർവഹണ കമ്മിറ്റിയിൽ (Executive Committeee) നിന്നും ലഭിച്ച പരിചയങ്ങളിൽ നിന്നും, അനുഭവങ്ങളിൽ നിന്നും തൊഴിൽ വൈദഗ്ദ്ധ്യം ലഭിച്ചു. അവിടെ നിന്നും സംവേദനക്ഷമതയും, സൂക്ഷ്മഗ്രാഹിത്വവും പഠിക്കുവാനും കഴിഞ്ഞു. മറ്റുള്ളവരുടെ ചേതോവികാരങ്ങളും അനുഭവങ്ങളും ഞാൻ പഠിച്ചു. മറ്റുള്ളവരോട് എങ്ങനെ പെരുമാറണം, എങ്ങനെ അവരെ സംതൃപ്തരായി മടക്കി അയയ്ക്കണം, എങ്ങനെ പണം കൈകാര്യം ചെയ്യണം എന്നെല്ലാം ഞാൻ അവിടെ നിന്നും മനസിലാക്കി. ഏറ്റെടുത്ത ജോലി ഏറ്റവും ഉത്തരവാദിത്വത്തോടെ ചെയ്യുവാനും Mission-ഉം ആളുകളുമായി കൂടുതൽ ബന്ധിപ്പിക്കുവാനും മറ്റുള്ളവരുടെ ചേതോവികാരങ്ങളോട് കൂടുതൽ സംവേദനക്ഷമത കാട്ടുവാനും എന്നെ പഠിപ്പിച്ചു".

സ്വപ്നയുടെ വ്യക്തിപരമായ ജീവിതത്തിലും Mission-ലെ വേല വളരെ ഉപകരിച്ചു. "നിങ്ങൾക്ക് എല്ലാവരെയും എപ്പോഴും തൃപ്തിപ്പെടുത്തുവാനോ ബോധ്യപ്പെടുത്തുവാനോ സാധിക്കില്ല; എങ്കിലും എനിക്ക് സൗഹൃദവും സഖ്യവും ധാരാളം മിത്രങ്ങളേയും; അവരുമായി ബന്ധപ്പെടുവാനും സംഗതിയാക്കി. എനിക്ക് ഒരു ഖേദവും (ദു:ഖവും) ഇല്ല", സ്വപ്ന ആവേശത്തോടെ പറഞ്ഞു.

Connecting with Values: Anusha Senan

അനുഷയുടെ കൗമാരപ്രായത്തിൽ അവളുടെ അമ്മ ശ്രീനാരായണ മിഷനിലെ ഭരണനിർവഹണ സമിതിയിലെ ഖജാൻജിയായി പ്രസരിപ്പോടെ സേവനം ചെയ്യുന്നതിന് സാക്ഷിയായിട്ടുണ്ട്. പ്ര സ്ഥാനത്തിലെ ചില വേലകളിൽ പങ്കെടുക്കുവാനും, സഹായിപ്പാനും അനുഷയെയും പ്രലോഭിപ്പിക്കുകയും പങ്കെടുപ്പിക്കുകയും ചെയ്തിട്ടുണ്ട്. അതൊന്നും അവൾ ചിന്തിച്ചിട്ടുപോലുമില്ല, ഒരിക്കലും അടങ്ങാത്ത ഒരു തീവ്രവികാരം (ആവേശം) അവളിൽ ഒരു തീപ്പൊരി വിതറിയിട്ടുന്നെ്. അമ്മ മിഷനിലെ ഒരു സജീവപ്ര വർത്തകയായിരുന്നു. അവിടെ നടക്കുന്നതെല്ലാം എന്നോട് പറയുമായിരുന്നു. ഞാനും അവിടുത്തെ ഒരു സജീവ പ്രവർത്തകയാകണമെന്ന് എല്ലാവരും എന്നെ പ്രോത്സാഹിപ്പിക്കുമായിരുന്നു. അങ്ങനെ ഞാനും അവി ടുത്തെ പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങളിൽ സജീവപങ്കാളിയായി. പ്ര വർത്തനങ്ങളും സാമൂഹികമായി ഒത്തുചേരലുകളും, വിനോദങ്ങളുമെല്ലാം നല്ല രസമായിരുന്നു. ഞാനാണ് കായികവിനോദങ്ങൾ സംഘടിപ്പിച്ചിരുന്നത്.

ബിരുദാനന്തരബിരുദത്തിന് വെളിനാട്ടിലായിരുന്നപ്പോഴും, അനുഷയുടെ ഹൃദയത്തിൽ Mission ആയിരുന്നു. എന്റെ മാതാവിൽക്കൂടെ ഞാൻ മിഷനുമായി ബന്ധപ്പെട്ടിരുന്നു. മിഷനിലെ മിക്കവരും ഞങ്ങളുടെ കുടുംബത്തെ സുഹൃത്തുക്കളായിരുന്നു. അവരും എന്നെ മിഷനുമായി കൂടുതൽ അടുപ്പിക്കുവാൻ പ്രേ രണ നൽകി. അനുഷ തിരിച്ച് സിങ്കപ്പൂരിൽ വന്ന ശേഷം സംഘടനയിൽ ഭാഗഭാക്കാകുയും കൂടുതൽ ബന്ധപ്പെടുകയും ചെയ്തു.

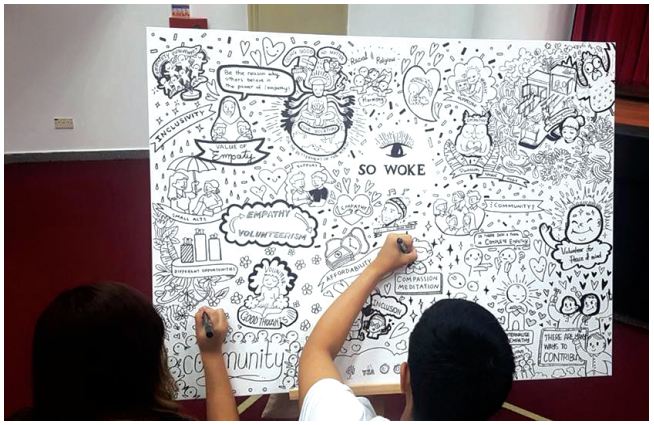
അനുഷ ഭരണഘടനാ സമിതിയിലെ ഒരു അംഗമാകുകയും യുവ സമിതിയുമായി കൂടുതൽ ബ ന്ധപ്പെടുകയും ഭാഗഭാക്കാകയും ചെയ്തു. കാരണം, യഥാർത്ഥത്തിൽ അതിനുമുമ്പ് യുവ കമ്മിറ്റിയിൽ (യുവ സമിതിയിൽ) യുവാക്കളേ ഉണ്ടായിരുന്നില്ല. ഞാൻ യുവജനങ്ങളെ യുവജനസഖ്യത്തിൽ കൂടുതൽ ഭാഗഭാക്കാക്കുവാനും ബന്ധപ്പെടുവാനും

പ്രോത്സാഹിപ്പിച്ചു. അവരുടെ പ്രസ്ഥാനത്തോടുള്ള ചുറുചുറുക്കു കണ്ട് ഞാൻ ധന്യയായി. ഞങ്ങളുടെ അടുത്ത (Next) കാൽവയ്പ് കൂടുതൽ യുവാക്കൾ സമിതിയെപ്പറ്റിയും, രാഷ്ട്രീയ തലത്തിലും കൂടുതൽ ജാഗരൂകതയുള്ളവരും, ബോധമുള്ളവരുമാക്കി തീർക്കുന്നവരാക്കുകയെന്നതിലായിരുന്നു. അതിന് കാരണം, ഞങ്ങൾക്ക് കാലാതീതമായും, മതേതരവും, ലൗകികവുമായും നിലനിൽക്കുന്ന ഒരു നല്ല വേദിയുണ്ടായിരുന്നു എന്നുള്ളതാണ്. ആളുകൾക്ക് സ്വാതന്ത്ര്യമായി അവരുടെ മൂല്യങ്ങളും, അഭിപ്രായങ്ങളും പങ്കുവയ്ക്കാൻ പറ്റിയ ഒരു വേദിയായിരുന്നു Sri Narayana Mission. ഭാവിയിൽ ആശയങ്ങളും, ചിന്തകളും പങ്കുവയ്ക്കുന്ന; നായകസ്ഥാനത്തിരിക്കുന്ന ഒരു Mission ആയി കാണുവാൻ ഞാൻ ആഗ്രഹിക്കുന്നു.

മിഷനുമായുള്ള അഗാധമായ ഭാഗാഭാഗിത്വം (പങ്ക്) ആണ് അനുഷയെ മിഷനുമായി ഇത്രമാത്രം അടുപ്പിച്ചത്. എന്റെ അമ്മയുടെ മൂല്യങ്ങളും ഗുരുവിന്റെ പഠിപ്പിക്കലും മൂല്യങ്ങളും ഒരേ ചിന്തയിലായതിനാൽ ഞാനും അവരുടെ മൂല്യങ്ങളിലും അഭിപ്രായങ്ങളിലും പങ്കാളിയാണെന്നു പറയാം. നിങ്ങളുടെ ജാതിയോ മതമോ എന്തുതന്നെയായാലും, നിങ്ങളുടെ ശ്രേഷ്ഠതരമായ വിനയവും, മാനവും, കരുണയും, ദയവും നിങ്ങളെ ശ്രേഷ്ഠനായി മാറ്റും. ഇവയെല്ലാം ഞാൻ മിഷനിൽ കാണുന്നു. നാം ഒന്നിച്ചു ചേരുമ്പോൾ ഇവയെല്ലാം നമ്മുടെ ഉപബോധമനസ് നാം അറിയാതെ തന്നെ മറ്റുള്ളവരിലേക്ക് പകരുന്നു. ഞങ്ങൾ ഒന്നിച്ചുകൂടുമ്പോൾ, മീറ്റിംഗുകളിൽ, അംഗങ്ങൾ എങ്ങനെയാണ് പ്രധാന വിഷയങ്ങളും പ്രശ്നങ്ങളും കൈകാര്യം ചെയ്യുന്നതെന്നും; മീറ്റിംഗ് തുടങ്ങുന്നതിനു മുമ്പ് ഒരുമിനിറ്റ് നിശബ്ദത പാലിക്കുന്നതെന്നും ഞാൻ കണ്ടിട്ടുണ്ട്. ഇവയെല്ലാം തങ്ങളുടെ വ്യക്തിപരമായ കാര്യങ്ങളെക്കാൾ മുഖ്യമായ കാരണങ്ങളാണ് തങ്ങൾ നടത്തുന്നത് എന്നുള്ളതിന്റെ തിരിച്ചറിവും അംഗീകാരവുമാണ്. ഞങ്ങൾ അത് പറയുന്നില്ല. കാരണം, മിഷന്റെ അനുവാദത്തോടെയാണ് ഞങ്ങൾ എല്ലാം ചെയ്യുന്നത്. ആളുകൾ മിഷനിൽ ഒന്നിച്ചുകൂടി വലിയ കാര്യങ്ങൾ നടത്തുകയാണെന്ന് മനസിലാക്കിയാണ് അവിടെ വരുന്നവർ തിരിച്ചുപോകുന്നത്.

അനുഷയെ പ്രചോദിപ്പിച്ചത്/പ്രേരിപ്പിച്ചത്, (ഉത്തേജിപ്പിച്ചത്) അവരുടെ പ്രയത്നങ്ങൾക്ക് ഫലം കണ്ടതിനാലാണ്. ആളുകൾ മിഷനെപ്പറ്റി കേട്ടിട്ടുണ്ട്; പക്ഷെ അവിടെയുള്ള പല യുവജനങ്ങളെയും നേരിട്ട് കണ്ടിട്ടില്ല. ഇപ്പോൾ ഞങ്ങൾ കൂടുതൽ ദേശീയ കാര്യങ്ങളിൽ ഇടപെടുന്നതിനാൽ പുറമെയുള്ളവർക്ക് ഞങ്ങളെപ്പറ്റി കൂടുതൽ ബോധവും ജാഗ്രതയുമുണ്ട്.

നമ്മുടെ പൂർവികർ മിഷൻ സ്ഥാപിച്ചു; നമുക്ക് അതിന്റെ മൂല്യമറിയാം. അത് നമ്മെ രൂപപ്പെടുത്തുന്നു. മിഷനെ സഹായിക്കാൻ എന്നാൽ കഴിയുന്നിടത്തോളം ഞാൻ ശ്രമിക്കും. ഒന്നല്ലെങ്കിൽ മറ്റൊരു വിധത്തിൽ മിഷന്റെ കാര്യങ്ങളിൽ, രവി അങ്കിളിനെപ്പോലെ, ജീവകാലം മുഴുവൻ ഞാൻ ഭാഗഭാക്കാകുകയും മിഷനെ സഹായിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യും.



Bonding through cultural activities: Sabu Family

കുടുംബം കൂടെയില്ലാതെ അദ്ദേഹം 1979 മുതൽ 1989 വരെ സിങ്കപ്പൂരിൽ ഏകനായി കഴിഞ്ഞു. പക്ഷെ, ഇപ്പോൾ, അവർക്ക് നഷ്ടപ്പെട്ട വർഷങ്ങളുടെ കുറവു പരിഹരിച്ച്, അവരുടെ അടങ്ങാത്ത ആഗ്രഹങ്ങളെല്ലാം വാരാന്ത്യത്തിലും പിന്തുടരുകയാണ്. അവരുടെ സംഗീതത്തിലും നൃത്തത്തിലുമുള്ള അടങ്ങാത്ത ആവേശം സാബുവിനെയും കുടുംബത്തെയും ഒന്നിച്ച് ഒട്ടിപ്പിടിപ്പിച്ചിരിക്കുകയാണ്.

നേരത്തെ, കേരളത്തിൽ വച്ചുതന്നെ ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരുവിനെയും അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ തത്വജ്ഞാനത്തെയും പറ്റി സാബു സുപരിചിതനാണ്. 1979-ൽ സിങ്കപ്പൂരിൽ വന്നപ്പോൾ മുതൽ ശ്രീനാരായണ മിഷന്റെ പരിപാടികളിൽ ചേരുവാൻ സാബുവിന് ഒരു കൂസലും ശങ്കയും ഇല്ലായിരുന്നു. ഗുരുവിന്റെ ഒരു പഠിപ്പിക്കൽ തന്നെ, എല്ലാവരും കലാസാംസ്കാരിക സംഘടനകളുടെ പരിപാടികളിൽ ഭാഗഭാക്കായി കരുത്താർജിക്കണമെന്നതായിരുന്നു. നമ്മുടെ ആളുകൾക്ക് കലാസാംസ്കാരിക പ്രകടനങ്ങൾ വളരെ ഇഷ്ടമാണ്. വർഷം തോറും നടത്തുന്ന 'ചതയം' ആഘോഷം ഒരു ഉത്സവം പോലെയാണ് ആളുകൾ കാണുന്നത്. ചതയ ആഘോഷത്തിൽ പരസ്പരം കൂട്ടിയോജിപ്പിക്കുന്ന പ്രതീതിയാണ് ഓരോ അംഗത്തിനും തോന്നുക. സാബുവിനും ഇത് കൂട്ടിയോജിപ്പിക്കുന്ന ഒരു അനുഭവമായിട്ടാണ് തോന്നുക. തന്റെ വേല 'മരണം വരെ' തുടരുമെന്നാണ് സാബു പറയുന്നത്.

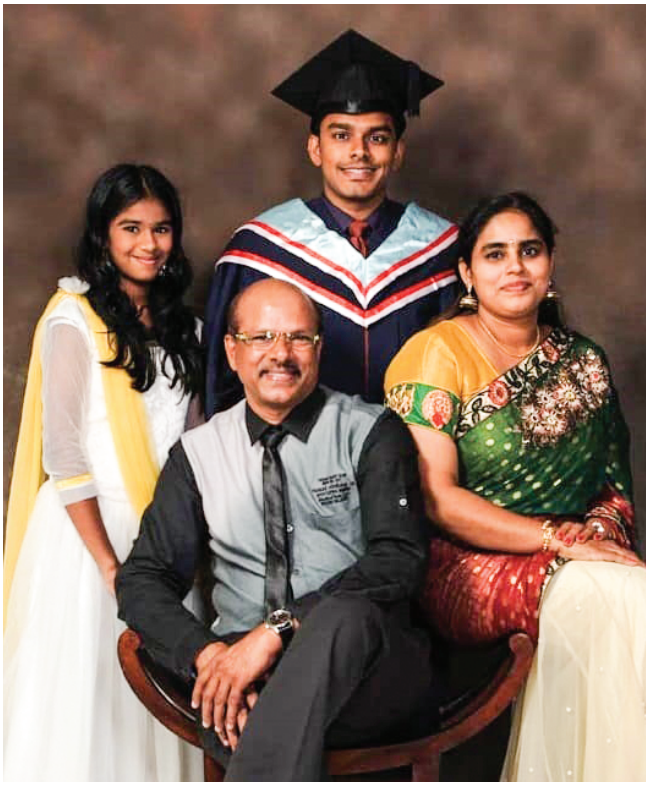
സാബുവിന്റെ ഭാര്യ ഷീജ ഭർത്താവിന്റെ വികാരങ്ങളെ ശരിവയ്ക്കുന്നു. 'മിഷനിൽ വരുന്നത് എനിക്ക് വളരെ സന്തോഷം നൽകുന്നു. ഇവിടെ, എനിക്ക്, പ്രത്യേകമായ ഒരു ചേതോവികാരം അനുഭവപ്പെടുന്നുണ്ട്. ഇവിടുത്തെ അംഗങ്ങൾക്കു വേണ്ടി പ്രവർത്തനം ചെയ്യുവാൻ ഞങ്ങൾക്ക് ഇഷ്ടമാണ്. അങ്ങനെ ഒന്നിച്ച് കാര്യങ്ങൾ ചെയ്യുമ്പോൾ ഞങ്ങളുടെ കുടുംബബന്ധം മെച്ചപ്പെടുന്നു.

2001-ൽ സാബു ശ്രീനാരായണ മിഷനിലെ കലാ ഉപസമിതിയുടെ അദ്ധ്യക്ഷനായിരുന്നു. തളരാതെ, ജാഗ്രതയോടെ മറ്റ് മുഖ്യകാര്യങ്ങളും ചെയ്യുമായിരുന്നു.

ഷീജ സിങ്കപ്പൂരിൽ വന്നതിനുശേഷം ഭർത്താവിനോടൊപ്പം മിഷനിലെ കാര്യങ്ങളിൽ കൂടുതൽ ശ്രദ്ധ പതിപ്പിച്ചു. മകൾ പ്രിയങ്കയുടെ നൃത്ത അരങ്ങേറ്റം മിഷനിൽ വച്ചായിരുന്നു. ചെറുപ്പം മുതലേ ഞാൻ ഇവിടെ പ്രദർശനങ്ങൾ നടത്തിയിട്ടുണ്ട്. എന്റെ മാതാപിതാക്കൾ പാടുമ്പോൾ ഞാൻ അരങ്ങത്തു പോയി നൃത്തം ചെയ്യും. അന്ന് എനിക്ക് മൂന്നുവയസ് പ്രായമായിരുന്നു. എനിക്ക് എട്ട് വയസുള്ളപ്പോഴാണ് ഔദ്യോഗികമായി നൃത്തപരിശീലനം ആരംഭിച്ചത്. അന്നുമുതൽ മിഷൻ എന്റെ ജീവിതത്തിന്റെ ഒരു ഭാഗമാണ്.

സാംസ്കാരിക പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങൾ സമൂഹത്തെയും, സമൂഹ പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങളെയും കൂടുതൽ ഉയർത്തും. അത് എന്നെ ഒരു വ്യക്തിയായി മാറ്റി. മറ്റു കുട്ടികളെക്കാൾ മുമ്പ് എനിക്ക് എന്റെ സംസ്കാരത്തെപ്പറ്റി അറിവുണ്ടായിരുന്നു. നൃത്തം എന്റെ ആവേശമാണ്. അതിൽക്കൂടി ഞാൻ പല മൂല്യങ്ങളും മനസിലാക്കി. തീരുമാനം, സഹനശക്തി, ക്ഷമ, എങ്ങനെ വിശ്വാസം കാക്കാം എന്നെല്ലാം. എന്റെ അച്ഛൻ ഇതെല്ലാം സംഘടിപ്പിക്കുന്നതിൽ നിന്നും ഞാൻ പലതും പഠിച്ചു. അച്ഛൻ വളരെ സമയം ഇതിനുവേണ്ടി ചിലവഴിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്. അച്ഛന്റെ അർപ്പണം (Dedication) വിസ്മയത്തോടെ (കൗതുകത്തോടെ) ഞാൻ കാണുന്നു. പണമോ പാരിതോഷികമോ ഒന്നും കിട്ടുന്നില്ലെങ്കിലും അദ്ദേഹം മിഷനുവേണ്ടി സന്തോഷത്തോടെ നിസ്വാർത്ഥ സേവനം ചെയ്യുന്നു. ഞാൻ അത് വിസ്മയപൂർവം ആദരവോടെ കാണുന്നു. അച്ഛന്റെ അവിടുത്തെ നിസ്വാർത്ഥ സേവനം കുടുംബമായി ഒന്നിച്ചുകഴിയുവാൻ കൂടുതൽ സമയം ലഭിക്കുന്നു; ഞങ്ങൾ കുടുംബമായി വളരുന്നു. ഇതിൽക്കൂടെ ഞങ്ങളും നമ്മുടെ സംസ്കാരം പരത്തുകയും, മലയാളികളെ ഒന്നിച്ചുചേർക്കുകയും കൂടുതൽ മലയാളികളും ചീനക്കാരും ചതയം ആഘോഷത്തിൽ പങ്കെടുക്കാൻ വരുന്നതിനും മലയാളികൾ ആരാണെന്ന് കൂടുതൽ ആളുകൾ അറിയുന്നതിനും ഇടയാക്കുന്നു, പ്രിയങ്ക പറഞ്ഞു. പതിനാറ് (16) വയസുകാരിയായ പ്രിയങ്ക അവളുടെ മാതാപിതാക്കളുടെ കാലടികളെ പിന്തുടരുകയാണ്.

പ്രത്യാശയോടെ (Hopefully) ഞാനും എന്റെ അച്ഛനെപ്പോലെ സഹായിക്കും. ഞാൻ ഇപ്പോൾ ചെറുപ്പക്കാരുടെ പക്ഷത്തിലാണ് (Youth Wing). ഞാൻ വളർന്നുവലുതാകുമ്പോൾ മിഷനുവേി കൂടുതൽ സേവനം ചെയ്യുവാൻ കഴിയുമെന്ന് പ്രത്യാശിക്കുന്നു. ഗുരുവിന്റെ മൂല്യങ്ങൾ ഞാൻ പഠിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്. എല്ലാ ജാതിയെയും ഒന്നായി കാണുക. തൂർച്ചയായും ഞാൻ ഗുരുവുമായി ആത്മിയബന്ധം പുലർത്തുകയും ചെയ്യും. ഈ ഭാഗാഗിത്വം (പങ്ക്, Involvement) എന്നെ എന്റെ കുടുംബത്തോടൊപ്പമായിരിക്കുവാൻ സഹായിക്കും. അവരുടെ സാമീപ്യം എനിക്ക് വളരെ പ്രധാനപ്പെട്ടതാണ്. എന്റെ കുടുംബം മിഷന്റെ കാര്യങ്ങളിൽ ഭാഗഭാക്കായതുപോലെ കൂടുതൽ കുടുംബങ്ങൾ മുന്നോട്ടുവരണം. മറ്റൊരു വിധത്തിൽ പറഞ്ഞാൽ നാം എല്ലാം ജോലിയിൽ വളരെ വ്യാപൃതരാണ് (Busy). അത് മിഷനും നമുക്കു തന്നെയും ഒരു സഹായമായിരിക്കും – ഐക്യത്തിൽ ബലമുണ്ട് കുടുംബങ്ങൾ ഒന്നിച്ചുവരുമ്പോൾ.



Leading SNM: M.K. Bhasi

ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരു അന്ത്യദിനങ്ങൾ കഴിച്ച സ്ഥലത്തിന് രുമൈൽ (2 Miles) ദൂരെയായിരുന്നു അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ ഗ്രാമം. അങ്ങനെ ശ്രീ. എം. കെ. ഭാസി ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരുവിന്റെ തത്വജ്ഞാനശാസ്ത്ര സ്വാധീനത്തിലാണ് വളർന്നുവന്നത്. "എനിക്ക് അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ പഠിപ്പിക്കലിൽ താൽപ ര്യമുണ്ടായിരുന്നു. കാരണം, അതിലെ മതേതരമായ പഠിപ്പിക്കൽ എന്നെ ആകർഷിച്ചു. അദ്ദേഹം സമുദായങ്ങളുടെയും സംഘടനകളുടെയും പ ഴയ ദൃഢവിശ്വാസങ്ങൾക്കും, ആചാരങ്ങൾക്കും എതിരായിരുന്നു. "മനുഷ്യജാതി ഒന്നാണ്" എന്ന അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ പഠിപ്പിക്കലും ആദർശങ്ങളും എനിക്ക് മാർഗദർശനം നൽകി. ആ പഠിപ്പിക്കൽ അതുല്യമായിരുന്നു. മതമില്ലാതെ നിനക്ക് ഒരു നല്ല മനുഷ്യനായിരിക്കാൻ കഴിയുമെന്ന അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ പഠിപ്പിക്കലും ആദർശങ്ങളും എനിക്ക് മാർഗദർശനം നൽകി. എത്രപേർ അങ്ങനെ പറഞ്ഞിട്ടുണ്ട്? ഒരുത്തരും മുടിയില്ലാതെ അങ്ങനെ പറഞ്ഞിട്ടില്ല. അദ്ദേഹം ആരാധനാസ്ഥലങ്ങൾ പണിയിച്ചിട്ടു ണ്ട്. മതപ്രചരണത്തിനായിട്ടല്ല – പിന്നെയോ വിദ്യാഭ്യാസത്തിനു വേണ്ടിയാണ്.

1953-ൽ സിങ്കപ്പൂരിൽ കാൽകുത്തിയപ്പോൾ തന്നെ ഭാസി ശ്രീനാരായണ മിഷനിലേക്ക്

ആകർഷിക്കപ്പെട്ടു. അഞ്ചുവർഷങ്ങൾക്കു മുമ്പാണ് മിഷൻ ഔദ്യോഗികമായി രേഖപ്പെടുത്തിയത് (Registered). അത് പരിചയമുള്ള ഒന്നായിരുന്നുവെന്നു മാത്രമല്ല, അത് അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ മൂല്യങ്ങൾക്കും വിശ്വാസത്തിനും ഒത്തുപോകുന്നതിനും സഹായിച്ചു. "ഞാൻ ഒരിക്കലും ഒരു ക്ഷേത്രത്തിൽ പോയിട്ടില്ല; ആരാധിച്ചിട്ടുമില്ല. എന്റെ ഭാര്യ ക്ഷേത്രത്തിൽ പോയി ആരാധിക്കുമായിരുന്നു. ഞാൻ ഒരിക്കൽ പോലും ഒരു ക്ഷേത്രത്തിൽ കാൽകുത്തിയിട്ടില്ല". മിഷനിൽ, ഭാസി, ഗുരുവിന്റെ ആദർശങ്ങളെപ്പറ്റി പറയുമായിരുന്നു. അംഗങ്ങളുടെ മതവിശ്വാസങ്ങളെ സ്പഷ്ടമായി ആദരിച്ചാണ് മിഷൻ നടത്തിയിരുന്നത്. തക്കസമയത്ത് ഭാസിയെ മിഷന്റെ ഭരണസമിതിയിലേക്ക് തിരഞ്ഞെടുക്കുകയും ഭരണവാഹിത്വം വഹിക്കുകയും ചെയ്തു. "മുഹമ്മദീയരും മറ്റു പലരും എന്റെ കമ്മിറ്റിയിലുണ്ടായിരുന്നു," ഭാസി ഓർക്കുന്നു.

പതിനേഴു വർഷക്കാലം ഭാസി ഭരണസമിതിയുടെ തലവനായി (President) ഭാരവാഹിത്വം വഹിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട് . അത് സിങ്കപ്പൂരിലെ സാമൂഹികപ്രവർത്തകവൃത്തത്തിൽ ഒരു രേഖയായി. അദ്ദേഹം രുവർഷം പ്രസിഡന്റിന്റെ താഴെയുള്ള പദവിയിലും (Vice President); കുറേ വർഷങ്ങൾ ഖജാൻജിയായും വേല ചെയ്തിട്ടുണ്ട്. "മീറ്റിംഗുകളിൽ എന്റെ പേര് നിർദേശിക്കും; വേറെ ഒരു പേരുകളും നിർദേശിക്കയില്ല. അതുകൊണ്ട് അതിൽ നിന്നും ഒഴിഞ്ഞുമാറുവാൻ എനിക്ക് പ്രയാസമായിരുന്നു," ഭാസി അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ മിഷനിലെ ദീർഘകാല സേവനങ്ങളെപ്പറ്റി വിവരിച്ചു. ഗുരുവിന്റെ മാതൃകയിൽ തന്നെ ജീവിക്കണമെന്നുള്ള അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ ആഗ്രഹവും എന്ത് തടസങ്ങൾ നേരിട്ടാലും മിഷനെ നയിക്കണമെന്നുള്ള ദൃഢധൈര്യവും അദ്ദേഹത്തെ മുന്നോട്ടുനയിച്ചു. "പൊതുജന സേവയിൽ നിങ്ങൾക്ക് ഒരു പ്രതിഫലവും കിട്ടുകയില്ല. നന്ദിക്കു പകരം നിങ്ങൾക്ക് തിരിച്ചുകിട്ടുന്നത് കുറ്റങ്ങളും ആരോപണങ്ങളും മാത്രമായിരിക്കും. അതായിരുന്നു ആദ്യം മുതലേയുള്ള എന്റെ മനോഭാവം.

ആവശ്യമുള്ളതു ഞാൻ ചെയ്തു. എന്നാൽ കഴിവതും അങ്ങനേയറ്റം വരെ ചെയ്യാൻ ഞാൻ ശ്രമിച്ചു. സിങ്കപ്പൂരിലെ അറിയപ്പെടുന്ന ഒരു സ്ഥാപനമായി മിഷൻ മാറിയതിൽ എനിക്ക് അതിയായ സന്തോഷമുണ്ട്. മെച്ചപ്പെട്ടതും വലിയതുമായി മിഷൻ മാറി. അപരിചിതമായിരുന്ന ധാരാളം ആളുകളെ എന്റെ മിഷൻ പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങളിൽക്കൂടി എനിക്ക് സ്നേഹിതരായി ലഭിച്ചു. ഡോക്ടർ വാസുവിന്റെയും ഞങ്ങളെ സഹായിച്ചു കൊണ്ടിരുന്ന മന്ത്രിസഭയിലെ ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥൻമാരുടെയും ഉപദേശങ്ങളനുസരിച്ച് മിഷൻ വളരെ വിപുലമായ രീതിയിൽ കൊണ്ടുപോകേ എന്നു ഞങ്ങൾ തീരുമാനിച്ചു. ഡോക്ടർ വാസു സർക്കാരിൽ (Government) ഉന്നത സ്ഥാനത്തുള്ളയാളും സമൂഹപ്രവർത്തകനുമായിരുന്നു. 1984–2001 വരെ അദ്ദേഹം സിങ്കപ്പൂരിലെ പ്രതിനിധിസഭാകാര്യ വിദ്ഗ്ദ്ധനുമായിരുന്നു."

ഇതൊക്കെയാണെങ്കിലും ഭാസി പഠിപ്പിക്കലും മിഷനിലെ ചുമതലകളുമെല്ലാം നല്ല ഭംഗിയായിത്തന്നെ തുടർന്നുകൊണ്ടേയിരുന്നു. മലയാളത്തിൽ വളരെ കവിതകൾ അദ്ദേഹം രചിച്ചു. അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ കൃതികളുടെ സമാഹാരം മലയാളത്തിൽ പ്രസിദ്ധീകരിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്. ഇക്കാലമത്രയും അദ്ദേഹം ശ്രീനാരായണ ഗുരുവിന്റെ സിദ്ധാന്തം സ്വീകരിച്ച് അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ പാതയിൽ പിന്തുടരുന്നു.

Keeping the Family Together: Foo Ci En

പൊതുവെ പറഞ്ഞാൽ ഒരു സ്വമേധാ സേവകനായി എട്ടു വർഷങ്ങൾ വേല ചെയ്യുക ഒരു നീണ്ട ഒന്നുതന്നെയാണ്. 18 വയസുകാരി Foo Ci-En – നെ സംബന്ധിച്ചിടത്തോളം അത് അവരുടെ ജീവിതകാലത്തിന്റെ പകുതി സമയമായി വരും. "ഞാൻ നാലാം ക്ലാസിൽ ആയിരിക്കുമ്പോഴാണ് എന്റെ മാതാപിതാക്കളോടൊപ്പം എല്ലാ ശനിയാഴ്ചയും സ്വമേധാ സേവനത്തിന് പോകുവാൻ ആരംഭിച്ചത്. എന്റെ മാതാപിതാക്കളുടെ സ്വാധീനത്താൽ അന്നുമുതൽ ഇന്നുവരെ ഞാൻ സേവനം ചെയ്യുന്നുണ്ട്. Foo Say Thye-o ആണ് Foo Ci-En – ന്റെ മാതാപിതാക്കൾ. അവർ ശ്രീനാരായണ മിഷനിലെ സേവക കൂട്ടത്തിന്റെ ഒരു ഭാഗമാണ്. സത്യം പറഞ്ഞാൽ അവരുടെ കുടും ബത്തിന്റെ കെട്ടുറപ്പിന് പ്രധാന കാരണം അവരുടെ സേവനസന്നദ്ധതയാണ്. "ശ്രീനാരായണ മിഷനിൽ സേവനം ചെയ്യുമ്പോഴാണ് എന്റെ മാതാപിതാക്കൾ കണ്ടുമുട്ടിയതും വിവാഹിതരായതും." FooCi-En പറഞ്ഞു. എന്റെ ചെറുപ്പം മുതലേ അവരോടൊപ്പം ഞാൻ SNM – ൽ പോകുമായിരുന്നു. ഞാൻ ശരിക്കും അത് ആസ്വദിച്ചു. അത് വളരെ സാർത്ഥകമായ (അർത്ഥ ഗർഭമായ) ഒന്നായിരുന്നു.

പ്രായമായപ്പോഴും, വേറെ പുതിയ താൽപര്യങ്ങൾ Ci-En – നെ നിഷ്പ്രയാസം ആദ്യ താൽപര്യങ്ങളിൽ നിന്നും ഒഴിച്ചുമാറ്റാമായിരുന്നു. മറിച്ച് (പകരം) അവ ളുടെ ചെറുപ്പകാലത്തെ സേവനത്തോടുള്ള അടങ്ങാത്ത

ആഗ്രഹം, പ്രായമായപ്പോഴും (സമയം കടന്നുപോകുന്തോറും) ബലം വർദ്ധിച്ചുകൊുതന്നെയിരുന്നു. "ഞാൻ ഒരു കൊച്ചുകുട്ടിയായിരിക്കുമ്പോൾ ഞാൻ എന്താണ് ചെയ്യുന്നതെന്ന് എനിക്ക് അറിയില്ലായിരുന്നു. എന്റെ മാതാപിതാക്കളെ അനുഗമിച്ച് സേവനം ചെയ്യുന്നതിൽ സന്തോഷം കത്തെിയിരുന്നു. പ്രായമുള്ളവർക്കും സുഖമില്ലാത്തവർക്കും ചെയ്യുന്ന സേവനം അവരെ സന്തോഷിപ്പിച്ചിരുന്നുവെന്ന് ഇപ്പോൾ എനിക്ക് മനസിലാകുന്നു. അതുകൊണ്ട് എന്റെ സേവനം ഞാൻ തുടർന്നുകൊണ്ടുതന്നെയിരിക്കും. അവർക്കുവേണ്ടിയുള്ള, ഞങ്ങളുടെ, ശനിയാഴ്ച തോറുമുള്ള സജീവപ്രവർത്തനങ്ങൾ ഞങ്ങൾ ചെയ്യുന്നില്ലായെങ്കിൽ, അവിടുത്തെ മുതിർന്ന അന്തേവാസികൾക്ക് ആ ദിവസം ഒരു രസവുമില്ലാത്ത ഒന്നായി മാറുമെന്ന് എനിക്ക് തോന്നുന്നു. എനിക്ക് സുഖമില്ലാതിരിക്കുന്ന ദിവസങ്ങളിൽപ്പോലും അവരുടെ സേവനം എന്റെ ധർമമാണെന്നു കരുതി ഞാൻ അവിടെ പോകും.'

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ഈയിടെയായി Ci-En – ന്റെ മാതാപിതാക്കളെക്കാൾ കൂടുതലായി അവളുടെ സാന്നിദ്ധ്യം ശ്രീനാരായണ സന്നദ്ധസേവക കൂട്ടത്തിൽ കാണാം. "2015 – ൽ ഞാനൊരു സജീവപ്രവർത്തകയായി. എന്റെ മാതാപിതാക്കൾ വേറെ സന്നദ്ധസേവക സമൂഹങ്ങളുാക്കി. അവർ കൂടുതൽ ഉത്സുകത്തോടെ ശ്രീനാരായണ സേവക സമിതിയിൽ വേല ചെയ്യുന്നു."

Ci-En ഇപ്പോൾ ശ്രീനാരായണ സന്നദ്ധ സേവക കമ്മിറ്റിയിലെ ഒരു അംഗമാണ്. മുതിർന്നവരുടെ സന്തോഷത്തിനുവേി കൂടുതൽ പൊതുപരിപാടികൾ Ci-En ഇപ്പോൾ ഉണ്ടാക്കിക്കൊണ്ടിരിക്കുകയാണ്. "നിങ്ങൾക്ക് ഒരു ശനിയാഴ്ച അവിടെ എത്തിച്ചേരാൻ കഴിയാതെ വന്നാൽ, അടുത്ത ആഴ്ച മുതിർന്നവർ ചോദിക്കും എന്തുകൊണ്ടാണ് നിങ്ങൾ തലേ ശനിയാഴ്ച ചെല്ലാത്തതെന്ന്." എത്ര വെല്ലുവിളികൾ നേരിടേിവന്നാലും സന്നദ്ധ സേവാ സംഘത്തിന്റെ ലക്ഷ്യങ്ങൾ സാധ്യമാക്കുമെന്ന് അവൾ പ്രതിജ്ഞ ചെയ്തു. "സേവനത്തിനും സേവനം നിലനിർത്തുന്നതിനും നല്ല ആവേശം (Passion) ആവശ്യമാണ്. വാരാന്ത്യം മാതാപിതാക്കളോടൊപ്പം കഴിയുന്നതിനേക്കാൾ കൂടുകൽ ആവേശം സേവനത്തിൽക്കൂടെ ലഭിക്കും."

കുടുംബാംഗങ്ങൾ ഒന്നിച്ച് സേവനത്തിന് തയാറാകുന്നത് ഒരുപക്ഷെ അവർക്ക് നല്ല ആവേശം ലഭിക്കുന്നതുകൊണ്ടാകാം. അവർക്ക് ഒന്നിച്ച് സമയം കഴിക്കാൻ ഇടയാകും. വാസ്തവത്തിൽ Ci-En – ന്റെ സഹോദരനും സന്നദ്ധസേവാ സംഘത്തിലെ ഒരു കമ്മിറ്റി അംഗമാണ്. സഹോദരിയെപ്പോലെ തന്നെ അയാളും വലിയ ചുമതലകൾ വഹിക്കുന്നുണ്ട്. ശരിക്കും പറഞ്ഞാൽ "കുടുംബ സേവകരുടെ" ഈ കുടുംബസേവനം Ci-En – ന് സുപ്രധാനവും ശ്രദ്ധേയവുമായ ഓർമയിൽ നീുനിൽക്കുന്ന ഒന്നാണ്. "മക്കൾ ചെറുപ്പമായിരിക്കുമ്പോൾ തന്നെ ഈ സേവന മനോഭാവം അവരിൽ പകരണം", Ci-En ന്യായീകരിക്കുന്നു (Reasoning). അവളുടെ മാതാപിതാക്കൾ ഇത് സ്പഷ്ടമായി (patently) അവരുടെ രണ്ടു മക്കളിലും പകർന്നു. Ci-En – ഉം ആ പാരമ്പര്യം തുടരുവാൻ ആഗ്രഹിക്കുന്നു. "ഞാൻ സർവകലാശാലയിൽ പോയാലും സേവനം തുടരും; എന്റെ കല്യാണ ശേഷവും ഞാൻ എന്റെ ഭർത്താവിനെ സേവിക്കുന്നതിന് കൂടെ കൊണ്ടുപോകും; പിന്നീട് എന്റെ കുഞ്ഞുങ്ങളെയും. മൂന്നാം തലമുറയിലും ഞങ്ങൾ ഇത് തുടരും.

Growing Spiritually through Volunteering: Foo Say Thye

അദ്ദേഹം സ്ഥാപിത മാനങ്ങൾക്ക് വിധേയനും, വ്യാപാരത്തെ ചിട്ടപ്പടിയാക്കുന്നവും, ഓഹരി കമ്പോളത്തിൽ ചുറുചുറുക്കോടെ വ്യാപാരത്തിൽ മുഴുകിയിരിക്കുന്നവനും ക്ഷിപ്രകോപിയുമായിരുന്നു.

നിനച്ചിരിയാതെ, ഒരു ദിവസം, Foo Say Thye-ൽ ഇവയ്ക്കെല്ലാം ഒരു മാറ്റം സംഭവിച്ചു. 1994-ൽ ഒരു മിത്രത്തിന്റെ വിവാഹസമയത്ത് അയാളിൽ ചില വെളിപാടുകളുായി. "എനിക്ക് അംഗവൈകല്യം സംഭവിച്ചവരുടെയിടയിൽ സേവനം ചെയ്യുന്ന ഒരു മിത്രമുായിരുന്നു. അയാളുടെ വിവാഹത്തിന് അയാളുടെ സേവനം സ്വീകരിച്ചിരുന്ന എല്ലാവരെയും ക്ഷണിച്ചിരുന്നു. അവരെ വിവാഹസ്ഥലത്ത് കണ്ടപ്പോൾ എനിക്കൊരു പ്രചോദനമുായി. "അയാൾ ചെയ്യുന്നത് അർത്ഥവത്തും താൽപര്യമുളവാക്കുന്ന ഒന്നായി എനിക്ക് തോന്നി", അയാൾ പറഞ്ഞു.

Say Thye-ക്ക് ആ ദിവസം നിർണായകമായ ഒന്നായിരുന്നു. "ഒരു അർത്ഥവുമില്ലാത്ത ജീവിതമായിരുന്നു എന്റേതെന്ന് എനിക്ക് തോന്നി," അയാൾ പറഞ്ഞു. Say Thye-ക്ക് ആ ദിവസം നിർണായകമായ ഒന്നായിരുന്നു.

"ഒരു അർത്ഥവുമില്ലാത്ത ജീവിതമായിരുന്നു എന്റേതെന്ന് എനിക്ക് തോന്നി. എനിക്കും മറ്റുള്ളവർക്ക് സഹായം ചെയ്യണമെന്ന ആഗ്രഹം തോന്നി. എനിക്കും ഒരു സന്നദ്ധസേവകൻ ആകണമെന്ന് ഞാൻ എന്റെ മിത്രത്തോട് പറഞ്ഞു," പരിശീലനം നടത്താൻ National Counsil of Social Service-നെ വിളിച്ച് ബന്ധം പുലർത്താൻ Say Thye-യുടെ മിത്രം ഉപദേശിച്ചു. പ്രാഥമിക ശിക്ഷണത്തിന്റെ ഭാഗമായിട്ട് Say Thye, ശ്രീനാരായണ മിഷൻ സന്ദർശിച്ചു. അതിനുശേഷം ഒരിക്കലും ഒരു തിരിച്ചുനോട്ടവും തിരിച്ചുപോക്കും ഉണ്ടായിട്ടില്ല.

ശ്രീനാരായണ സന്നദ്ധ സേവാസംഘം 1992-ൽ ആളുകളുടെ ഒരു സംഘമായി രൂപീകരിച്ചതാണ്. അവർ സംഘമായി Sri Narayana Mission Home

for the Aged (വൃദ്ധസദനം)-ൽ എല്ലാ വാരത്തിലും പോകുമായിരുന്നു. 1994-ന്റെ അവസാനത്തിൽ Say Thye അവരുമായി ചേർന്നു.

പക്ഷെ അതൊരു ക്രമമല്ലാത്ത തുടക്കമായിരുന്നു. "ഓഹരി കമ്പോളത്തിൽ (Stock Market) പെട്ടെന്നുള്ള ചിന്തകളും പെട്ടെന്നുള്ള തീരുമാനങ്ങളും ആവശ്യമാണ്. അങ്ങനെ നിങ്ങളുടെ മാനസികാവസ്ഥയും പെട്ടെന്നാണ് മാറുന്നത്. ഒരു സന്നദ്ധസേവകനായ ശേഷം എനിക്ക് എന്നിൽ ചില മാറ്റങ്ങൾ വരുത്തേിവന്നു. കാരണം, പ്രാരംഭത്തിൽ ഞങ്ങൾക്ക് വളരെ സംശയങ്ങളുണ്ടായി; കാരണം, സേവകർ വിവിധ തുറകളിൽ നിന്നുള്ളവരായിരുന്നു; തിങ്കളാഴ്ച മുതൽ വെള്ളിയാഴ്ച വരെ ഞാനൊരു മുൻകോപിയും ശനിയാഴ്ചയും ഞായറാഴ്ചയും ഞാൻ എന്നെത്തന്നെ മാറ്റേണ്ടിയുമിരുന്നു. എന്റെ അനുഭവം എന്നെ വളരെ പഠിപ്പിച്ചു.

Say Thye ആദ്ധ്യാത്മികമായി വളരെ വളർന്നു. ഗുരുവിന്റെ അനുഗ്രഹത്താൽ "ഞാൻ സേവനം ആരംഭിക്കുമ്പോൾ അവിടെ എട്ട് സന്നദ്ധസേവകരേ ഉണ്ടായിരുന്നുള്ളൂ. അന്ന് ഞാനൊരു പുതിയ സേവകനായിരുന്നു. ഒരു ദിവസം, മഠത്തിലെ, ഗുരുവിന്റെ പടത്തിനു മുന്നിൽ നിന്ന് കൂടുതൽ സന്നദ്ധസേവകരെ കിട്ടാൻ സഹായിക്കണമേയെന്ന് ഞാൻ പ്രാർത്ഥിച്ചു. ഞാൻ അദ്ദേഹത്തോടു പറഞ്ഞു, "ഞാൻ അങ്ങേയ്ക്ക് സഹായം ചെയ്യണമെങ്കിൽ അങ്ങ് എന്നെ സഹായിക്കണം." ഞങ്ങളുടെ പത്താം വാർഷികത്തിൽ ഞങ്ങൾക്ക് 300 സേവകരുായിരുന്നു. ഞാൻ ആഗ്രഹിക്കുന്നതെല്ലാം സാവധാനത്തിൽ സത്യമാകാൻ തുടങ്ങി. എനിക്ക് തോന്നുന്നത്, നമ്മൾ ഗുരുവിൽ ആശ്രയം നേടിയാൽ അദ്ദേഹം നമ്മളെ സഹായിക്കുമെന്നാണ്."

Say Thye ഇപ്പോൾ സേവകസംഘത്തിന്റെ അമരക്കാരൻ (നേതാവ്, തലവൻ) ആണ്. ശ്രീനാരായണ മിഷനിലെ അന്തേവാസികളെ സേവിക്കണമെന്ന Say Thye-യുടെ കലർപ്പില്ലാത്ത (ശുദ്ധമായ) ആഗ്രഹം ആയാളെ അതിന്റെ ഉത്തരവാദിത്വം (ചുമതല) ഏറ്റെടുത്ത് നടത്തുവാൻ പ്രേരിപ്പിച്ചു. "നിങ്ങൾ അവിടെ പോയി അവരെ സന്ദർശിക്കുകയും, സഹായിക്കുകയും ചെയ്തില്ലായെങ്കിൽ മുതിർന്നവർക്ക് നിങ്ങളുടെ അഭാവം തോന്നും. അതിനാൽ ഞങ്ങളുടെ അവിടുത്തെ വേലകൾ മുടങ്ങാതിരിക്കാൻ ഞങ്ങൾ അങ്ങേയറ്റം ശ്രമിക്കും. ഞങ്ങളുടെ പ്രയത്നത്തേക്കാൾ കൂടുതൽ ലാഭമാണ് അവിടുത്തെ സേവനത്തിൽ നിന്നും ഞങ്ങൾക്ക് ലഭിക്കുന്നത്. എത്രയോ മെച്ചമായ കൃപയാണ് ഞങ്ങൾക്ക് അനുഭവപ്പെടുക! എന്റെ ക്ഷിപ്രകോപത്തിന് ഒരു മാറ്റം വന്നു. മെച്ചപ്പെട്ട സ്വഭാവക്കാരനായി. സേവനം, എന്നെ മാറ്റി. ഞാൻ ഇപ്പോൾ കൂടുതൽ ശ്രദ്ധ ആകർഷിക്കപ്പെടുന്നു. എനിക്കിപ്പോൾ ധാരാളം മിത്രങ്ങളുണ്ട്. മറ്റുള്ളവരുമായി കൂടുതൽ ഇടപഴകുന്നുണ്ട്. സഹായാഭ്യർത്ഥനയുമായി കൂടുതൽ ആളുകൾ നിങ്ങളെ സമീപിക്കുന്നു. ആളുകൾ നിങ്ങളെ കൂടുതൽ വിശ്വസിക്കുന്നു. നിങ്ങൾ മറ്റുള്ളവർക്ക് നൻമ ചെയ്യുന്നത് കാണുമ്പോൾ അവർ നിങ്ങളുടെ സഹായത്തിനായി മുന്നോട്ടു വരും. ഇത് മനസിൽ കരുതിയാണ് നിങ്ങൾ സേവനം ആരംഭിച്ചതല്ലായെങ്കിലും ഇതാണ് സേവനത്തിന്റെ ഫലം.

ഞാൻ ഭാഗ്യവാനാണ്. ഈയൊരു വഴി തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്തതിൽ എനിക്ക് സന്തോഷമുണ്ട്; അല്ലായിരുന്നുവെങ്കിൽ, ഞാൻ വേറെയൊരു മനുഷ്യനായി മാറിയേനെ. എന്റെ ഇപ്പോഴത്തെ ഈ അവസ്ഥ ഞാൻ ഇഷ്ടപ്പെടുന്നു. എന്റെ കുടുംബ മുഴുവനും സേവനത്തിൽ ബദ്ധശ്രദ്ധരാണ്. ശ്രീനാരായണ സേവകരിലെ രണ്ടാം തലമുറയിൽ എന്റെ മകനും മകളും ഉൾപ്പെടുന്നു.

Our Family, Our Service to the Mission: Raghavan Family

മിഷൻ ഇല്ലായിരുന്നെങ്കിൽ എന്റെ കുടുംബം വ്യത്യസ്തമായ ഒന്നായിരുന്നേനെ, അശോകൻ രാഘവൻ തീർത്തുപറയുന്നു. ശ്രീനാരായണ മിഷനുമായുള്ള അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ ബന്ധത്തിന് പ തിറ്റാുകളുടെ ദൈർഘ്യമുണ്ട്. 1950-ാം ആണ്ടു മുതൽ അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ മാതാപിതാക്കൾ അവി ടുത്തെ സജീവ അംഗങ്ങളാണ്; പ്രത്യേകിച്ച് കലാസാംസ്കാരിക പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങളിൽ. അമ്മ മിഷനിലെ സംഗീത നൃത്തകാര്യങ്ങളിൽ പ്രത്യേ കിച്ചും ഭാഗഭാക്കായിരുന്നു, അംബികാ രാഘവൻ പങ്കുവയ്ക്കുന്നു. അവരുടെ അച്ഛൻ അവിടുത്തെ സാംസ്കാരിക കമ്മിറ്റിയിൽ മാർഗദർശിയും പ്രധാന ചുമതല വഹിക്കുന്നയാളുമായിരുന്നു, മോഹൻദാസ് രാഘവൻ ഓർമിക്കുന്നു. കുടും ബമായുള്ള വിനോദയാത്ര എപ്പോഴും മിഷനിലേ ക്കായിരിക്കും; കാരണം, അക്കാലത്ത് ഗ്രാമ ജീവി തത്തിൽ അധികമൊന്നും ചെയ്യാനുായിരുന്നുല്ല. ചിലപ്പോൾ വാടക കാറിലാണ് (Taxi) ഞങ്ങൾ അവിടെ പോകുക. അങ്ങനെ ആ യാത്രകൾ വളരെ സന്തോഷാവേശം തരുന്നതായിരുന്നു, മോഹൻദാസ് ഓർക്കുന്നു. ആ കുടുംബത്തിലെ ഏഴു മക്കൾക്കും, മിഷൻ അവരുടെയൊരു രാം വീടും, അവിടുത്തെ അംഗങ്ങൾ അവരുടെ നീട്ടുകുടുംബാംഗങ്ങളും ആയി രുന്നു (Extended Family). മിഷൻ അവരുടെ കുടും ബത്തിന് വളരെ താങ്ങും തണലുമായിരുന്നു (Sup-portive). അതിപോലെ തന്നെ സിങ്കപ്പൂരിൽ കൂടുതൽ ക്രമീകൃതമായ ജീവിതം ഉറപ്പിക്കാനും മിഷൻ പിന്തുണ നൽകി. അവിടുത്തെ അംഗങ്ങൾ മിക്കപ്പോഴും ഞങ്ങ ളുടെ വീട്ടിൽ വരികയും, പാട്ടു പാടുകയും, പാട്ടുകൾ ലേഖനം ചെയ്യുകയും ചെയ്യുമായിരുന്നു, മോഹൻദാസ് ഓർമിക്കുന്നു. അവരുടെ അവശ്യസമയത്ത് ഒരു കുടുംബം പോലെ മിഷൻ അവരോടൊപ്പമുണ്ടായി രുന്നു. അമ്മയുടെ അന്ത്യകർമങ്ങളിൽ സാമ്പത്തിക സഹായം നൽകിയതുകൂടാതെ, Australia-ലെ സർവകലാകാലാ പഠിത്തത്തിന് ആവശ്യമായ പ ണം കടമായി നൽകുകയും ചെയ്തു, മോഹൻദാസ് കൂട്ടിച്ചേർത്തു.

മിഷനുമായുള്ള സമ്പർക്കം സഹോദരങ്ങളിൽ തുടച്ചുമാറ്റാൻ വയ്യാത്ത ഒന്നായി മുദ്രണം ചെയ്യപ്പെട്ടു. അശോകൻ ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരുവിന്റെ ആദർശങ്ങളും സിദ്ധാന്തങ്ങളും മനസിനുള്ളിൽ സംഗ്രഹിച്ചു. അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ പഠിപ്പിക്കലുകളായ സ്വാതന്ത്ര്യത്തിൽക്കൂടി വിജ്ഞാനം നേടുക, സംഘടനയിൽക്കൂടി ശക്തി (കരുത്ത്) നേടുക, എന്നിവ എന്നിൽ ശക്തമായ സ്വാധീനം ചെലുത്തി. ഇവ എന്റെ ഉള്ളിന്റെയുള്ളിൽ വരെ ശക്തമായി എത്തി. ചില അംഗങ്ങളുടെ മക്കൾ സ്കൂളിൽ നല്ല മാർക്കും, ജീവിതത്തിൽ ഉന്നതസ്ഥാനവും നേടിയിട്ടുണ്ട്. അവർ ഞങ്ങൾക്ക് മാതൃകയായി മാറി. മിഷന്റെ വിശ്വാസത്തിലും സേവനത്തിലും അമ്മ ഉറച്ചുനിന്നു. ആ വിശ്വാസത്തിലും സേവനത്തിലും ഞങ്ങൾ മക്കളും ഉറച്ചുനിന്നു (വളർന്നുവന്നു). ആഴ്ചയിൽ രണ്ടു ദിവസങ്ങൾ, വൈകിട്ട് 5.30 മുതൽ രാത്രി 12 മണി വരെ അമ്മ അച്ഛനോടൊപ്പം മിഷനിൽ അഭിനയ പരിശീലനം ആവർത്തിച്ചുനടത്തിക്കൊരുന്നു, അശോകൻ വെളിപ്പെടുത്തി. അച്ഛൻ ബ്രിട്ടീഷ് യുദ്ധോപകരണ വകുപ്പിൽ (British Ordinance Department) പകശാലാ സൂക്ഷിപ്പുകാരൻ (Store Keeper) ആയിരുന്നു. മാസശമ്പളമായ നാന്നൂറു വെള്ളി (×400) കൊണ്ടാണ് ഞങ്ങളുടെ കുടുംബം കഴിഞ്ഞിരുന്നത്. ഇതൊക്കെയാണെങ്കിലും ഞങ്ങളെ മുന്നോട്ടു നയിച്ചത് മിഷന്റെ മൂല്യങ്ങളാണ് (Values). മിഷനുവേ ത്യാഗങ്ങൾ സഹിച്ച്, തുച്ഛശമ്പളത്തിൽ കുടുംബം നയിച്ചു. അത് ഞങ്ങളെ ശക്തമായി ബന്ധിപ്പിക്കുകയും (Bonded), മിഷനുവേ എന്തു ത്യാഗങ്ങൾ ചെയ്യുന്നതിനും പ്രേരിപ്പിച്ചു. ദേശീയ സേവനത്തിൽ എനിക്ക് Lance Corporal ആയി (സൈന്യത്തിലെ താഴ്ന്ന പടിയിലുള്ള ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥൻ) സ്ഥാനക്കയറ്റം കിട്ടിയപ്പോൾ ലഭിച്ച ശമ്പളത്തിൽ നിന്നും 50 വെള്ളി (×50) കൊടുത്ത് 1972 ജനുവരി മാസത്തിൽ ഞാൻ മിഷനിലെ ആയുഷ്കാല അംഗമായി, അശോകൻ വെളിപ്പെടുത്തി. അദ്ദേഹം ഇപ്പോഴും മിഷനിലെ സേവനവുമായി മുന്നോട്ടുപോകുന്നു. സേവനം ഞങ്ങളുടെ തലയിൽ അടിച്ചുകയറ്റി (Drummed Intous). നമ്മൾ എത്ര ദാരിദ്ര്യം അനുഭവിക്കേവന്നാലും നമുക്കുള്ളത് നാം പാവങ്ങളുമായി പങ്കുവയ്ക്കണം. ഞങ്ങൾ മിഷനിലെ മുതിർന്നവരുടെ താമസ സ്ഥലത്തു പോവുകയും സഹതാപ മനോഭാവം ഹൃദയത്തിൽ ഉണ്ടാക്കുവാൻ അത് ഉപകരിക്കുകയും ചെയ്തു, അംബിക കൂട്ടിച്ചേർത്തു.

Australia-ലേക്ക് താമസം മാറ്റിയശേഷവും, അശോകനെപ്പോലെ അംബികയും മിഷൻ സേവനം തുടരുന്നു. മിഷന്റെ ഗ്രന്ഥപ്രസാധനത്തിന്റെ പരിശോധനയും അംബിക നടത്തുന്നുണ്ട്. മിഷൻ നടത്തുന്നതിന്റെ സങ്കീർണമായ വ്യത്യാസങ്ങൾ പോലും കണ്ടുപിടിക്കാൻ സമർത്ഥമായ പാഠങ്ങൾ മോഹൻദാസ് പഠിച്ചു. മോഹൻദാസും മിഷന്റെ ഭരണനിർവഹണ സമിതിയെല ഒരു അംഗമായും, മറ്റുപല ഭാരവാഹിത്വങ്ങളും വഹിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്.

ഗുരുവിന്റെ സിദ്ധാന്തങ്ങളും പഠിപ്പിക്കലുമെല്ലാം ഞങ്ങളെ പ്രചോദിപ്പിക്കുകയും, കുടുംബം ഒന്നായി യോജിപ്പിക്കുകയും ചെയ്തു, അശോകൻ പറയുന്നു. ഒരു ജാതി, ഒരു മതം, ഒരു ദൈവം എന്ന ഗുരുവിന്റെ സിദ്ധാന്തങ്ങളിൽ നിന്നും ഞങ്ങൾ വഴിതെറ്റിപ്പോയിട്ടില്ല (Strayed). ആ സിദ്ധാന്തം ഞങ്ങളെ പ്രചോദിപ്പിക്കുകയും കുടംബമായി ഒന്നായി സംഘടിപ്പിക്കുകയും ചെയ്തിട്ടുണ്ട്, അംബിക വിശദീകരിച്ചു. ഞങ്ങൾ ലോകത്തിന്റെ എല്ലാ ഭാഗത്തുമുണ്ട്; എന്നിരുന്നാലും ഞങ്ങൾ വളരെ അടുത്താണ്, മോഹൻദാസ് സംക്ഷേപിച്ചു പറഞ്ഞു.

Commited to the ideals of Sree Narayana Guru: R Raveenaran

തൊണ്ണൂറാം വയസിൽ കുറച്ചുപേർക്കു മാത്രമേ ഒരു പദ്ധതിയുടെ ചുമതല ഏറ്റെടുക്കുവാനും, അത് നിലനിർത്തിക്കൊണ്ടുപോകുവാനുമുള്ള കായികശേഷി ഉണ്ടാകുകയുള്ളൂ. പക്ഷെ രവീന്ദ്രൻ മറ്റുള്ളവരിൽ നിന്നും വ്യത്യസ്തനായ ഒരു വ്യക്തിയാണ്. അദ്ദേഹം പതിവായി വീട്ടിൽ നിന്നും 25 കിലോമീറ്റർ ദൂരെയുള്ള ശ്രീനാരായണ മിഷനിലേക്ക് സന്ധ്യക്ക് ഏഴു മണി മുതൽ രാത്രി 11 മണി വരെ നീുനിൽക്കുന്ന മീറ്റിംഗിൽ പങ്കെടുക്കുവാൻ തനിയെ വണ്ടിയോടിച്ചുപോകും.

തൊണ്ണൂറാം വയസുള്ള ഇദ്ദേഹം ശ്രീനാരായണ മിഷനിലെ ഒരു അംഗവും അവിടുത്തെ കെട്ടിടനിർമാണ കമ്മിറ്റിയിലെ ഒരു സജീവ അംഗവുമാണ്. അദ്ദേഹത്തിന് ഇത് ശ്രീനാരായണഗുരുവിന്റെ കാഴ്ചപ്പാടും ക്ഷേമവും നിലനിർത്താൻ കിട്ടിയ ഒരു സുവർണാവസരമാണ്. ഞാൻ ഗുരുവിന്റെ മൂലതത്വത്തിൽ (Principles) വിശ്വസിക്കുകയും മനുഷ്യജാതിയുടെ ക്ഷേമത്തിനും ഉന്നതിക്കും (Welfare) വേണ്ടി പ്രവർത്തിക്കുവാൻ ആഗ്രഹിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു, അദ്ദേഹം ന്യായീകരിച്ചു (Reasoned).

1950-ൽ അദ്ദേഹം കേരളത്തിൽ നിന്നും സിങ്കപ്പൂരിൽ വന്നു. അദ്ദേഹത്തിന് ഗുരുവിന്റെ സിദ്ധാന്തങ്ങളിൽ അവഗാഹമായ (Steep) ജ്ഞാനമുായിരുന്നു. തന്നാൽ കഴിഞ്ഞത് സമൂഹത്തിനുവേണ്ടി ചെയ്യുവാൻ അദ്ദേഹം നിശ്ചയിച്ചു. വളരെ ദൂരെയുള്ള ഒരു അന്യനാട്ടിലും ഗുരുവിന്റെ സമൂഹ ഉയർത്തൽ പ്രചരണം (പഠിപ്പിക്കൽ) നടത്തണമെന്ന് അദ്ദേഹം നിശ്ചയിച്ചു. ഭാരിച്ച ചുമതലകൾക്കിടയിലും രവീന്ദ്രൻ ശ്രീനാരായണ മിഷനിലെ അംഗമാകുകയും കുറച്ചുകാലങ്ങൾ അവിടുത്തെ കാര്യനിർവഹണ കമ്മിറ്റിയിൽ സെക്രട്ടറിയായി ഭാരിച്ച ചുമതലകൾ വഹിക്കുകയും ചെയ്തിട്ടുണ്ട്. വേലയും കുടുംബ ചുമതലകളും അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ ഭാരം കൂട്ടി. ആദ്യകാലങ്ങളിൽ മിഷന്റെ ആവശ്യങ്ങൾക്കായി സംഭാവനകൾ ചോദിക്കുവാൻ വീടുകൾ തോറും രവീ

ന്ദ്രൻ കയറിയിറങ്ങിയിട്ടുണ്ട്. ആളുകൾക്ക് കൊടുക്കാൻ കഴിയുന്ന സംഭാവനകൾ സന്തോഷത്തോടെയും നന്ദിയോടെയും രവീന്ദ്രൻ വാങ്ങുമായിരുന്നു. കാലക്രമേണ മിഷൻ വളരുന്നതോടൊപ്പം രവീന്ദ്രന്റെ ചുമതലകളും വർദ്ധിച്ചുവന്നു. മിഷന്റെ പല കാര്യങ്ങളിലും തന്നാൽ കഴിവതെല്ലാം ചെയ്യുവാൻ മുന്നോട്ടുവരുമായിരുന്നു.

2017-ൽ അദ്ദേഹം തന്റെ തൊണ്ണൂറാം വയസ് (ജൻദിനം) ആഘോഷിച്ചു. എങ്കിലും പ്രായം അദ്ദേഹത്തെ പിന്നോട്ടുവലിച്ചില്ല. മിഷനിലെ അംഗങ്ങൾ കാറോടിക്കുന്നതിൽ നിന്നും എന്നെ പിന്തിരിപ്പിക്കാൻ ശ്രമിക്കും. രാത്രിയിൽ അവർ എന്നെ വീട്ടിൽ കൊാക്കാമെന്നു പറയും. ഞാൻ ചെയ്തുകൊിരുന്നത് ഇപ്പോഴും തുടരുന്നു. ഗുരുവിന്റെ അനുഗ്രഹത്താൽ എനിക്ക് ഇപ്പോഴും എല്ലാം ചെയ്യുവാൻ കഴിയുന്നു. ഗുരുവിന്റെ പഠിപ്പിക്കൽ ആളുകളുടെ സേവനത്തിനായി എന്നെ കൂടുതൽ പ്രേരിപ്പിക്കുന്നു. സേവനത്തിൽ ഞാൻ സന്തോഷിക്കുന്നു. ഗുരുവിന് നല്ല ശക്തിയുണ്ടായിരുന്നുവെന്ന് ഞാൻ വിശ്വസിക്കുന്നു. നിങ്ങൾ നിസ്വാർത്ഥം മിഷനുവേി സേവനം ചെയ്താൽ നിങ്ങൾ വിജയിക്കും (അഭിവൃദ്ധി നേടും). പക്ഷെ നിങ്ങൾ നിസ്വാർത്ഥസേവനം തന്നെ ചെയ്യണം. ഗുരുവിന്റെ കൃപ കൊണ്ട് ഞാൻ ഇപ്പോഴും ആരോഗ്യവാനാണ്. എന്റെ മരണം വരെ ഈ വേല ഞാൻ തുടരും.

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Editorial Team

Singapore Bicentennial Launch Event 28 Jan 2019 - Excerpt from Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's speech:

“...In the process, they formed communities and organised themselves to help one another. Ethnic groups to provide mutual support and community leadership, like the Chinese clans and the Eurasian Association. Welfare bodies to take care of the poor and underprivileged, like the Sree Narayana Mission and the Catholic Welfare Services...”

Progress with Compassion

The Journey Continues…

Notes

Artist – Mdm. Lim Mou Tan, Resident of SNM Home

Sree Narayana Mission (Singapore)

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