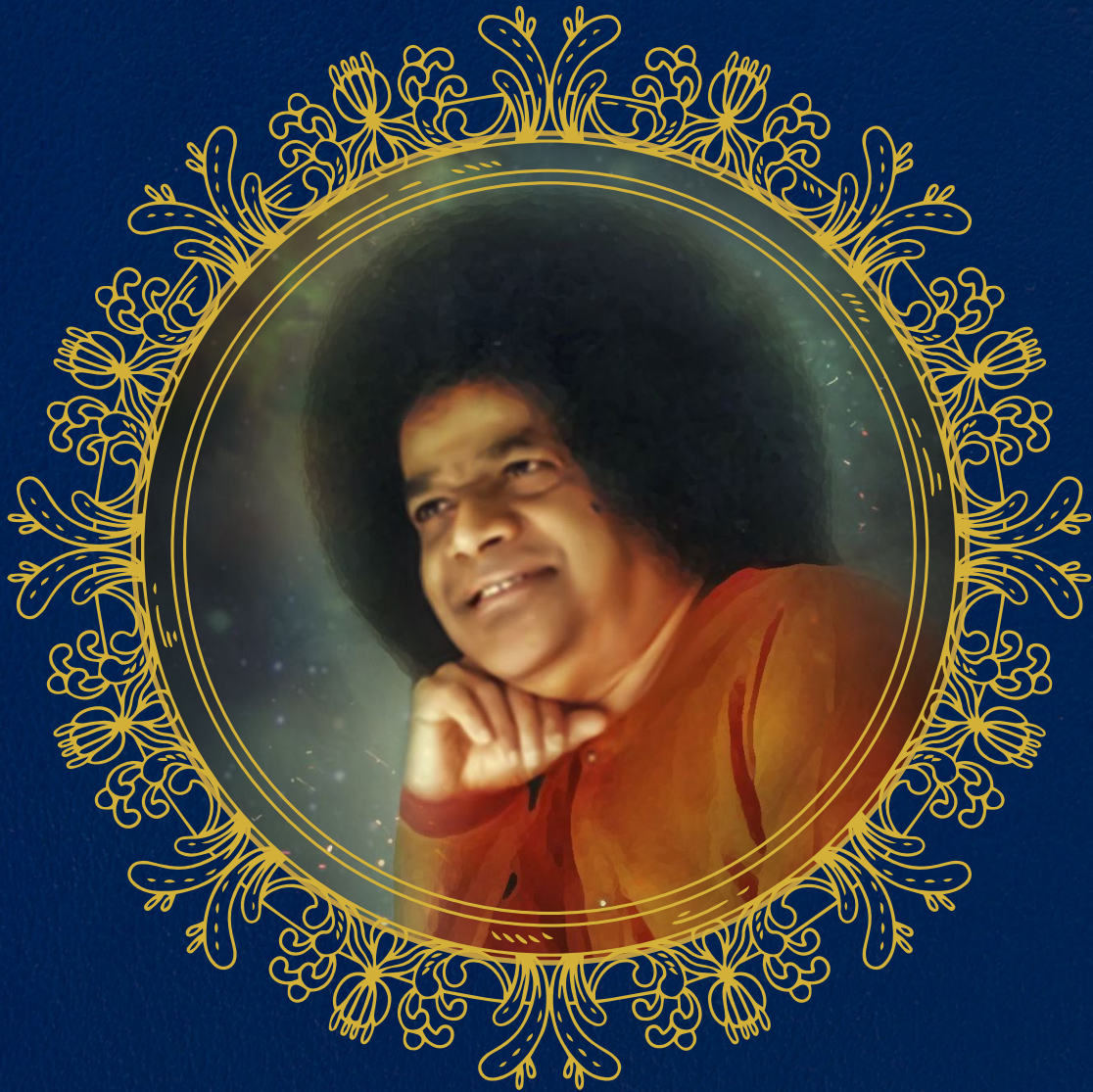


VIDYULLEKHA



ANNUAL ISSUE - 2024



TABLE OF CONTENTS

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR	4
BHAGAWAN UVACHA	5
ALUMNI PROFILE - Krishna Kishore Jasthi	6
ALUMNI PROFILE - Prof. M. Krishnamurthy	8
COVER STORY - A Bridge Across Time	10
FROM MY DIARY	14
GRATITUDE CORNER	17
LOVE IN ACTION	20

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

As another chapter unfolds in the grand saga of our lives, it brings us immense joy to reconnect with each of you through the pages of Vidyullekha. The fabric of time weaves its intricate patterns, and we find ourselves once again at the juncture where nostalgia mingles with anticipation.

Our annual sojourn to the memories of our beloved Swami's divine presence is an eternal pilgrimage, a timeless tradition that breathes life into our spirits. In the dance of years, we are not merely spectators; we are participants in the cosmic ballet choreographed by the Divine Hands of our Bhagawan. As we reflect on the previous year, the echoes of His love still resonate within us, serving as a perennial reminder of the sapling of love He planted in our hearts. Like a beacon, that love guides us through the myriad experiences that life unfurls before us, allowing us to weather storms and savour the sunshine alike. This edition of Vidyullekha, much like a radiant sunrise, promises to illuminate the corridors of our hearts. In the Bhagawan Uvacha section, Brother Dilip Chaudhary shares a profound encounter with Swami, unravelling the intricate tapestry of karma, intentions, and trust. It's a narrative that not only imparts wisdom but also reminds us of the profound connection we share with the Divine.

Our Cover Story, 'A Bridge Across Time', is a testament to the creative brilliance of our alumni. This annual album, a devotional symphony echoing through time, beautifully captures the evolution of the Bhajan Movement. It's a bridge that transcends generations, connecting us with Swami and fostering a sense of brotherhood among us. The commitment, purpose, and love poured into this endeavour are nothing short of miraculous, symbolising the continued shower of Swami's blessings. In the section 'From My Diary', we delve into the transformative memories of a brother Swagath Kumar Routhray's family, each page imprinted with Swami's love. It's a heartwarming journey from a mother's Bhajan melodies to a Sai student's academic and professional path—a narrative spun by Swami's grace and omniscient guidance.

Our Alumni Profile features the illustrious Professor M Krishnamurthy, the Director of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Hyderabad. His journey from Eswaramma School to a distinguished physicist is a testament to the harmonious blend of academic excellence and devotion to Swami. His story echoes the sentiment that true success lies not just in academic accolades but in unwavering commitment to Swami's ideals. We also talk about Krishna Kishore Jasthi, currently functioning as the Chief Income Tax Commissioner, Ministry of Finance. In a career adorned by multiple landmark projects of prominent national significance, Krishna Kishore has managed to keep a stellar and honest reputation by following Swami's guidance every step of the way.

In the Gratitude Corner, we are privileged to hear from Prof. N. Sivakumar, Director of Brindavan campus, in a letter titled 'Hridaya Brindavan'. It symbolises the eternal connection between Sai students and our alma mater. Prof. Sivakumar urges us to actively engage in the institute's growth, showcasing our talents, and contributing to the spiritual progress of current students—a call to action that resonates with the essence of Sai education. And finally, the Love in Action section beautifully elucidates how the selfless Seva that Brothers Lala Susanta Ray, Devdutt Swain, Vivekananda Sahoo, Suryaprakash Pati and Dr. Satish Pattnaik has transformed an orphanage into a CBSE school modelled on the lines of Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School and, in the process, transformed the neighbourhood.

May this edition of Vidyullekha bring Swami's love to us in abundance, lighting up the canvas of our lives. May His message resonate within us, guiding us through the upcoming year's adventures. Carry His love to our near and dear ones and beyond, becoming the living message of Sai.

Do share your thoughts and experiences with us at Vidyullekha@saistudents.org and stay connected with us at www.vidyullekha.in.

With gratitude and love,
Team Vidyullekha
Sri Sathya Sai Alumni

BHAGAWAN UVACHA

Brother Dilip Chaudhary (MBA, 1991)

One evening after the conclusion of an interview, Bhagawan summoned Mr. Khial Das and me for Padaseva before the evening Bhajan. After silently perusing a few letters, Bhagawan encouraged us to pose any questions to Him.



A persistent thought had been troubling me regarding individuals coming to Bhagawan's interview room, knocking on the door to submit their letters and explaining the urgency behind their requests. My duty entailed informing Bhagawan when letters arrived and seeking His guidance on their acceptance. Usually, His nod brought joy, but sometimes a firm "No" painted faces with sadness. Conveying this to those who, with hope, sought His support was incredibly challenging.

I mustered the courage to ask Bhagawan, "Swami, people come to deliver letters to You when You sit upstairs. When I seek Your permission, You usually say yes, but sometimes, You refuse to accept the letter. The person has come to You as the last resort. When I convey Your refusal, I am often questioned by them and troubled by the thought that I might have failed to communicate to You correctly, resulting in Your refusal to accept their letter. I am also deeply distressed that God's door is being closed to them and it is my responsibility to convey this sad news to them. How should I approach this situation without succumbing to sadness?"

Bhagawan set the letter aside and gazed at me as I focused all my attention on Him. He responded (summarized): "Do you believe that a person's interaction with Me begins only when they come with a letter and knock on the interview door? Your involvement is limited to the moment when someone approaches you with a letter and a request for its delivery to Me. However, their interaction with Me extends beyond that specific instance. There is a deeper connection between them and Me - one that transcends those few moments of interaction that you witness. Their life is filled with numerous moments before they even conceived the thought of writing the letter, and there will be moments after the letter's denial. Their past karma, intentions, and unwavering determination dictate whether I accept the letter or not. When I communicate to you not to take the letter, how you convey the message to them and the thoughts you hold while delivering the denial message influence your karma. Ultimately, how they receive the message of refusal shapes their future karma. Some are filled with gratitude when I accept the letter, while others are filled with ego. Have compassion for all and convey any refusals with humility. Have faith - I always act in the best interest of everyone, even if the person may not perceive it that way in the immediate moment. With the love of a thousand mothers, why would I do something to harm My child? Many times, by denying letters, I cleanse away past karmas. If the person accepts that whatever Swami does is for their good and doesn't feel sadness or question My actions, they come closer to Me. If they question and do not accept the denial in this manner, they move farther from Me. Your feeling bad when I deny accepting someone's letter is a good quality - you perform your duty with love in your heart. I am a witness to lives that transcend beyond the few moments of interaction you have with them. They are in Me for much longer than they think. I provide everyone with what they deserve, even if they don't fully understand it. I only discipline with the intention of love. My grace is on everyone equally. If you think good, you have a larger vessel to collect My grace. If you think bad, your vessel is smaller. That's why I say, 'Be good, do good, and see good.' This is the way to reach God."

As His words resonated in the interview room and in my heart, the melody of the flute wafted in from the Bhajan Hall. He asked us to move as He stepped out for the Bhajan session. I am forever grateful to such a loving Lord who guided, guarded, and loved me in spite of who I am.

ALUMNI PROFILE - BROTHER KRISHNA KISHORE JASTHI (B.COM 1983)

Brother Krishna Kishore Jasthi is the Chief Commissioner of Income Tax, Govt of India.



In a career marked by honesty, hard work, diligence and compassion, Brother Krishna Kishore has served under numerous political leaders and government officials. His name is spoken in the hallways of power with a certain reverence reserved only for those who stood by their principles. He was named Chief Commissioner of Income Tax, Karnataka in July 2023. With humility, Krishna Kishore attributes it all to Swami, having endeavoured to make his life exemplify Swami's message.

It was thanks to Swami's blessings that Krishna found himself at Sri Sathya Sai University (then Bangalore University), despite scoring only 49% in his 10th standard exams. He was determined to perform better and completed his college education with distinction scoring 71% and subsequently cleared his Chartered Accountancy in 3.5 years when the average course duration was close to 5 years.

When Krishna was working in a reputed CA firm in Chennai, he wanted to join the administrative service. He knew Swami often called on His students to join IAS but could not decide. One day, he went to his father's office, picked up Sanatana Sarathi and opened it to the following lines from Swami, "My Students may do CA, etc. But I would like them to do IAS. If you turn IAS around, it becomes SAI. As an IAS, you will serve your country. If you serve your country, it is a service to Swami." He got his answer.

Krishna took the civil services exams twice and was assigned to the Indian Revenue Service both times. He accepted that as Swami's will. As a Tax Commissioner, Krishna came to be known for his honesty, compassion and value system. His stellar reputation meant that several departments requested that he be deputed to them. With his contributions across these departments over several projects, he was regarded as a valuable asset.

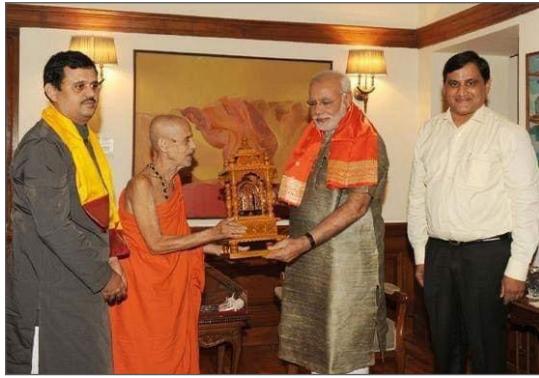
In 1997, when he was 33 years old, Krishna wrote an article titled 'National Development Through Development of National Highways'. It highlighted that infrastructure spending was the surest way to drive economic growth. Poor road infrastructure was a major hurdle for efficient transportation, public safety and development of rural, remote and backward areas. His essay also proposed building a national network of four-lane highways – to be expanded into eight lanes in the long term. It was rich in details including the estimated expenditure, sources of investment and policy changes. Krishna shared it widely and it eventually reached Swaminathan Gurumurthy, Atal Bihari Vajpayee's economic advisor. The BJP Government added it to its election agenda and it became the Golden Quadrilateral project implemented during the Vajpayee government.



In 2014, Cyclone Hudhud hit the eastern coast of India, damaging the Vizag airport. The then Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, requested Krishna, then deputed as the Private Secretary of the Civil Aviation Minister, to help restore the flight services as early as possible. Historically, such tasks took three months. Krishna realized that the solution was more human-related than system-related. He gave an inspiring speech,

asking the staff to look at the situation not as a crisis but as an opportunity to demonstrate their competence. The team came up with several solutions ranging from handwritten boarding passes to waterproof tents for cracked/broken ceilings, and video cameras for security. Krishna convinced Air India to run the first flight on 17th October while also persuading the PM's entourage to visit the airport on the same day. The staff worked day and night. Within five days of the landfall of Hudhud, the Vizag airport was operational again.

Krishna Kishore played a key role in the revival of SpiceJet. He identified the consequences of SpiceJet going bankrupt – loss of 20,000 jobs, increase in ticket prices of other airlines, burden of bad debts on airports and oil companies. He spent a significant time convincing senior government officials in the Aviation Sector to support the airline. He came up with the idea of a Strategic Investor (like Tech Mahindra bailing out Satyam Computers). His efforts paid off when the founder of SpiceJet, came to buy it back.



In 2015, seeing Krishna's exceptional qualities, the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh requested the Centre to depute him to Andhra Pradesh as the CEO of Andhra Pradesh Economic Development Board (APEDB) that was set up to attract investments and double the state's economic growth rate. Krishna handpicked his team and approached business leaders – building a network of more than 7000 stakeholders including 650 Fortune 1000 companies. It led to an inflow of 60,000 crores by January 2019 with the potential of adding 1,27,000 jobs. APEDB won

the Gold Award for being the best organization in India for Investment promotion and Project Facilitation at the 55th SKOCH Summit.

In the early 2000s, he co-authored a book with his father, the renowned Justice Easwara Prasad, titled 'Towards an Urban Revolution'. The book identified systemic issues that the government must address for an all-round urban development of the nation. It laid out comprehensive guidelines covering everything from sanitation to population management, both at policy and implementation levels. In July 2014, in a meeting he attended with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Krishna handed over an article from his book 'National Campaign for Cleanliness' to the Prime Minister. Three months later, on 2nd October, the Prime Minister launched Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. This mission incorporated a lot of ideas from Krishna's article and has become one of the trademark initiatives of the current government.



All through these projects, what has kept Krishna Kishore strong is the transformative years at Sri Sathya Sai University. Holding true to the teachings of Swami, discipline and dedication to his job, many sacrifices by him and his family, and an absolute faith in Swami, he has built a reputation as a man of integrity and honesty. Krishna has also participated in Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation activities. He recently led the launch of an environmental initiative in Odisha called Sri Sathya Sai Kalpa Tharu program that aims at planting 10 lakh trees over the next two years.

"I have never chased after any of these opportunities. By Swami's grace, all these opportunities have come to me," Krishna Kishore says.

ALUMNI PROFILE - PROF. M KRISHNAMURTHY (MSc 1991)



A Journey Rooted in Sai's Educational Embrace

In the vast cosmos of scientific inquiry, Professor M Krishnamurthy navigates the frontiers of knowledge with a blend of intellectual prowess and unwavering dedication. An experimental physicist specialising in atomic, molecular and optical sciences, his journey from the early years at Eswaramma School to the present leadership at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Hyderabad, is a narrative of academic brilliance intertwined with spiritual guidance.

Educational Foundations in Sai's Embrace

In the sanctum of Sai's educational fold, Prof. Krishnamurthy's journey began in the initial years of the English Medium Section at Eswaramma School. Reflecting on those formative years, he shares, "His presence always emphasised the importance of judiciously utilising the resources

and seizing every opportunity that came our way." This unspoken pact among students was apparent – transcend limits in the pursuit of excellence, genuinely embodying the title of being Swami's students.

Transformative Impact: From Marathon Challenges to Academic Heights

The transformative impact of Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning is evident in anecdotes such as the impromptu marathon undertaken by a group inexperienced in running. Prof. Krishnamurthy reflects, "Literally crawling to the finish line, they risked days of post-race fatigue for a few seconds in Swami's presence." This exemplifies the unparalleled effect Prasanthi Nilayam can have on an individual's life.

Harmony Between Science and Spirituality

Embarking from Parthi into the realm of rational minds, Prof. Krishnamurthy found a seamless alignment between the principles of science and Swami's teachings. In his words, "Swami consistently emphasised the value of personal introspection and inner exploration over blind adherence to religious texts or external authority." Science, rooted in rational inquiry, shares the stage with personal introspection, as emphasised by Swami. The pursuit of science and the quest for divinity demand dedication free from conventional constraints.

Diverse Expertise: From Quantum Chemistry to Laser Plasma Physics

Prof. Krishnamurthy is well known for his range of expertise, starting his journey with an interest in experimental synthetic chemistry. He transitioned to a simulation approach in Quantum Chemistry, which laid the foundation for his later accomplishments.

His research journey continued into accelerated ion-based spectroscopy, culminating in the attainment of a Ph.D. in Physics from TIFR. Subsequently, his stint at JILA, Colorado, as a scientist introduced him to the world of lasers, high harmonic generation and photoelectron spectroscopy. Upon his return to India as a faculty member at TIFR Mumbai, Prof. Krishnamurthy embarked on a pioneering path, initiating one of the first independent groups to delve into experimental

Laser Plasma Physics, a field scarcely explored at the time in India. This challenge, undertaken at the turn of the millennium, was no small feat, considering there were just a few limited ventures by government-funded labs in economically advanced nations. The project's substantial financial requirements demanded a blend of perseverance, patience, and scientific passion, especially in an era where international collaborations were challenging to come by, especially in areas with implications in defence and energy sources.

In his journey of navigating this intricate landscape, Prof. Krishnamurthy's innovative approaches played a pivotal role in reducing operational costs, alleviating dependence on external funding and positioning India as a significant player in Laser Plasma Physics.

Leadership in Institution Building: Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Hyderabad

Another significant opportunity to contribute to India's growing scientific prowess came when the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research decided to build an interdisciplinary research campus in Hyderabad. As a youthful and eager faculty member, Prof. Krishnamurthy actively led and participated in launching and developing this new campus. Even today, beyond his roles as director and scientist, he remains actively involved in the daily functioning of the institution, spearheading multiple future developments.

Scientific Pioneer: Cluster Dynamics and Low-Cost Tabletop Particle Accelerators

As a scientist, Prof. Krishnamurthy is a trailblazer in cluster dynamics under extreme fields and remains one of the few experts mastering this domain. Apart from that, he was among the first to demonstrate the acceleration of neutral atoms in India. Currently, he is in pursuit of creating ideal low-cost tabletop particle accelerators, something that can rival extremely massive and expensive conventional accelerators. While common aspiration takes one to foreign lands, he believes in integrating scientific innovation with the perennial potential that the Indian youth holds within the nation. Prof. Krishnamurthy's unwavering commitment continues to shape the frontiers of scientific exploration, leaving an indelible mark on the convergence of science, spirituality, and academic excellence.



COVER STORY - EVERLASTING DEVOTION: A BRIDGE ACROSS TIME

“Love is the key to peace and sacrifice is the door to bliss. Fill your heart with love, maintain peace and make sacrifices so that you may attain bliss.” Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. 13, Ch. 19

In the celestial symphony of devotion echoing from the alumni of Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, each note resonates the expression of timeless connection with our Swami. ‘A Bridge Across Time’ is the story of the spiritual journey of the musicians amongst the alumni - a journey that has constantly evolved over the years to make their musical offering their very best to our Bhagawan.

Unveiling Spiritual Melodies

The genesis of ‘A Bridge Across Time’ unfolded as a heartfelt offering at Swami’s Lotus Feet. What began as a humble bouquet of Bhajans has transformed into a melodic odyssey capturing the metamorphosis of devotional outpourings across the alumni community. The journey through 31 volumes, with a brief hiatus due to the global pandemic, exemplifies the enduring commitment and unwavering love of the alumni for their beloved Swami.

From Humble Beginnings to Musical Spectacles

“Offer to God the gifts He has given you. Use them to the best of your ability. This is the true worship of God. You can experience God through love and service. When love overflows and expresses itself through selfless acts of kindness and service, it becomes worship.” Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. 15, Ch. 6

The evolution of this divine album, from its inception in 2003 to the present day, mirrors the advancements in instrumentation, recording technology and the sheer professionalism of the alumni musicians. Each volume is a testament to the alumni’s commitment to quality, with compositions that traverse traditional boundaries, incorporating a variety of instruments, showcasing the spiritual evolution of the Bhajan Movement.

Swami’s Blessings - The Story of its Origin

The cassette of the first volume was brought to Puttaparthi by the alumni musicians to be offered to Swami. Swami graciously accepted that offering and allowed them to sing in the Mandir on that special day. Devotees who were present in the Darshan hall could also recognise the alumni singers. Swami was so moved during the Bhajans that He got down from the throne and walked over to Prof. Anil Kumar and told him “*Chudu Naa Pillalu Paaduthunaru*” (See My boys are singing). Following the Bhajans He blessed each one of the alumni representing the ‘A Bridge Across Time’ team, individually.

Every year as the 1st of January approached the team would tirelessly work to produce a compilation of Bhajans they have made till date in the form of a CD, sparing no efforts. And Swami would eagerly look forward to the occasion when the boys would make an offering of the CD in the Mandir on New Year’s day.

Devotees across the globe have come to treasure this spiritual compendium, finding solace and connection through its timeless Bhajans. ‘A Bridge Across Time’ has given some of the most memorable and immortal Bhajans such as *Sai Baba Sakala Bhuvana Ke Daata*, *Daya Karo Hey Karunanidhaan* and *Prasanthi Nilaya Nivasa Araja Suno*.

Harmonising the Past and Present



“The end of wisdom is freedom. The end of culture is perfection. The end of knowledge is love. The end of education is character.” Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. 8, Ch. 33

The album serves as a bridge not only across time, but also across generations. It harmonises the compositions of senior alumni with those of the newer generations, creating a rich tapestry of devotion. When it was felt that the compositions could benefit from new infusions and that there was a need for variety by adding in more composers, the senior batch of alumni musicians sprung into action. Within days, many beautiful compositions such as Partheeshwara Sri Sai Prabhu and Sri Madhusudhana Krishna were received from newer batches of alumni students. Thus began a continued fast growing confluence of effort between batches of alumni spanning many generations. The senior alumni were able to include many beautiful compositions and were also able to train and nurture new talent. So, ‘A Bridge Across Time’ has compositions from across generations of alumni across time. In order to contribute to this album, the alumni musicians have invested in some of the best musical instruments which are also being used for the production of songs for Swami’s educational institutions.

Beyond Music: A Saga of Devotion

“Start the day with love; spend the day with love; fill the day with love; end the day with love. This is the way to God.” Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. 27, Ch. 15

Recording sessions are not just about music; they are a pilgrimage of the heart. The unique bond among the alumni shines during these sessions bringing up soft loving memories of their days at Swami’s Lotus Feet. The production process, from selecting singers to mastering the tracks, unfolds like a divine play, with each recording considered a miracle—a testament to the pure intentions and shared purpose behind this annual offering.

Preparations for the forthcoming volume typically commence well in advance - around the June-

July timeframe. During this period, potential singers are identified from alumni circles in India and other countries. The initial screening criterion is that the singer should have previous experience singing in the Mandir. Subsequently, they are requested to perform and record a song, which is evaluated based on the quality of their rendition. The selection of songs for the upcoming volume follows, with a focus on incorporating newer compositions from multiple composers. Efforts are also made to ensure that new singers are recognised and provided with opportunities. Each volume is strategically planned to include a variety of genres with decisions on pitch and pace for the songs. By September, lead singers are assigned their respective Bhajans.

The recording with the lead singers is concluded by October after which they dispatch their tracks to the studio technician in Chennai. In the initial week of November, the alumni brothers in Sundaram sing and record the chorus section. Subsequently, instrumentalists render and record the background music (BGM). The next steps involve placing the tracks, followed by mixing and balancing processes. The final output is released on 31 December, which is burned onto a CD for presentation to Swami at His Sannidhi. Simultaneously, the digital version is forwarded to the Books and Publications Division for both offline and online sales. Each volume comprises 12 Bhajans, individually performed by one lead singer, and involves 4–6 additional singers for the chorus. Three to four alumni contribute with Tabla, while one to two alumni handle instrumentation. The remaining instrumental work is undertaken by non-alumni professionals.

Blessings Amid Challenges

“Do not be misled by what you see around you, or be influenced by what you see. You live in a world which is a playground of illusion, full of false paths, false values, and false ideals. But you are not part of that world.”Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. 12, Ch. 35

The journey, however, is not without its challenges. The increasing sophistication of instruments, quality of recording and the overall rise in professionalism have increased the cost of production. Yet, the alumni affirm Swami’s assurance that pure intentions obviate financial constraints.

The transition from Bengaluru to Chennai, which could potentially have been challenging, also went through smoothly by His grace. Thus, the story of overcoming obstacles resonates through the production of every volume.

Alumni Bond: A Lifelong Sadhana

Beyond the music, ‘A Bridge Across Time’ has become a catalyst for a sense of brotherhood among the alumni. The contributors, including non-musician alumni, share an intimate connection - a shared sadhana. The experience of working on each volume is not just about musical prowess, but is also a profound journey with Swami, nurturing talents, and fostering a spirit of oneness. The distinctive connection among the alumni becomes especially prominent during the extended recording sessions. A particularly cherished element is the communal sharing of meals, whether it’s breakfast, lunch or dinner depending on the recording schedule. These moments evolve into a nostalgic journey, revisiting the beautiful days spent at Swami’s Lotus Feet across various batches.

Global Impact

“The happiness that comes through love and devotion is unique; it is beyond the reach of other pleasures of the senses.”Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. 27, Ch. 25

The impact of this devotional saga extends globally. Devotees across the world consider the album a lifeline connecting them with Swami through the medium of music. The album’s reach, both online and offline, testifies to its universal appeal, becoming a source of spiritual inspiration for countless hearts.

In the Spirit of Service

“Your duty is to build the new world of truth and virtue based on the sound foundation of selfless service.”Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. 12, Ch. 38

The alumni’s journey goes beyond music, extending into various realms of service. Initiatives such as Samarpan, engagement with academic departments, and active participation in SSSSO activities showcase the multifaceted nature of their devotion. The story of the alumni band and the drama enactment underscore their commitment to embodying Swami’s teachings through diverse mediums.



Conclusion: A Continuous Offering of Love

The alumni’s journey, as showcased through ‘A Bridge Across Time’, is a continuous offering of love at the Lotus Feet of the Divine. Swami’s teachings, encapsulated in each musical note, each act of service, and each moment of spiritual reflection, form the foundation of their unwavering commitment. As they navigate the realms of music, service, and brotherhood, the alumni stand united in their pursuit of making Swami’s message of love and unity a living reality.

Acknowledgment

The Vidyullekha team expresses heartfelt gratitude to the brothers who shared their stories and information for this article embodying the spirit of brotherhood and devotion that defines the alumni community. The team seeks Bhagawan’s blessings for the ongoing journey of the album, year after year, and extends heartfelt wishes to all the contributing artists.

FROM MY DIARY - SWAGATH KUMAR ROUTHROY

Om Sri Sai Sarva Gnaya Namaha

Salutations to the Omniscient One!

This story is a rapturous reminiscent of moments spent with the Lord. Naturally, these moments are cherished for a lifetime. This beautiful story is about my mother who came to Swami and became a Bhajan singer. This was momentous for me as it ultimately led to me becoming a Sai Student. Today, I consider my stay with Him to be the most cherished period of my life.

When My Mother Became a Bhajan Singer

It was in the late 1960s. My parents used to visit the Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, and on the way back to Cuttack, they would visit Parthi for Swami's Darshan. During one such Darshan session, Swami came to my mother and asked her to sing Bhajans in the Mandir. He directed Vijaya Auntie to guide her and instructed the late Sri Kutumba Rao to allow her to sing. My mother was surprised as she had no formal training in singing. Swami gave her His assurance by materialising Vibhuti and asked her to start singing. She was one of the first female singers from Odisha who was fortunate to sing in the Mandir in Swami's presence. Swami would address her as the 'Odisha lady' and in Odisha he would tell her, "Kuni Apa" ('apa' means sister).

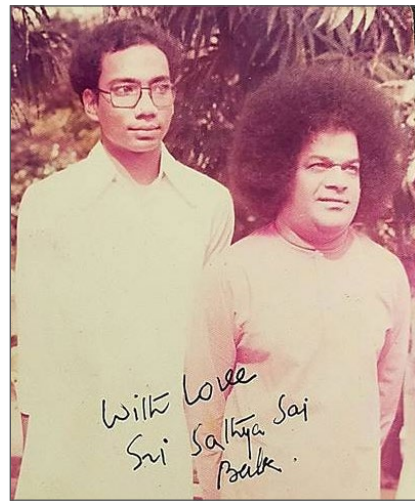
The HMV Gramophone Record company had once approached her to record a few songs as a lead singer. She went to Swami to seek His permission. Swami responded, "Your voice has been given to you for chanting God's name and not for commercialisation." She had her answer. Since she had been given the opportunity to sing Bhajans before Swami, she began visiting Parthi more often, and with this, we had the golden chance of getting many family interviews. During the interviews, Swami would put His hand on my shoulder, hug me like a friend, and speak to my parents like a guardian - an elderly family member. During one such interview, Swami asked me what I wanted to study further. I wanted to join the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune. Looking at my father with a mischievous smile, He said, "Look! Your son wants to become a hero!" I immediately responded, "No Swami. I want to work in Still Photography." Swami said, "No, Don't go there..." Immediately, I requested Swami to give me admission in His college. Swami then said that the entries that year were completed and He would consider next year.

His Student

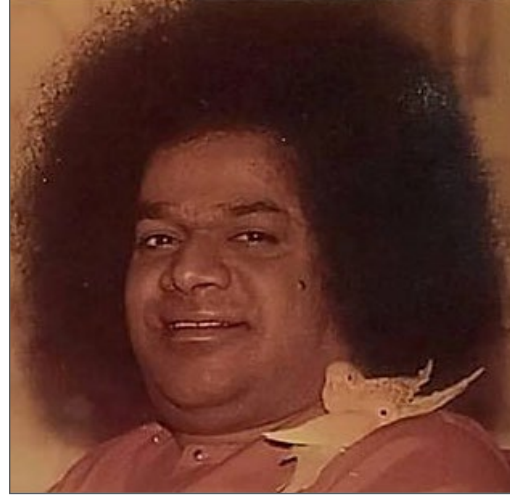
The following year (1976), I had come with a group of students for the summer course from Odisha. I wrote letters to Swami requesting Him to take me in as a Summer Course student and permit me to study at His college. While Swami accepted the letters, there was no reply. After four days of waiting, Swami told Rupak Changkakoti and Dr. Sudarshan (warden), "There is this curly-haired boy from Odisha. Give him the Summer Course badge and ask him to stay in the hostel." This was how I entered His College.

I used to take part in many activities that pleased Him. Be it Veda chanting, Bhajans, Kitchen Service, Flower decoration (Rangoli) - I made it a point to be active in them. In 1978, the Andhra Pradesh Teachers Conference took place in our college. Before the conference began, Swami instructed a few of us to create an exhibition for the delegates in the Botany lab.

The choice of a caption for the exhibition was challenging. I was then one of the photographers. I initially thought about having a poster with a unique picture of Swami with birds or animals with the caption, "Let us be like the innocent ones in the hand of our Lord." However, this caption was too long.



Bhagawan was inquiring about the progress and was expected to visit the college. I was nervous as the caption was not yet decided. My ego as a creative person was being shaken and I prayed to Bhagawan for help. Bhagawan used to summon all the boys to the bungalow for regular Bhajans, but on that day, Swami gave a discourse on how to become closer to the Lord. He said, "All of you want to become nearer to Bhagawan, but only a few want to become dearer to Me. There is coal burning at one and there is another lump of coal some distance away. If the dry coal is kept close to the burning coal then the dry coal will warm up and if one fans that warm coal it will start burning. There is the warmth of sitting close to a fire during winter, but if we were closer, we could get burnt. So if you are trying to be near Bhagawan then you have to learn how to become dear first. If you think that once you are near Bhagawan you will be dear to Him, that is completely wrong. To be dear, you have to follow the instructions of Bhagawan. It is like a penance, which Dhruva and Prahalad have done and thus become dear to the Lord. As coal knows fire and becomes fire, Vedas declare that by knowing Brahman one becomes Brahman."



That was it! Swami had given me an idea for the caption - BE DEARER NOT NEARER to SAI

The next day, we went to Swami's bungalow. Swami was waiting for us anticipating to see the poster. When Swami saw the poster, He remarked, "Have faith and confidence in your SELF always. Like Draupadi, have full Samarpan and mere trust or belief. Trust is partial surrender and belief is 90%. There is still an element of doubt. Maintain your faith at all times and develop confidence." He then changed the caption: BE DEARER NOT NEARER TO EXPERIENCE SAI. He materialised Vibhuti and instructed us to finish the poster. The exhibition was a success. It was appreciated by delegates, guests, devotees and most importantly by Bhagawan. He inaugurated the exhibition and explained to the guests the pictures and the caption on the poster. We had a lot of Ananda seeking His happiness.

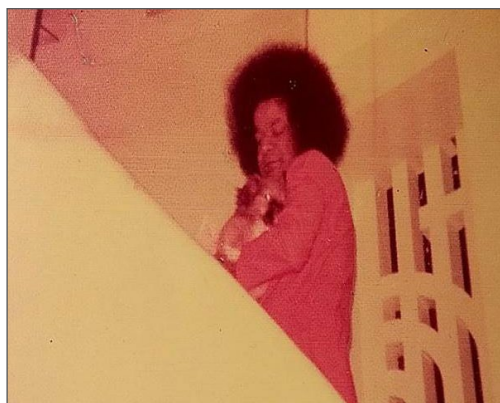
Memories from His Bungalow

I used to carry a box camera that fit easily in my pocket instead of the large one allowing me to capture some 'candid' pictures of Swami. Bhagawan had received a tiny puppy as a present from a foreigner. The puppy was Goldy. The boys used to stand near the steps



heading upstairs to get a glimpse of Swami before He went inside. Goldy used to do 'Sevadal' duty not allowing anybody to approach or touch Bhagawan's feet.

Once after Bhajan, Bhagawan was ascending the steps when Goldy leapt on Him. Bhagawan lovingly grabbed hold of him - I got to capture that moment with my camera. Bhagawan said, "You all may have dogs as pets at home. You take care of them by playing with them, feeding them and bathing them. If you truly adore your pet dog, your pet obeys all of your commands. Similarly, you can follow Me. You all want to be near Me and love Me even though you don't listen to what I say. If you follow Me, then from a dog you will become God."



In those days, we were also given the opportunity of carrying breakfast and evening snacks to the bungalow for Swami. One Rakhi Poornima day, it was my turn to take food for Swami. Coincidentally, that year my mother had sent a Rakhi to be given by me to Swami. My joy knew no bounds as I could then give the Rakhi to Swami - our Protector, in person. When I went upstairs to serve snacks and coffee to Swami, I handed over the Rakhi to Him. He took the packet, opened it slowly and carefully. Speaking in Hindi, He said that Amma made this Rakhi by putting this silver flower on it and that it looked good. He placed the Rakhee on His left hand before returning back to me. He then called Brother Radhakrishnan and asked him to get some photographs. He then took out a black and white photo of my mother sitting in Poornachandra Auditorium, autographed it and asked me to give it to my mother as a return gift.



Shaping My Career

When I was graduating from Brindavan college, Swami asked me about my future plans. I said that I wanted to pursue post graduation in Sanskrit (the intention was to be close to His Lotus Feet). Swami then guided me saying that I have become BAD doing BA and asked if I wanted to become MAD by doing MA. He then told me to do a technical course. He instructed the then Principal of Anantapur Campus, Prof. Hemalata, to contact the Dean Prof. HG Hanmant (a devotee of Bhagawan) of Sir JJ School of Arts, Mumbai. I appeared for the entrance exam and got into the college as per His command.

Twenty-five years later, when in 2019 I got the Excellency Award for Skill Development/ Technical Education from Hon'ble Governor of Odisha, I could attribute all that occurred in my professional career to Bhagawan's grace and guidance. He knew what the future had in store for me. It is only He who knows our past, present and future. Hence, in gratitude we bow down to His omniscience - Om Sri Sai Sarva Gnaya Namah.

GRATITUDE CORNER - PROF. N. SIVAKUMAR

The author, Prof. N. Sivakumar, is the Director, Brindavan campus, Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning. He was the head of the department, Department of Management & Commerce from 2018-2020. He is the recipient of the Sai Krishna Award for Excellence in Research in 2011. He was the first Ph.D candidate in the Department of Management and was blessed with the doctoral degree in 1995.

Hridaya Brindavan - SAI

On the occasion of the 50th birthday celebrations of Bhagawan in 1975, Brindavan college had published a commemorative volume of experiences of its students. When students prayed to Swami to name the volume, Swami aptly christened it 'Hridaya Brindavan'.

On several occasions Swami later explained to the students the great truth about Hridaya Brindavan. "Even if you leave Brindavan after your studies, Hridaya Brindavan will never leave you".

Hridaya Brindavan, thus, represents the sacred bonding of every Sai student with their alma mater - SAI. The term SAI in this article has also been used as an acronym to represent:

S – Supreme | **A** – Alumni | **I** - Interface

Hridaya Brindavan is the supreme alumni interface that every alumnus must nurture for their own spiritual progress.

'Supreme' – Hridaya Brindavan

Every Sai student can vouch that the time they spent at Brindavan (or any other campus) as a student is the most valuable and memorable time of their life. Recently, an alumnus from the 1970s visited Brindavan after a long time. He recalled the wonderful days he had spent at Brindavan as a student. He then elaborated, "I feel extremely satisfied with my visit. This visit has helped me to revisit those golden days of my life. I could recollect so much of my life at Brindavan – the hostel routine, my activities in the Gokulam, the science classes, the science laboratories, the playgrounds - everything. Most importantly, I felt Swami enveloping me completely during my visit to Brindavan. I feel blessed and vibrant". Similarly, several alumni who visited Brindavan during the golden jubilee celebrations in 2019 experienced a direct connection with Swami.

Having lived in the campus as a student, Hridaya Brindavan provides the supreme opportunity for every Sai student to recharge themselves regularly on the ideals laid by our dear Bhagawan. During the Benedictory Discourse on the Convocation Day, 22 November 2002, Swami addressed the students thus:

"Having completed your education, it is time for you to go back to your respective places, take up suitable jobs and serve your parents. Once in a while, you can come here to recharge your batteries. Otherwise, you may forget whatever you have learnt here. Your stay here becomes meaningful only when you practise what you have learnt here".

Action points for the alumni:

1. Alumni can take initiatives to plan regular visits to Brindavan campus, batch wise, for reconnecting and recharging. This can be planned on an organised basis for an entire batch rather than individuals or small groups of students planning their visits on their own.
2. Alumni batches can plan a programme during their visits to Brindavan. This can include visit to Trayee, Bhajan session in Trayee, visit to Divya Smriti Digital Museum, visit to the campus, visit to the Super Specialty hospital and so on.

'Alumni' – Hridaya Brindavan

Hridaya Brindavan facilitates each alumnus to remain a 'Sai' student rather than just being an 'Institute student'. The parent of an alumnus was once blessed with an interview with Bhagawan. Swami started enquiring about the family members of the person. When the parent mentioned about the son who had studied in the Institute, Swami feigned ignorance of knowing him! The parent gave details of the time of study of the student. Swami then commented, "Was he really a 'Sai' student? He must have been an 'Institute' student". Being a 'Sai' student is much more than being an 'Institute' student. Being a 'Sai' student means being committed to the ideals of Swami throughout one's life.



Hridaya Brindavan can help each alumnus to remain a 'Sai' student always. Being a 'Sai' student means being proud of being associated with the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning and all its campuses.

Action points for the alumni:

3. Each alumnus must ensure that their study at Brindavan (or any other campus) is clearly highlighted in their profiles. It has been observed that students highlight their several degrees from several institutions, but are reluctant to highlight their study in Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning. To be a 'Sai' student is an extraordinary blessing which every alumnus must be proud of.
4. Having been blessed with a sacred education at Brindavan, it becomes the responsibility of every alumnus to ensure that the subsequent generations too benefit. Alumni must hold Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning as the first option of study for their own children. This is a true mark of being a 'Sai' student.
5. Every alumnus must speak about the Institute and the Sai Education system at every opportunity and stage they get. This could include speaking in Samithis, interacting with students in nearby schools/colleges wherever they live and social media posts. This will spread positive news about the Institute and encourage several students to explore the opportunity of studying in the Institute.

'Interface' – Hridaya Brindavan

Once a teacher was speaking during a Trayee session at Brindavan. That day the teacher opted to speak on the topic of 'talent'. During the opening remarks of the talk, the teacher said, "Talent is a gift of God". Swami, who was intently listening to the talk, immediately objected to this sentence. The teacher attempted to explain to Swami and the audience how every person's talent has been gifted by God. Swami did not seem satisfied with the explanation. The teacher and the audience then prayed to Bhagawan to give the correct explanation. Swami then declared, "*Talent is not a gift of God. TALENT IS GOD*".

Hridaya Brindavan provides several opportunities to every alumnus to exhibit the God in them in the form of talents and directly offer them to Swami.

Action points for the alumni:

6. Alumni can share their knowledge in various subjects with current students in the form of guest lectures in physical or virtual mode.
7. Alumni can share their wonderful experiences with Swami during Thursday moral classes.
8. Alumni can help in providing internship opportunities to current students at their workplace.
9. Alumni can act as mentors for current students and provide them guidance on various fronts.
10. Alumni can come to Brindavan and coach students in games, sports meet items, music, bhajan singing, brass band, artistic activities, dramatics, public speaking and so on.
11. Alumni can offer their work expertise to serve the campus. For example, recently an alumnus used his work expertise to prepare CAD generated layout of the entire Brindavan Campus buildings.

Hridaya Brindavan is thus a sacred bond between every alumnus and the alma mater. Let us pray to our Dear Lord to bless all of us to be near and dear to Him through Hridaya Brindavan.



LOVE IN ACTION

The Story of Sai Anandam

Lala Susanta Ray graduated from SSSIHL with a bachelor's degree in MES (Maths, Economics & Statistics) in 1994. Following a post-graduate degree from the Delhi School of Economics and a stint in the professional arena, he returned to his home state of Orissa. It was a transformative decision sparked by a sudden idea after the Atirudra Mahayagna in 2006. Thereafter, he not only re-shaped his own path but also became a beacon of change, influencing countless other lives along the way.



This is the story of Sai Anandam, a home for orphans situated in Daruthenga village, 12 kilometres from the city of Bhubaneswar in Odisha. Currently operating as a co-ed school for small children, the project started as a small orphanage run for seven boys. It operated out of a house donated by a devotee from Barang, a nearby town. By 2007, the project had reached a stage where the Odisha alumni had brought its tidings to the abode of peace to be blessed by Swami.

“Frankly, we never had any challenges. Whatever was needed, it came to us.”

In Lala Susanta's words, whenever there was a need for monetary assistance, Swami's unseen hands were always there to provide. Whenever they needed human resources, His will drew people to their project. Initially, the alumni associated with the project itself and the state took care of the monetary needs. Now, it is jointly funded by alumni and devotees from all over India. The local Sai Organization regularly contributes to physical Seva, involving maintenance and cleaning.



“From the beginning, we had decided not to ask for funds.”

In 2015, due to a change in government regulations, the orphanage was converted into an English medium school. This was the beginning of another bountiful phase for the project. The school is entirely run on the lines of Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School, Puttaparthi. The students pay hostel fees while the education is imparted free of cost. The school follows the CBSE syllabus with co-education facility till the 5th Standard. Currently, higher classes are limited to only boys. The hostel facility is available to all. Some devotees, including the founders themselves, render their Seva as teachers in the school without monetary compensation.

One memorable incident that Lala Susanta remembers is from the 14 August 2010. It was an alumni meet where they had gathered in the Mandir in Prasanthi Nilayam. Swami was present and He said, “Make these boys into good boys.” It stood as a clear directive from the Divine, a gentle nudge recalling the commitment the founders had made during the initiation. An attempt to honour this commitment manifests in the disciplined lifestyle that the students embrace, mirroring the ethos of Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School.



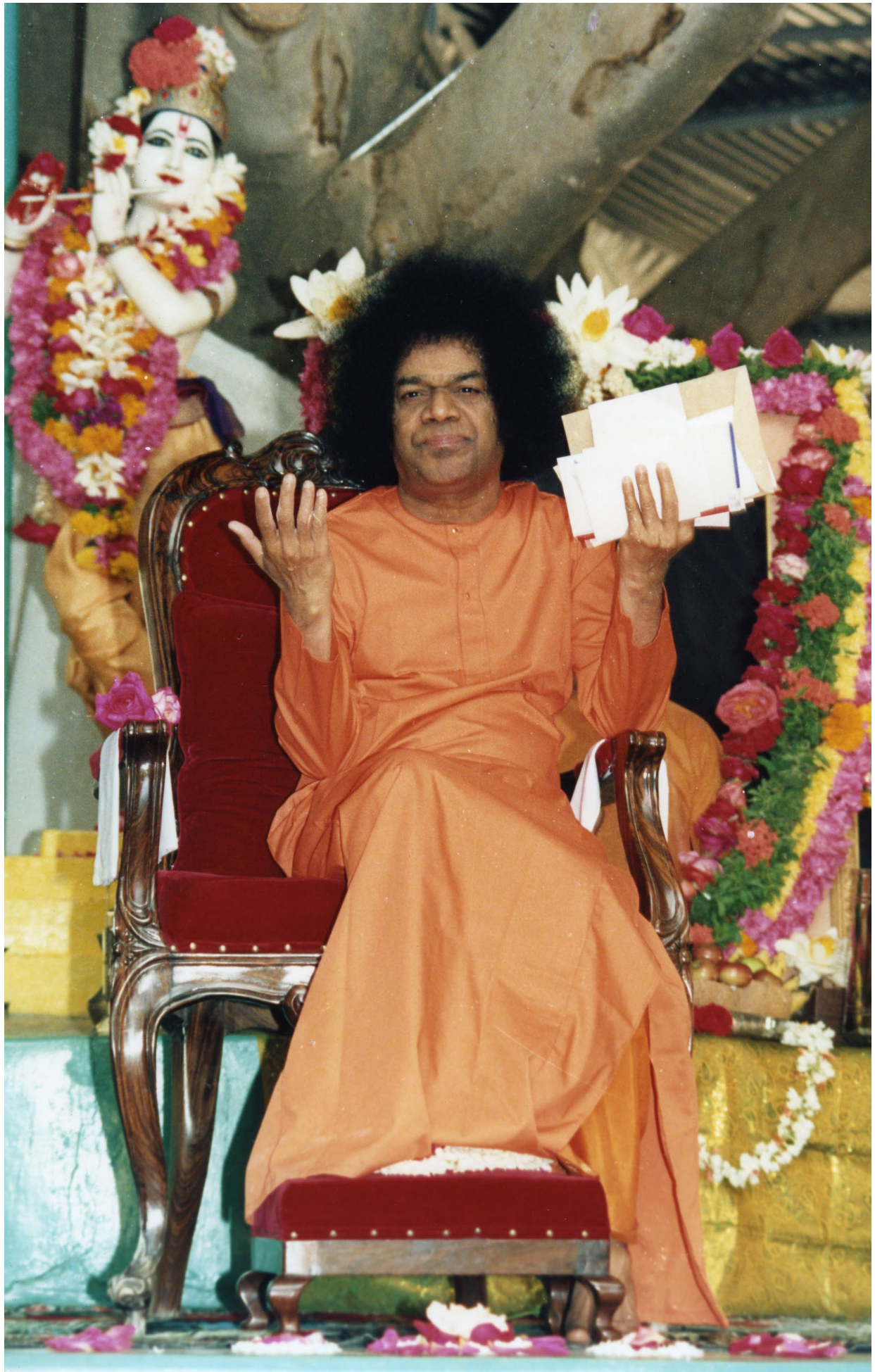
Several alumni from the school went on to pursue their higher education at Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning and a handful have secured employment after their studies. The profound impact of this project extends beyond the students to envelop the local community. What was once a ‘notorious place’ has now transformed into ‘Swami’s village’, adorned with a vibrant Seva group hosting regular Bhajans. *Narayana Seva* and *Nagara Sankeerthan* have become an integral part and have brought a positive shift to the entire area.

Swami says, “When you start any good work, I will help you. This work is an opportunity for us to redeem ourselves.”

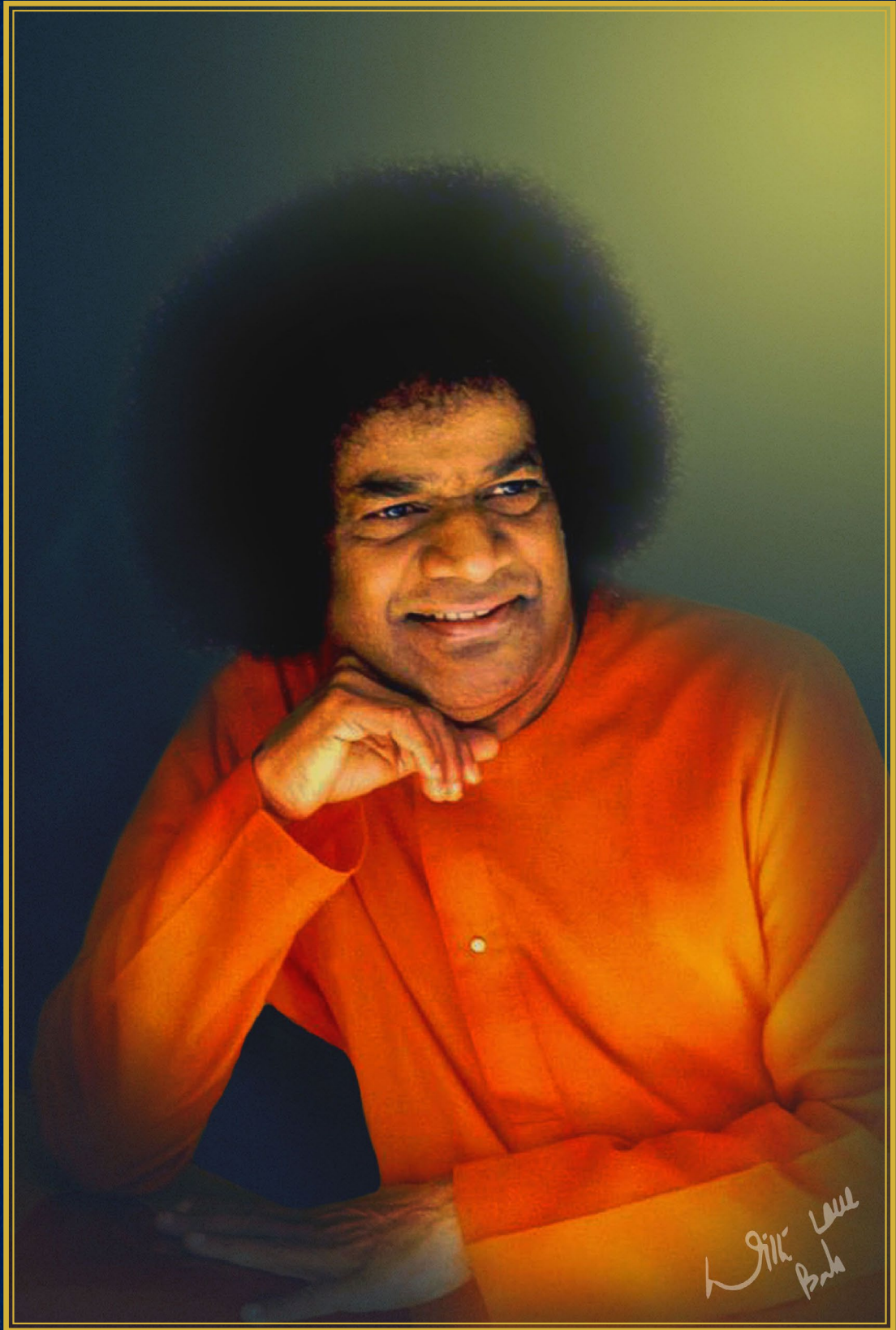
Apart from Brother Susanta, the project is handled by four other members of the Sai family. Devdutt Swain, Vivekananda Sahoo, Suryaprakash Pati, and Dr. Satish Pattnaik, who also happens to be the state president of Sathya Sai Seva Organisations, Orissa. In commemoration of Swami’s centenary birth year, plans are underway to establish a dedicated girl’s wing for the school.

Further details on Website: <https://srisathyasaianandamschool.in/>

Alumni looking to be involved in this Seva initiative can contact Brother Lala Susanta at +91 9437632059.







www.vidyullekha.in
vidyullekha@saistudents.org