

VIDYULLEKHA



SEPTEMBER 2024

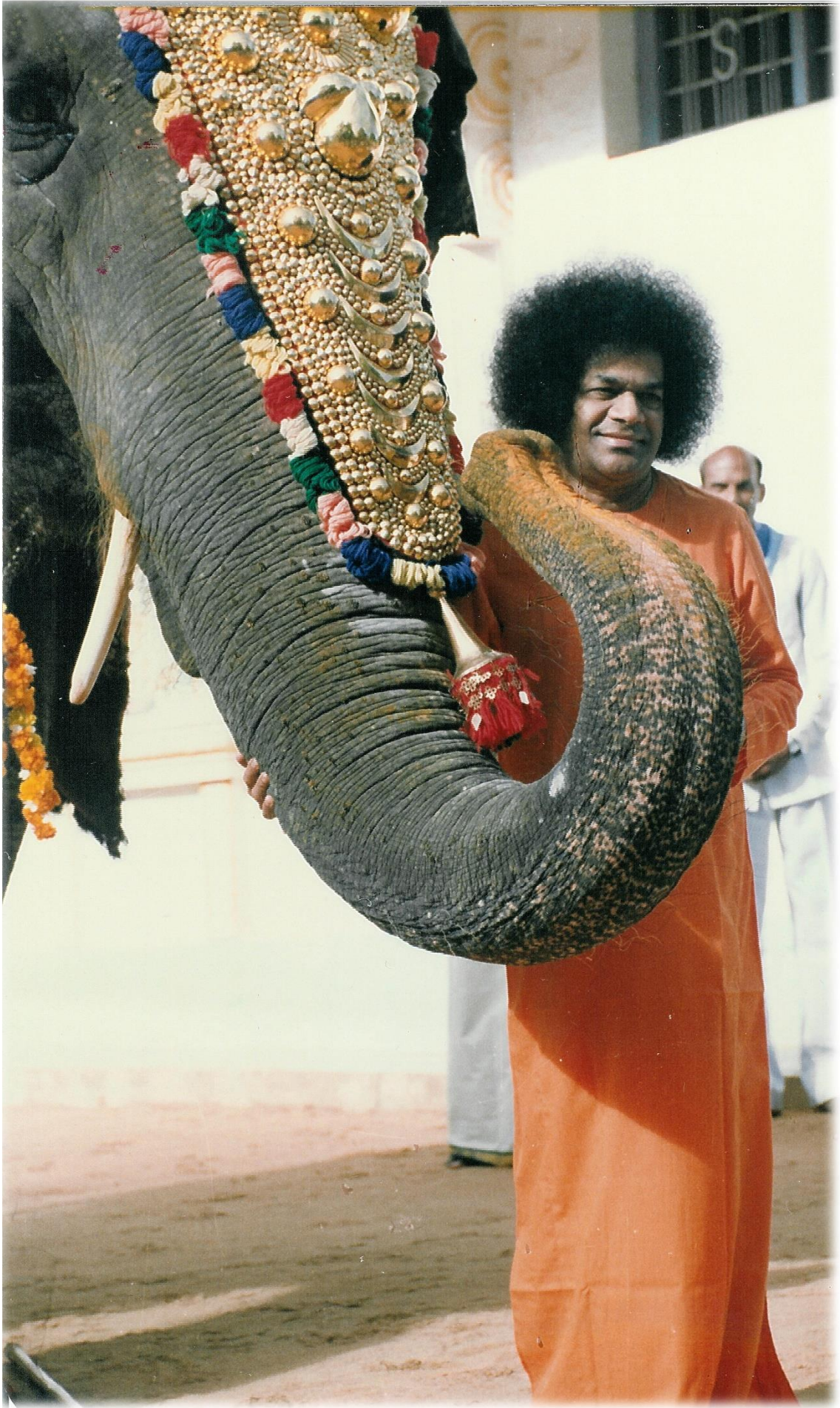
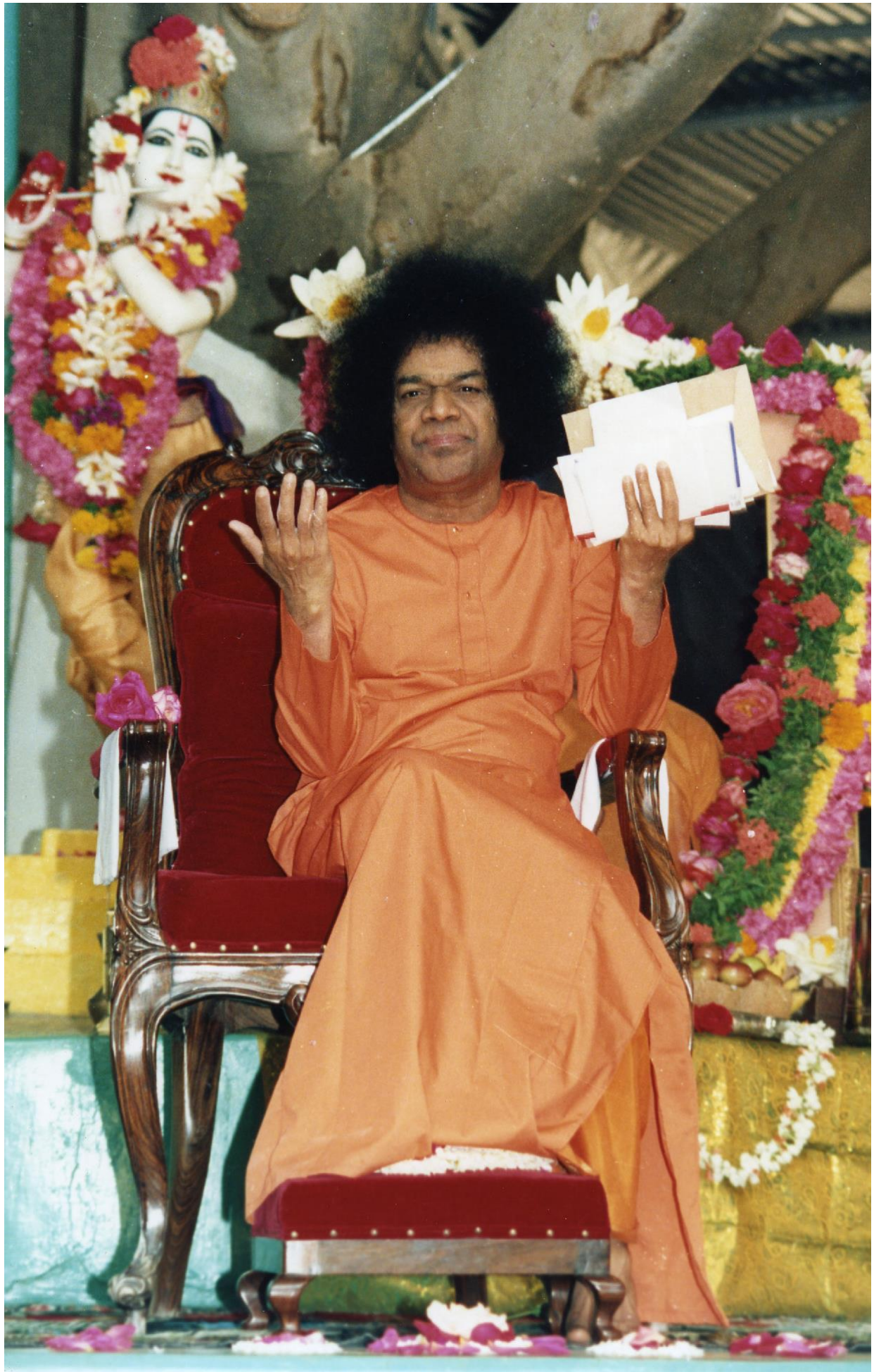




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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Swami explained the significance of Lord Ganesha thus: Lord Vinayaka has an elephant's head and trunk. It denotes that Vinayaka can be compared to an elephant in intelligence, which always thinks twice before setting its foot forward. Similarly, it is only after intelligent discrimination that Vinayaka moves forward. The four letters in the word Ganapathi (ga, na, pa, and ti) denote that Lord Vinayaka is full of vijnana, sujnana, and prajnana. People today forget the underlying meaning in the name 'Ganapati' and engage themselves in mere rituals. You may not perform any rituals, but, never give up worshipping Lord Vinayaka. (Divine Discourse, 18 September 2004).

When we reflect on the ideas of intelligence, action and worship, and the underlying meaning of the divine name, we see that Swami has also gently guided us through the paths of spirituality - Jnana, Karma and Bhakti. It's in this spirit of reflection and reverence that we bring to you this edition of Vidyullekha.

The cover story captures some beautiful Ganesh Chaturthi moments from our student days. Here's an evocative line from the essay: "A senior professor vividly recalls that on the morning of every Ganesh Chaturthi, boys were expected to be at the Mandir for Darshan. Following this, Swami would accompany the students to the hostel. In the dining hall, everyone gathered as Swami delivered a discourse on the significance of the day. This was followed by Bhajans. At times he used to participate in the Puja being conducted in the hostel, inquiring about the little details that made the day."

Bhagawan Uvacha recounts a beautiful event that took place in Sai Kulwant Hall leading to these words from Swami: "*All scriptures such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and others illuminate the path that man has to take to attain the final destination — Divinity.*"

In Love in Action, we share the story of Sri Sathya Sai Palliative Care Centre, capturing the service it does and the team behind it. In Gratitude corner, our vice-chancellor Prof. B. Raghavendra Prasad reminds us of our duty to Swami's education system. He writes: "Bhagawan always envisioned His students as ambassadors of His Integral Education System. Now, it's our responsibility to reaffirm our commitment and offer support to our alma mater in every possible way, including mentoring of current students. Though the magnitude of our indebtedness may seem overwhelming, our dedication will ensure the continued elevation of our alma mater to higher levels".

In From My Diary, Brother Siddharth Nayak shares a beautiful experience that led him to this epiphany. "Swami wore the cloak of an 80-year-old in a wheelchair, but that was for our learning. He still is the Master of the Universe, and we are all actors in His stage. We have an opportunity to play a part in His work, His work will happen anyway as per His will."

In the same section, Brother C Chandrasekaran takes us to his student days in the 1990s. The experiences he shares are eternal. On seeing Swami, he writes, "The whole dimension of space disappeared, and it was the aura of orange that filled me all over. I started crying, oblivious of anything and anyone around."

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.

Finally, in the alumni profile section we cover the inspiring careers of Madhukar Bose and Gauri Shankar Nagabhushanam

We dedicate this edition at the Lotus Feet of Bhagawan. Do write to us at Vidyullekha@saistudents.org with your feedback

With gratitude and love,
Team Vidyullekha

Sri Sathya Sai Alumni



BHAGAWAN UVACHA

The Essence of Narayana Upanishad(N. Sudhindran)

It was a bright Sunday morning on the third of July, 2005 at Sai Kulwant Hall, Prasanthi Nilayam. Bhagawan was seated on the stage and was listening to the students chanting Vedic hymns. When Narayana Upanishad was being chanted, Bhagawan commanded me to translate that mantra into English. So, as the Vedam group chanted the Upanishad line by line, I translated it into English. At the end of the mantra, Bhagawan waved His hand and materialised an exquisite golden necklace.

He said that *the necklace contained the power of the sacred mantra "Om Namō Narayanaya."* He then said, *"All scriptures such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and others illuminate the path that man has to take to attain the final destination — Divinity. The mantra 'Om Namō Narayanaya' contains the essence and power of all the scriptures. This mantra embodies the fatherly and motherly aspects of Divinity. Without either of them, there can be no creation. If one were to contemplate deeply, one would realise that there is no difference between the two aspects — Purusha (God) and Prakruthi (Nature), for, they are indeed one and the same. "*



I realised that after my theoretical (and rather prosaic) explanation of the Narayana Upanishad, Bhagawan had decided to conduct a 'practical class' on the same topic! Swami revealed new, beautiful insights into the meaning of the very same verses of the Narayana Upanishad that we had chanted many times.

He then gave the necklace to me to hold it up for everyone to see and made me repeat on the microphone what He had elucidated about it, for the benefit of everyone assembled in Sai Kulwant Hall that day. I had the good fortune of keeping the necklace until the Bhajans that morning, and at the end of it, I reverentially handed it back to Bhagawan.

What a blessing to have been taught the Narayana Upanishad by Lord Sriman Narayana Himself! "

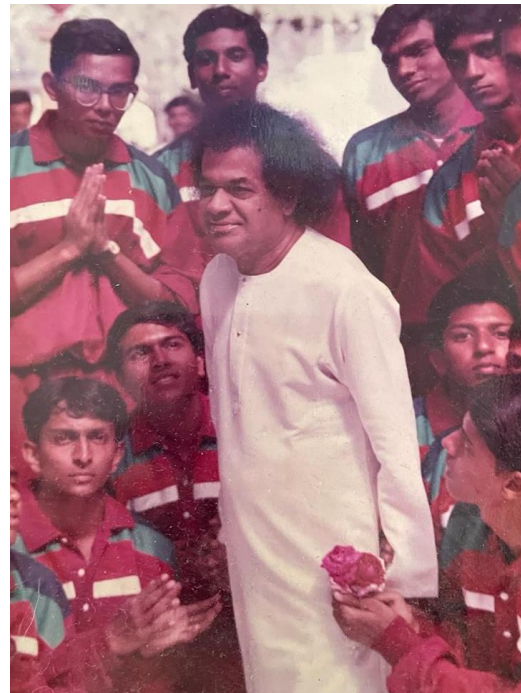
ALUMNI PROFILE - Madhukar Bose(B.Sciences 1997)

Named by Bhagawan

Born into a family of Sai devotees, Madhukar experienced early on in his life, many of the typical aspects of domestic devotional practices from Bhajans to Bal Vikas classes. His father and grandfather were both Army men and it was the latter, who had first been introduced to Swami in the early 70s and brought the former to Swami's fold some years later. Since his infancy and through childhood, Madhukar would often visit Puttaparthi and Brindavan to visit his grandparents and to get Swami's Darshan. It was during one such early visit that Swami gave him his name. Much later in life, his mother got the opportunity to serve in the General Hospital in Puttaparthi running the physiotherapy department while his father was directed by Swami to construct and take charge of the Chaitanya Jyoti Museum.

Joining the Higher Secondary School

As in the case of most army children, Madhukar's childhood was spent in different places as his father was transferred periodically. As an introverted child, Madhukar found it challenging to make new friends and adapt to new environments, but this was a valuable experience as it helped him later. Not naturally confident, his school career was unremarkable. A seismic shift came in the form of his grandfather's insistence that Madhukar apply for the 11th standard in Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School. While Madhukar did gain admission, the first year as a student was a difficult one as he was away from his parents for the first time in addition to handling the challenging academic syllabus and dealing with a new culture and way of life. Swami's presence was the main comfort and was critical in helping him complete his schooling in 1994.



Falling in Love with Computers

While school life was just about manageable, it was his subsequent BSc program in Brindavan that proved pivotal in his development. It was there that he gained a great deal of confidence and self-sufficiency — not to mention a clear sense of his future career goal.

His childhood fascination with computers was channeled during the final year of his undergraduate program when Computer Science was introduced as a subject.

During his first year, Swami spent most of His time in Brindavan due to the construction of Sai Kulwant Hall. This was an unexpected, yet supremely blessed and extremely fascinating period and through the next three years, Brindavan provided the all-round living routine which served as a template for the rest of his life. The dedicated lecturers of Brindavan — true mentors in many ways — were instrumental in Madhukar's growth.

Delhi, Chennai and the UK

Following his BSc, Madhukar began working in New Delhi and subsequently Chennai, in the software industry. It was not smooth sailing though and after another challenging period, Madhukar found himself in the UK on an assignment. In an interview during Madhukar's school days, Swami had indicated that both the field of computers and the UK as a location lay in the future. After working on software development projects in the UK and Mumbai for three years, Madhukar decided to enrol in an MBA course from Cranfield University and subsequently began a career in management consulting.

Consulting was a challenging field with performance and outcomes monitored very closely and linked to career progression (not to mention remuneration). Madhukar's attitude was to draw upon the lesson from the Bhagavad Gita of focusing on strong delivery, free from anxiety about results. The next ten years saw Madhukar build a strong reputation and an increasing expertise in healthcare technology working with clients including some of the biggest names in the world of pharmaceuticals as well as the UK's National Health Service. The unrivalled sense of purpose when working in the healthcare space made it a vocation of choice for Madhukar. When the opportunity came to work on an assignment with the UK government, Madhukar welcomed it and over the next two years delivered new initiatives in markets such as China and the Middle East.

From Consulting to Civil Service

Through a strange twist of fate, the opportunity then arose to become a full-fledged civil servant and Madhukar embraced it with the feeling that this was Divinely directed even though the pay was lower. Over much of the next eight years, Madhukar also took on the wider role of leading the team's work in India across all aspects of healthcare and life sciences covering both exports and foreign direct investment. Strong joint working with colleagues in India has set an example of what can be achieved. Giving credit and encouragement to others while keeping a strong focus on wider goals, has proved critical in engendering a strong and shared sense of purpose. The role has also meant working with industry and government leaders in healthcare in the UK and overseas.

Madhukar has looked to constantly innovate and improve, to achieve these goals as a public duty and as an offering to God. Projects such as the UK-India Healthcare AI Catalyst, which Madhukar took from concept to delivery, have showcased the power of technology in addressing unmet needs of underserved segments of society. The initiative was announced by the prime ministers of both countries in 2018 and completed in 2021. Madhukar often represents the UK's healthcare sector in international fora and draws upon his Brindavan experience in public speaking which helped him become comfortable with presenting to large audiences.

Rather than seeking constant career progression, Madhukar has focussed on ensuring his expertise is best utilised within his chosen domain while remaining open to being directed by Swami's will. The importance of balanced living manifests in Madhukar's life through regular study and practice of the Bhagavad Gita and regular exercise (as an avid tennis player). Madhukar's practice of yogic meditation has clearly indicated to him the primary goal of his life and the choice of career and vocation are in alignment.

While much work remains to be done, Madhukar is committed to the effort and the journey knowing that the Lord will look after the outcome.

Brother Madhukar Bose (BSC Maths 1994-97 – Brindavan campus) is a specialist in digital healthcare technologies and a civil servant, currently working in the British government's Department for Business and Trade as Head of Digital Health. He is responsible for creating international commercial collaborations between companies based in the UK and global institutions. He was also responsible for leading the department's work in healthcare and life sciences in India between 2016 and 2022. In addition to his 10-year civil service career, Madhukar spent a decade as a management consultant in the UK and holds an MBA from the Cranfield School of Management (UK). He also set up and briefly ran a remote healthcare monitoring service in Mumbai.



ALUMNI PROFILE - Gauri Shankar Nagabhusanam

Life lessons at the Institute

The Divine Cure and a Divine Intervention

My first interaction with Swami's institutions happened during Bal Vikas at the Shirdi Sai Mandir in Guindy, Chennai, which was managed by Leela Amma. It was Swami's blessings that I was exposed to human values at a very young age. In 1993, my family was blessed with an interview with Swami as part of Leela Amma's group. As a child, I used to get seizures and was on medication. When my mother mentioned this to Swami, he called me near him, put his hand over my head and ran it down my spine saying "*Emi ledhu. Anni bhagaipothadi*". That was it! My electroencephalography tests showed no abnormality, and I haven't had medicine since. While leaving the interview, Swami asked me twice if I would join His institute, "*Na dhegara chaduvukuntava?*" Before we stepped out He asked, "*Vasthavu kadha?*" Both times, I answered affirmatively. I wondered why He asked me, instead of my parents. Being an only child, my parents wanted me to pursue engineering in Chennai. I, however, was clear. I would study in Swami's institute. That has been the single most important decision of my life.



Learning Life lessons at the Institute

Whatever I am today, I owe it to Swami and His institute. The diversity of students that I found there was unlike anywhere else. It exposed me to different languages, different cultures, different mindsets, and different economic backgrounds of people and made me comfortable engaging with all of them. This set me up for my future career as I moved from one country to another to take up new assignments.

I was an average student (CGPA of 4.21), but a voracious reader. Thanks to our institute and hostel libraries, I was exposed to a multitude of topics, be it Tao of Physics, Autobiography of a Yogi, Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, or biographies of Jack Welch, Warren Buffet, and others, topics that would have a profound influence on my corporate life.

I was an avid sportsman and could play pretty much every sport and was made the Sports Captain in my final year. This was my first foray into a leadership role and taught me how to manage the emotions of oneself and one's team while going through the highs and lows of victory and defeat.

I also participated actively during the sports meet, and willingly chose riskier stunts. In my first year I was part of BMX cycle stunts and jumped through a huge ball of fire in front of Swami. In my second year, I was part of the carabining accident of 1997. A day before the sports meet, as we carabined from the Shiva statue to the cricket ground, the steel cable broke, and we all crashed to the ground. It was by Swami's grace alone that we all, hanging upside down, descending at 25 km/hr, survived a 30 feet fall!

I was blessed with brilliant classmates and seniors. Just observing them going about their daily life was an inspiration. Most of the skills I picked up were from them. The art of silence, the importance of hardwork, appreciating art and music, staying grounded, anything can be fixed (I was part of the maintenance department).

Hitting the job market

I started my career in Chennai in a small firm called Global Realty Outsourcing (later became a part of Accenture), which was doing outsourcing work for banks in the US. Work involved financial modelling and underwriting of commercial real estate loans for lenders in the US. This is where I was first introduced to real estate as an asset class and picked up skills in investment analysis, financial modelling and managing high pressure work. On one occasion a colleague who was to automate a process quit at very short notice, I volunteered to step in and worked 40 hours at a stretch without sleep to manually complete the process and deliver the work to our clients. The US manager was so impressed that he fast tracked my promotion and sent me to the US for on-the-job training.

Subsequently, I was recruited by Deloitte in Hyderabad, to set up their Real Estate Financial Advisory Division. Back then, there were few professionals in India that could use specialised real estate financial modelling applications like Argus, Dyna and others. Having this specialised knowledge was pivotal in my early career growth. At Deloitte, I recruited and managed a team of 40 professionals.

We did some really interesting work, such as the valuation of the 9/11 World Trade Center, buildings for insurance purposes; assistance in selection of sites for US embassies in places such as Kosovo, Milan, Baku, etc.

However, I was not satisfied working in advisory roles and wanted to be on the private equity or the 'buy side' of real estate. So I quit and took up a role in Saudi Arabia with Samba Financial Group in their corporate banking division, servicing real estate loans for large developers in the middle east. The job was interesting but Saudi Arabia is a tough place to live, so I prayed to Swami for a better opportunity.



Soon, a consultant shared an opening for an associate role at TAIB Bank's real-estate private division at Bahrain. I was interviewed and was hired immediately. On my first day, as I finished the joining formalities and walked into the office — the first picture I saw was of Swami on the desk of an alumni brother. I was overjoyed and realised it was He who created this opportunity for me. After five successful years in that role, I prayed to Swami for a break to go back and study and He blessed me with admission into London Business School. On graduating, I was recruited by Capitaland in Singapore (then Ascendas) and my career hasn't looked back since.

Dear Brothers...

My advice to students who are looking for a successful corporate life is as follows. Develop skills that make you unique and differentiated from your colleagues. Always seek opportunities to showcase your talent. Take calculated risks. Develop the ability to identify other talented people. Exhibit high integrity. And, most importantly, always pray to Swami to give you the wisdom to make the right decisions.

I take this opportunity to thank all my Gurus at the institute and at the hostel, for it is they who I looked to for inspiration during those formative years. It has been more than 25 years since I graduated from Swami's institute, but one of my most often repeated dreams is of me back in the institute. I would trade anything to relive those memorable days.

Brother Gauri Shankar Nagabhushanam is the CEO of Capitaland India Trust (CLINT), a business trust listed on the Singapore Stock Exchange. Capitaland is a Singapore-based company with assets under management of approximately \$100 billion; considered among the largest Real Estate Investment Management companies in Asia. He is responsible for approximately USD 3 billion of assets diversified across Business/IT Parks, Industrial/Logistics Parks and Data Centers. These assets are located in major Tier-1 cities in India. It is a divine coincidence that India's first IT Park, the now famous ITPL Tech Park in Whitefield is developed and owned by Capitaland India Trust. Prior to this role, brother Gauri Shankar held various roles within the larger Capitaland ecosystem, including CEO of India Business Parks, CIO and CFO of Ascendas Firstspace and Manager of India Private Funds.



COVER STORY -

The Divine Story of Ganesh Chaturthi in Swami's Institution

श्रुत्वैतत्प्राह विघ्नेशो यदि मे लेखनी क्षणम्।
लिखतो नावतिष्ठेत तदा स्यां लेखको ह्यहम्॥

Having heard Vyasa's request, He responded, "Only if my pen does not cease till the conclusion of this journey, shall I become your scribe."

And thus began the inscription of the greatest tale ever told.

Perfunctory reading might term this as a challenge from one illustrious scholar to another, perhaps to sufficient accuracy. Yet, beneath this lay a promise. A promise to act as a medium between the seeker and the Truth, between actions and their fruits, between the children and their Lord. Countless ages have passed since then, but this promise remains unbroken.

With the rains being Nature's way of replenishing itself, Puttaparthi dons a fresh tint of green during the month of Bhadrapada. A modest veil of gray now covers the afternoon sky, which would have been otherwise profuse in its luminosity. The air is refreshing, a stark difference from the oppressive heat of the summer months. The seekers, in white, can be seen hurrying back to the hostel after an engaging day. Although the situation invites a sense of calm and tranquility, there is an underlying eager anticipation coursing through each of their minds. Ideas, plans, and discussions permeate every conversation as they prepare to welcome Ganesha.

The Divine Origin

The senior boys hostel has never been a stranger to Divine encouragement and participation. Right from the early days of Prasanthi Nilayam, Ganesh Chaturthi has been an occasion when Swami used to be personally involved in the festivities. During the early 80's, clay idols were not available in and around Puttaparthi. They had to be sourced from Bangalore. It was the warden's duty to consult Swami regarding the specifics of the idol. "Typically, the idol would be about 3 feet tall, and Swami would estimate its price to be around 300 rupees". With just a single SRS bus running between the two locations, a day's journey to Bangalore had to be made to procure the idols. Swami's involvement in the selection and purchase of the idol was a special tradition that added to the spiritual significance of the event.



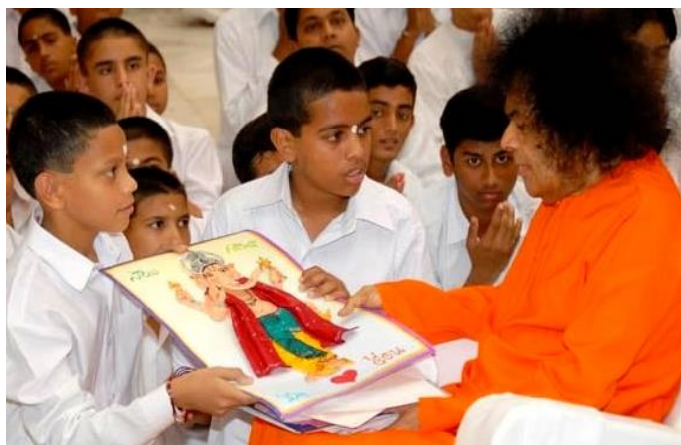
A senior professor vividly recalls that on the morning of every Ganesh Chaturthi, boys were expected to be at the mandir for Darshan. Following this, Swami would accompany the students to the hostel. In the dining hall, everyone gathered as Swami delivered His Divine Discourse. This was followed by Bhajans. At times he used to participate in the Puja being conducted in the hostel, inquiring about the little details that made the day. *“Once He got involved, the entire mechanism used to get activated — right from the Vice-Chancellor to the Warden and the students.”*

Ganesha – the Medium

Swami would always deliver a living discourse to those who are eager to listen and follow, as is the case with the majority of activities in the Divine presence. This festival was no exception. Opportunities materialised and were exquisitely veiled by the Lord. These were opportunities for transformation: a chance to bolster their faith, a chance to uncover their inherent potential, and a chance for them to organise and work as a team. Observing Swami's meticulous and nuanced attention to detail during the celebration was an amazing experience..



He had consistently iterated on the multifaceted nature of education provided at Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning (SSSIHL). On one hand, there was the significance He perpetually assigned to our culture and traditions. On the other hand, secular education was given utmost priority. A former warden recalls a specific incident. Swami would provide precise instructions regarding the date and time that must be adhered to for the events that occur during the Puja, from the very beginning. In a particular year, tradition mandated that Tuesday be avoided in order to facilitate the immersion of the idol. Regrettably, the university had examinations scheduled for the following Thursday (the next convenient date for immersion). Swami was informed of this and promptly suggested that the immersion be conducted on Tuesday, despite the fact that it was against tradition. The welfare and convenience of His children were of paramount importance to Him. Idol immersion has been held on the third day ever since, regardless of any stray implications.



A recollection common over multiple batches was how Swami would apparently be dissatisfied with the students as the festivities approached. This served as a warning to the students that their endeavours may not have been adequate. Subsequently, these endeavours saw increased innovation and effort in order to capture His attention and appease Him. Swami's demeanour would always undergo a transformation by the third day, which was typically the day of the idol immersion. He would return to a joyful state and engage in warm conversation with the students.

Thus, these festivities were just a medium, where in His unique execution, Swami would guide and guard His children.

When the chariots rolled in

There were two Ganesha idols during the early years: one at the university and one at the higher secondary school. Sai Kulwant Hall hadn't come to be yet, so they were transported to the Mandir in palanquins. An important milestone for the celebrations in SSSIHL was the creation of the first chariot, which occurred around 1992. The kitchen trolley served as the chariot's foundation during that period. Even though there were some reservations at first, the fears quickly faded when everyone witnessed the chariot being led into the Mandir, and Swami being overjoyed at seeing it. "Swami was so happy that He almost climbed the chariot to stand next to Ganesha and take pictures," reflects an alumnus. This was the year that an additional element was added to the connection between the students and their Lord — the element of innovation.



Over the years, Sai Kulwant Hall has witnessed brilliant chariot ideas being brought forth, some involving varied interpretations of philosophical intricacies, while others seeking to impress with their sheer beauty.

A New Custom

At this point, one might recall the story of a certain student who felt a close connection to the festivities, as his birthday coincided with Ganesha Chaturthi. It was the year 1994, and Sai Kulwant Hall was being constructed. Contrary to customs, Swami had decided to stay in Brindavan for the festivities. The mood in the Prasanthi Nilayam campus was sombre. A sudden burst of inspiration led him to believe that an idol could be created in the hostel itself. Abrupt decisions are seldom accompanied by pragmatism; therefore, this idea was vetoed. Yet, there were rumblings of intuition that the extra effort might improve the situation.



Following their instincts, clay was brought in secrecy, and an idol was created in the central dome of the top floor of the hostel by a group of 5-6 boys. It was the 8th of September when word arrived that Swami was indeed coming back to Puttaparthi, and He would visit the hostel. The heavy four-foot Ganesha, made of solid unbaked clay, was gently lowered down.

Swami immensely approved, rendering all other opinions and dismissals irrelevant. This then became the norm for a few years. Even though the idol's construction was later halted, it was realised that Ganesha could mediate the proximity and attention of Swami.

Not long after, each class was given an opportunity to make a chariot for their own Ganesha. The celebrations reached a new level of magnificence. The new custom was blessed by Bhagawan, and this munificence extended to other Sai institutions like the Hospitals, Central Trust and Alumni.

Swami would go around the Mandir, visiting the chariots and interacting with the students. He would painstakingly break coconuts before each chariot, with the water sometimes splashing His robe. He never cared about this inconvenience, as all that mattered to Him was the love, prayers and efforts that His boys put in to please Him.

The Doer, the Deed and the Divine

It would be unjust to assert that this journey was without any obstacles. However, each obstacle, as ordained by the Lord, was, in fact, a more significant stepping stone in one's personal endeavor.



In an instance narrated by our alumnus, their chariot had suffered a snag while leaving the hostel gates. The idol it carried suffered a few noticeable cracks. Everyone was dismayed as the idol could not be presented to Swami. With hearts strewn with sorrow and reluctance, a last-ditch effort was made. Within minutes a new chariot was prepared. Though just a shadow of its predecessor, it would now carry the idol whose cracks were covered with mispositioned decorative patches. Later that day, Swami would spend more time with that chariot than any other, perhaps less out of sympathy and more out of the precedence He gave to one's efforts..

In a separate incident, Swami's divine intervention saved a student's life. In those days, immersions used to be carried out in the well beyond the former Sai Geeta shed (currently part of the indoor stadium, opposite to the Senior Boys Hostel). The well was open to a limited number of individuals for a dip following the immersions. A student was unfortunate enough to end up with his foot ensnared in the quicksand at the bottom of the well. Being underwater for an extended period, he was retrieved in an unconscious state and rushed to the hospital. Surprisingly, very little water had entered his lungs, considering the time he spent under the surface. After intensive medical care brought him back to a stable conscious state, all he could recall was his failing will 20 feet underwater — until he beheld Swami there by his side.

After the conclusion of every Ganesha immersion at SSSIHL, the little place seeks to settle in a profound yet joyous stupor, perhaps to reflect the hue of the skies. Look beyond this into the farther corners, and one may see the chariots being dismantled. The decorations that can be salvaged are meticulously preserved for the future. The rest is just taken apart, bit by bit. Soon, all that remains is a metal frame that looks deceptively estranged from the beauty it once held. For any artist, this would be a painful yet inevitable sight — to watch his creation disappear into the memories of a select few. Yet, this is a place where every thought, idea and action revolve around a single aim — to be appreciated by Him. Neither the actions nor its rewards hold any relevance beyond this core purpose. Without His presence and assurance, every emotion loses its tint. Here truly, the doer and the deed seek to walk with the Divine.

FROM MY DIARY - Does He need me?

Siddharth Nayak, MBA 2008

“Jagadodharana Adisidale Yashoda” – never has a song so deeply encapsulated what it means to share our mundane lifetimes in the company of the divine. While His very presence uplifts our lives from mundane to extraordinary, he also gives us the experience of seeing him play a part in the normalcy of our day-to-day lives. Just as Sri Krishna engaged in play with His mother Yashoda, His gopalas, and His Gopikas, despite being the Lord of the Universe, our Beloved Swami also involved us in His small plays now and then, all to give us a chance to learn something anew.

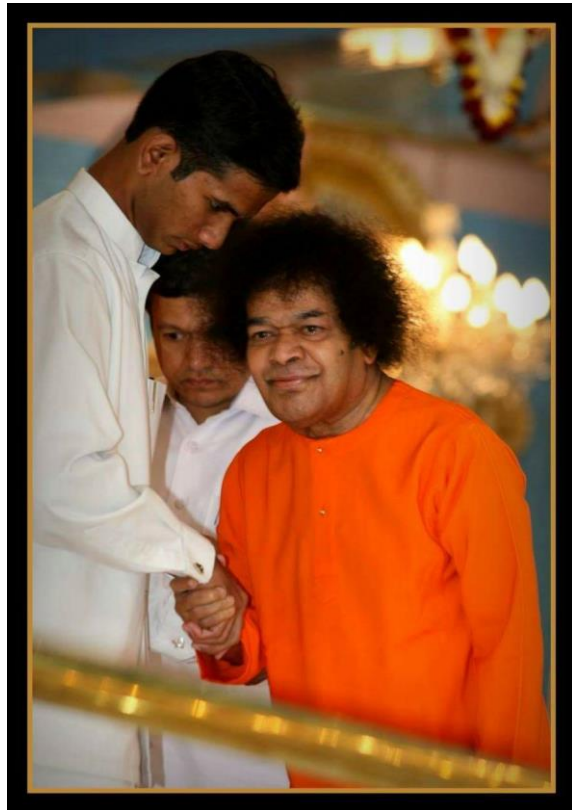
Hailing from Mumbai, Siddharth Nayak brother had the chance to enjoy the proximity of Swami during his days as a student at the Institute. As part of Swami’s personal entourage, he had the opportunity to assist and interact with Swami at close quarters. As he delves into the pages of fond memories in his diary, Siddharth brother shares with us a story of his interaction with Swami.

This story is from those days when Swami used to give darshan in his wheelchair. He used to come to the mandir in His car, drive around among the devotees and stop on the edge of the 3rd block where I would be waiting with the other equally blessed brothers to take Him onto the foyer or the interview room per His direction. As happens with most humans, over time, while assisting Swami every day, a small voice rose up in me. A voice that said that Swami was dependent on me. Without me, Swami would be deeply inconvenienced. While this feeling built up in me little by little, I should have anticipated that a lesson was soon coming my way. And it just happened to come during an unexpected moment.

I was in my usual place outside the interview room when Swami’s car stopped after His darshan round. As the car door opened, I looked up to His face. Instead of the usual brilliance of His smile, I was greeted with a grim indifference. It was the look that immediately told me that someone was in trouble. And a little later I realized that someone was me. I slowly wheeled Swami into the interview room and led Him to His usual place. As I then waited for His next command, Swami looked at me annoyed and said, “Who asked you to be here? I have no need for you. Wait outside.”

Surprised (and hurt), I excused myself and sat outside. After some time, I was told Swami was asking for me. But when I went inside again Swami asked me, “Who called you inside? Wait outside.”

Now this repeated 4-5 more times that day. By the last time, I was also exasperated. When I got called in again, I was mentally asking Swami “What is going on?” This time however Swami instead, of repeating the same asked me to get the then head of the Book Trust. He was a senior gentleman, about 65-70 years of age. So I had to help him inside the interview room and also assist him in sitting. Just as I was thinking that now things are back to normal, Swami again looked at me and said, “What are you doing here? I don’t need you. Go and sit outside.” As I quietly went outside and sat in my place, the small voice in me woke up. Swami cannot move around with my help. The head of the Book Trust is also aged and will need my help to come out of the interview room. Let’s see how they manage without me. Even as these egoistical thoughts went through my head, I saw the interview room open. There stood Swami and the head of the Book Trust, both standing unsupported. In front of my eyes, the head of the Book Trust walked independently and sat back down in his place.



And as I looked back at Swami from him, I saw him look at me and shrug – as if asking me - “Do you really think I need you?” And that was when the mirror of my ego shattered. Even as I realized the lesson that I was being taught, He, always being one step ahead, lovingly called me to His side and let me help Him back inside.

One morning, less than 50 words, and a lesson for a lifetime was imparted to me. His acting as if He was dependent on me was His way of giving me an opportunity to be a part of His grand play. “I” had nothing to do with it. It was He who made the “I” relevant in this whole situation. And that realization immediately led to a wave of gratitude as I realized it was His love and benevolence which had given me this opportunity to live my life so close to Him. And that lesson has since been firmly etched in my mind. He wore the cloak of an 80-year-old in a wheelchair, but that was for our learning. He still is the Master of the Universe, and we are all actors in His stage. We have an opportunity to play a part in His work, His work will happen anyway as per His will.

Every interaction with Him, every conversation, every eye contact, every gesture – it was all for our benefit. He was here, taking a quick swim in the ocean of the Samsara, so that He could show us the right currents to follow. And while He was doing all this, He was walking amongst us, talking to us, celebrating His mortal journey with us, so that we could one day understand what He really wanted us to learn.



FROM MY DIARY - The Beyond

C. Chandrasekaran, B. Arts 1995

Each droplet has a unique story about how it reached the ocean. Like every devotee, this is my story of getting connected to Swami.

1992 - Villupuram to Puttaparthi

Residing at Villupuram, a town about 160 Km from Chennai, I had just completed my 12th standard. A typical teenager in adolescence, my habits & friend circle made me desire to join a college in Chennai where I would enjoy 'freedom'. Hence, I was very disappointed when my parents decided that I should apply to Bhagawan's college in Puttaparthi. From delaying my application to not preparing well for the entrance exam, I did my best to ensure I was rejected.

However, an unseen hand was pulling me towards Prashanti Nilayam. Before the entrance, I was staying with my cousin in Bangalore. My parents who were to pick me up for my entrance exam were struggling to reach Bangalore due to Kaveri water agitation. Due to the riots buses from Tamil Nadu were not allowed beyond Hosur. But to their surprise, a car with Karnataka registration accommodated them as the car coincidentally was going to a street just adjacent to my cousin's house.

We reached Puttaparthi late in the evening of May 1992 - and I felt a sudden change in my heart, a sense of calm but I did not acknowledge or enquire into it.

On the day of entrance, I did well in my English paper but chose to be mediocre in my core science subjects. There were more than 1000 students competing for about 120 seats and hence my admission was unlikely.

The interview panel consisted of (Late) Prof. Sampath, Sh. Chakravarthy, Sh. Nanjundaya & Sh. Sanjay Sahani who was the Vice Chancellor, Registrar, Controller of Examinations & Warden of Hostel, respectively.

When asked how I had done my exam, my mind was processing the words, "I did extremely well." But the words that came out were, "English I have some reasonably well. Core subjects, quite bad." Prof. Sampath immediately replied, "We appreciate your honesty!"

As I write these words, I still vividly recollect wondering, how I uttered those words, when what my mind processed was a different and opposite response.



Prof. Sampath continued, “Chandrasekaran, compared to your Core Subjects, we find that you have scored reasonably well in English. Will you be willing to take up B A English Literature, if we offer that to you?”. Not being in control of what I spoke, I listened to my own response only when I responded thus, “Sir, the Course doesn’t matter, what is of importance to me is that I study in this College.”

The entrance ended & we left for Brindavan for Bhagawan’s darshan. We reached Bangalore on a Sunday which was incidentally my 18th birthday - I was fortunate to have a memorable darshan on my first day as a grown-up adult.

As we stood for Darshan next to the compound wall of Brindavan, Bhagawan appeared. The sun of Indian summer was embracing Bhagawan all over and the entire orange robe, with all its splendour, filled my senses. To add to this glorious moment was the Bhajan, "Bhashmabushithanga Sai Chandrasekhara" which went into an even higher tempo after having Bhagawan’s Darshan.

The whole dimension of space disappeared, and it was the aura of orange that filled me all over. I ran out of my senses; I was there and yet not there. The most exhilarating expression of a human being is tears. And that’s what happened to me, I started crying oblivious of anything and anyone around.

I witnessed His Grace cleansing me of my ego, pettiness, and negative thoughts about Him. No eye contact, no words spoken to, no touch – and yet the biggest of His miracles, the transformation of the human heart happened.

After the Darshan, as we were walking out, my father thought I was crying as I did not wish to join Bhagawan’s college. He remarked, “ If you are so annoyed, let us leave to Villupuram tonight itself. I will not force you to study here”. There was no way that I could explain to him my change of heart. At Bangalore, everyone in my cousin’s family said there has been some change in me ever since I came back from Puttaparthi. Yes, the old died, embracing the Beyond.

And purely His Grace and abundance of mercy I got admitted into Bachelor of Arts that year.

Love Rass

My first interaction with Bhagawan was during the Summer Course of the same year. We were seated in neat rows inside the Dining Hall and Swami came to have lunch with us. Swami started moving amidst us. Suddenly, Swami pointed to me and asked something which I could not decipher. Not waiting, He then turned towards a student brother who was standing nearby and gave some instructions. Only when that brother came, I realized that in my plate a cup with *aam ras* wasn’t there and He wanted to ensure that I did not miss out on that.

Who am I in front of His thousands and thousands of devotees? Would there be any loss if I was served one item less? I melted in His Love that tasted sweeter than any *ras* could ever, a Love that is Beyond the love of thousands of mothers.

The Jovial Mandir Sessions

After the Interviews, one day Bhagawan started interacting with us students who were in the middle portico. Swami asked what was for lunch that day. One of the items was ladies finger. Swami asked if we knew why it was called a ladies finger. Prompt came my reply, “Swami probably because it resembles a lady’s finger.” All people around including Swami had a hearty laugh even as Swami raised His Hand to affectionately hit me.

As I fondly recall Bhagawan descending to our levels during those mandir sessions, I also remember our elders reminding us not to get carried away and to maintain decorum while interacting with Swami.

With His greatest Devotee

My most cherished moment was when Sai Geetha came to Mandir during the Dusshera festivals of 1994. Bhagawan asked me to distribute sweets that morning and as Sai Geetha came closer, Bhagawan asked me to open the sweet packets and give them to Him so that He could feed Sai Geetha.

With only Swami, Sai Geetha and myself - this feeding went on for a very long time, maybe more than 5-10 minutes. I remember that I had to be prompt to ensure that neither Swami nor Sai Geetha had to wait and at the same time ensure I was not littering the mandir with empty wrappers by tucking them all into all my pockets.

Letters to Bhagawan

Once I wrote a letter to Him and put it in a postal envelop and pasted it.

Bhagawan accepted the letter and tried opening it but realized it was pasted. He returned it to me saying something which I did not understand. Sanjay Sahani sir who was sitting next to me said to open the envelope and give the letter alone to Swami.

As I did that with a lot of nervousness, Swami waited patiently, and as I handed over to Him, He said, "Don't waste money".

My parents had always felt that I did not value money as they had seen my spending habits. But here was the omniscient one guiding & correcting me.

Once a cousin named Ramesh visited Prasanthi Nilayam. This person was going through a tough time as a trusted business colleague had cheated him and had filed a false case in the Madras High Court. Sitting on the lawns of our hostel, Ramesh asked me if writing a letter to Swami would resolve this issue. I said he should do so with full faith and leave whatever happens to Swami. My cousin tried giving the letter to Swami for the next few days but could not. Hence before leaving Parthi, he handed over the letter to me to hand it over to Swami. For the next 3 weeks, I took the letter to every single Darshan, but Swami did not accept it.



Once, I was holding two letters -mine and my cousin's, but Swami carefully picked only my letter and did not accept my cousin's. On all the other days, Swami used to look at the letter and me and simply pass by. One fine evening, I was seated in the middle portico and Swami kept walking past me repeatedly collecting letters from everyone, except me. In fact, He accepted the letter from my hand and after a few steps simply threw it back at me. Finally during Bhajans at 5 pm, Ramesh's prayers were accepted as Swami came near me during his last walk on that path that day, accepted the letter and went by. That evening my father called me to tell me the judgement had gone in favour of my cousin Ramesh. Interestingly, the lawyer had called them around 5 pm to inform them of the same.

A Presence Eternal

Once during my student days, I was feeling depressed and lonely. To me who was all about friends, fun and frolic, it looked like life came to a standstill. I had joined His college only with Swami as the hope. But here He was not anywhere near me. I saw many brothers getting interviews, but I was not even seen by Him. Had I done anything wrong? The feeling of guilt only worsened my mental state of mind.

The bhajans were going on in the mandir and I was weeping, feeling forlorn. I was seated alone away from the rest of the brothers. I had closed my eyes and had bent my head so that no one would notice my crying. The next bhajan was 'Nandalala, nandalala, dayo karo Bhagawan'.

When the lines "tumrhi Sharan bina anaathu hey hamm...", were being sung I felt a familiar fragrance. As I opened my eyes, I saw Bhagawan standing next to me, looking down at me. I looked up, He saw my eyes filled with tears. But said nothing. He stood there, for me, just for me. And after a few minutes turned and went back.

And he continues to stand by me, for me even today. Thirty years have gone by since that day when He stood there witnessing my heart cry out to Him. I have grown in my understanding - from the outside, He has come inside me. Taking me along with Him, into the Beyond.

GRATITUDE CORNER

Prof. B. Raghavendra Prasad

Vice-Chancellor, Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning (Deemed to be University)

Dear brothers and sisters,

Sairam,

We, the alumni of Sri Sathya Sai Educational Institutions, spanning from the erstwhile Sri Sathya Sai Colleges (Anantapur, Brindavan, Prasanthi Nilayam, 1968-1981) to the current SSSIHL with its four campuses (since 1981), and SSSHSS (girls & boys), have been gathering at Bhagawan's Lotus Feet in Prasanthi Nilayam and to serve our alma mater in various capacities over the last few decades. Our connection with Bhagawan and our alma mater has always been one of informal gratitude. It brings me great joy to announce that Bhagawan, with His infinite love for His students, has graciously bestowed upon us a formal all-inclusive alumni association. This marks yet another opportunity for us to come together in His Divine Mission.



For all of us, maintaining a strong connection with the alma mater that has profoundly shaped our personal and professional journeys has been of utmost importance. Our achievements across various domains owe much to the blessings of our Revered Founder Chancellor, whose grace allowed us the privilege of learning at His Divine Lotus Feet. Bhagawan has always regarded His students as invaluable treasures, investing significant time and care in nurturing each one of us during His earthly presence. And He continues to do so with each and every student of Sri Sathya Sai Educational Institutions.

Bhagawan always envisioned His students as ambassadors of His Integral Education System. Now, it's our responsibility to reaffirm our commitment and offer support to our alma mater in every possible way, including mentoring of current students. Though the magnitude of our indebtedness may seem overwhelming, our dedication will ensure the continued elevation of our alma mater to higher levels.

We have formally registered ourselves as an alumni body under the name "SRI SATHYA SAI STUDENTS" on April 18th, 2024. All forthcoming alumni activities will operate under this banner. A structured process for enrolment in this association is being established and will be communicated shortly. This step does not alter our existing relationship with Bhagawan or the Institute; rather, it fortifies it by providing a common platform for communication and interaction.

Let us take this moment to recommit ourselves to the Sai Mission by becoming an integral support system for our alma mater.

LOVE IN ACTION

Palliative Care Centre: Spreading Bhagawan's Love

Sairam, Dear Reader!

In the January 1, 2023 edition of Vidyullekha, we presented the genesis and the philosophy of Sri Sathya Sai Palliative Care Centre (SSSPCC). In this edition of the journal, we look into how this initiative has reached deep into society, what treatment Seva they provide and, importantly, the dedicated team behind this wonderful initiative.

Today, it is entering into its third year of dedicated Seva to those in need. It is worth mentioning that a vast majority of beneficiaries are cancer patients. However, to serve them better a dedicated basic facility was considered. By the Swami's grace, a piece of land, close to three-fourths of an acre (near the current West gate of the Ashram) was donated by a devotee. This is gifted to Swaasthyam Palliative Care and Cancer Foundation (SPCCF) for the proposed new facility. SPCCF is a foundation set up at Puttaparthi by Alumni of SSSIHL to take forward the work at SSSPCC. In April this year, Bhoomi Pooja was conducted (construction is expected to start soon). The new centre christened 'Sai Sharan' would be completed and become operational in Swami's centenary year (2025). It would have facilities to perform cancer surgeries, chemotherapy and dialysis.



Treatments Provided:

The centre provides a very comprehensive palliative care program which is not limited to just cancer. Care is provided irrespective of the outcome of the disease. Pain management is a very big area in palliative care, followed by other symptomatic management therapies. In chronic and long-term conditions, patients go through a lot of suffering, with chronic pain being a major concern. Cancer pain is especially very difficult to treat. This calls for treating and administering drugs that require specialised training by the administrators. Patients go through a lot of symptoms for long durations which could be, but not limited to, nausea, vomiting, constipation, edema, difficulty in eating/feeding, difficulty in breathing, collection of fluid in the abdomen, bed sores and wounds. Wounds and bed sores do not heal fast and need to be treated for a long period of time.

Palliative care is provided to patients at various stages of cancer. There is a monthly cancer screening program at the centre, where more than 100 people are screened for cancer every month, which includes breast, cervix or any other type of cancer. Every month, anyone with suspicion of cancer may visit the facility to take necessary advice and guidance on where they may avail treatment. They also get palliative care support. Some patients may have complications after their chemotherapy or surgery. These patients may not be able to handle these complications at home. Often they do not even get admission to hospitals unless they are willing to get admitted in the ICU and pay a huge amount of money.

Also, some of those treatments may not be covered in typical insurance schemes available for poor people. Hence, they come to the centre, get admitted for symptom management and return to the curative treatment once their symptoms are stabilised. Increasingly, many people in the early stages of cancer visit the centre. They are first registered for palliative care so that throughout their entire treatment journey, they have access to palliative care both at home and at the centre. They are also educated on what would be the typical journey in terms of treatment and what are their options for treatment in order to help them make their choice. Hence, this also serves as a facility with medical professionals who can give the right information to patients and guide them.



Another sizable number of patients suffer from post-stroke conditions such as neurological deficits, which are usually lifelong. Here, palliative care helps to mitigate a lot of challenges that a patient encounters. Physiotherapy is another important element in palliative care. While physiotherapy may not help patients to regain their original function, it can prevent the stiffening of joints, retain mobility and increase the range of motion of limbs. The treatment provided is a combination of rehabilitation, prevention and to some extent curative.



Outreach up to the Doorstep:

The centre currently treats patients in and around Puttaparthi within a radius of 50km, who are diagnosed with chronic, progressive or terminal illnesses. This caters to about 560 patients as of today. Dharmavaram, Muddigubba, Kadiri, Gorantla and Penukonda, along with 160 plus villages, are covered. The majority of patients (close to 70%) are cancer patients, 20% are stroke patients and the rest include various other conditions including children born with congenital syndromes who need lifelong palliative care. It is noteworthy that all services provided in this centre have been free of cost since its inception.

Often it is a challenge for patients to visit the centre physically. So the services of SSSPCC reach the doorstep of these patients. Homecare vans are equipped with medications, dressings and materials needed for procedures such as insertion of feeding tubes, catheterization, stoma care, acidic tapping, giving an enema, nebulization and mobility aids along with medications related to palliative care. The frequency of home visits is determined by the condition of the patient. Besides this the centre has a 24/7 helpline to get guidance on the subsequent steps — which could be a change in the treatment or to plan for an early visit by the homecare team or an admission to the centre if the need be. Therefore a continuum of care is provided to hand-hold these patients to navigate through these difficult symptoms all through their lives. When the symptoms become difficult to manage by the caregivers at home, patients are admitted to the centre. The average stay of a patient in the centre is about a week, while there are patients who stay for even up to two months. There are also patients who come for daycare (i.e. they come in the morning, and go back in the evening).

Unlike other hospitals, the atmosphere in the centre is very homely. Festivals are also celebrated regularly. Besides, there are a lot of activities to look after the emotional and spiritual well-being of the patients. There are Bhajan programs, artwork and several other activities to engage the patients and their family members. Apart from going through physical pain, there is a huge amount of emotional challenge that the patients go through. Hence, counselling is an integral part of the treatment here.

The Hands that Serve:

The overall management is looked after entirely by a volunteer team of alumni. Apart from trained doctors and nurses, there are some long-term volunteers and a few alumni who are based in Puttaparthi who offer their services in the centre. Due to the chronic nature of conditions, counselling and training are provided to the patients and their family members by this team. Along with counselling and training, they are also empowered to handle basic activities by themselves.

In addition to the team in Puttaparthi, there is also a remote team which is very active. There are devotees in Puttaparthi who come to participate in Seva activities. There is a 17-member team of full-time employees, taking care of the day-to-day service delivery. This includes two medical officers who are trained in palliative care, seven nurses who cover both in-patient care and home care. There is also a team of housekeeping staff, drivers and pharmacists. There are a couple of very dedicated and senior physiotherapists who are retired residents of SSSIHMS, volunteering their time here. In this way there is a significant amount of professionals who are specialised in palliative care, available in the centre. The oncology team will be constituted once the cancer facility is established. For the monthly cancer screening programme, there are visiting oncologists who attend to the patients. Since palliative care is a very holistic approach, all the stakeholders become critical in giving this care.

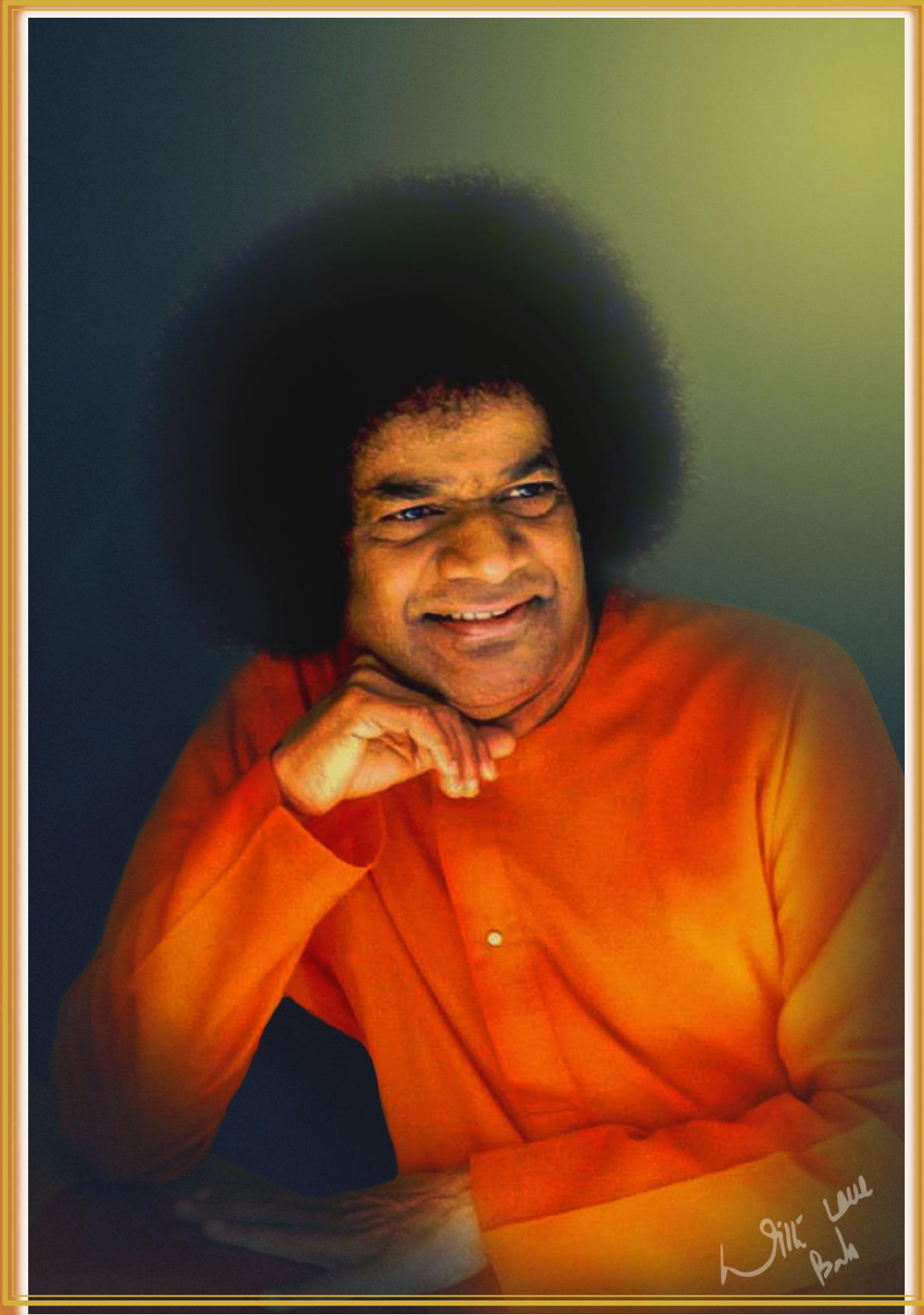
There is a detailed route map for the home visits and there is a full-fledged application (Health4All application) that helps to plan the home visits. All the patient-visit records get entered and stored digitally. The patient data is constantly tracked by the team to plan the homecare program. It also becomes easier to track the progress of the patients based on the severity of their conditions. There is very systematic planning on the route to take on a particular day. Usually, one van goes on a planned route and the second one is kept as a backup for emergencies. Apart from visits to the centre and homecare, there is tele-support for patients calling the centre for immediate support. The team also proactively follows up with patients to inquire about their status, as typically a lot of patients may not escalate the issue in a timely manner.

Team Vidyullekha wishes all success for SSSPCC and prays to Bhagawan to shower His choicest blessings on all the staff and volunteers who offer their services in the centre. For more information about the centre and service opportunities there, please contact brother Gunaranjan (+91-9000183123), brother Venkata Desikan (+91-9632422311) and sister Sathya Sai Shree Laxmi (+91-8310766193).









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