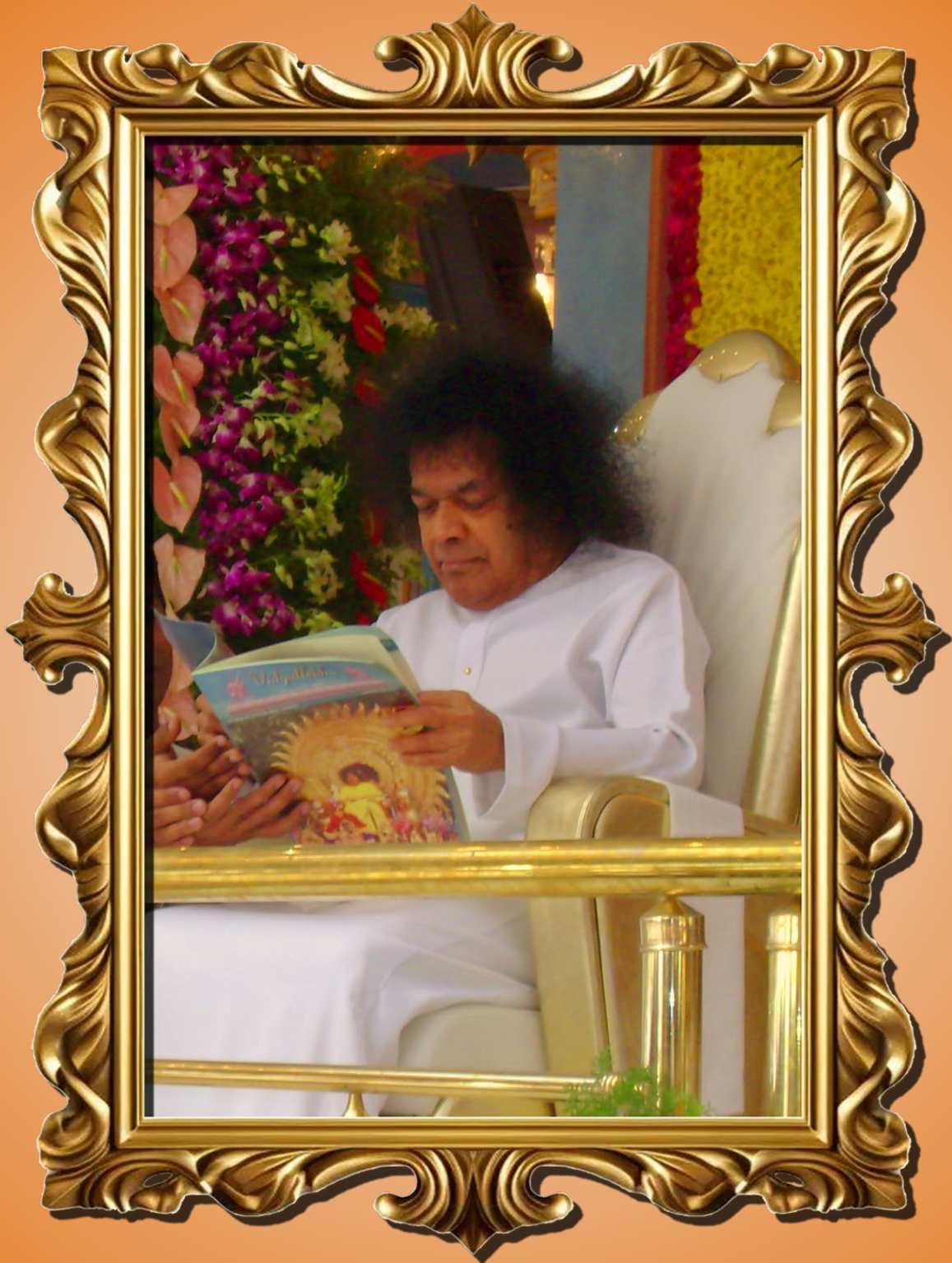
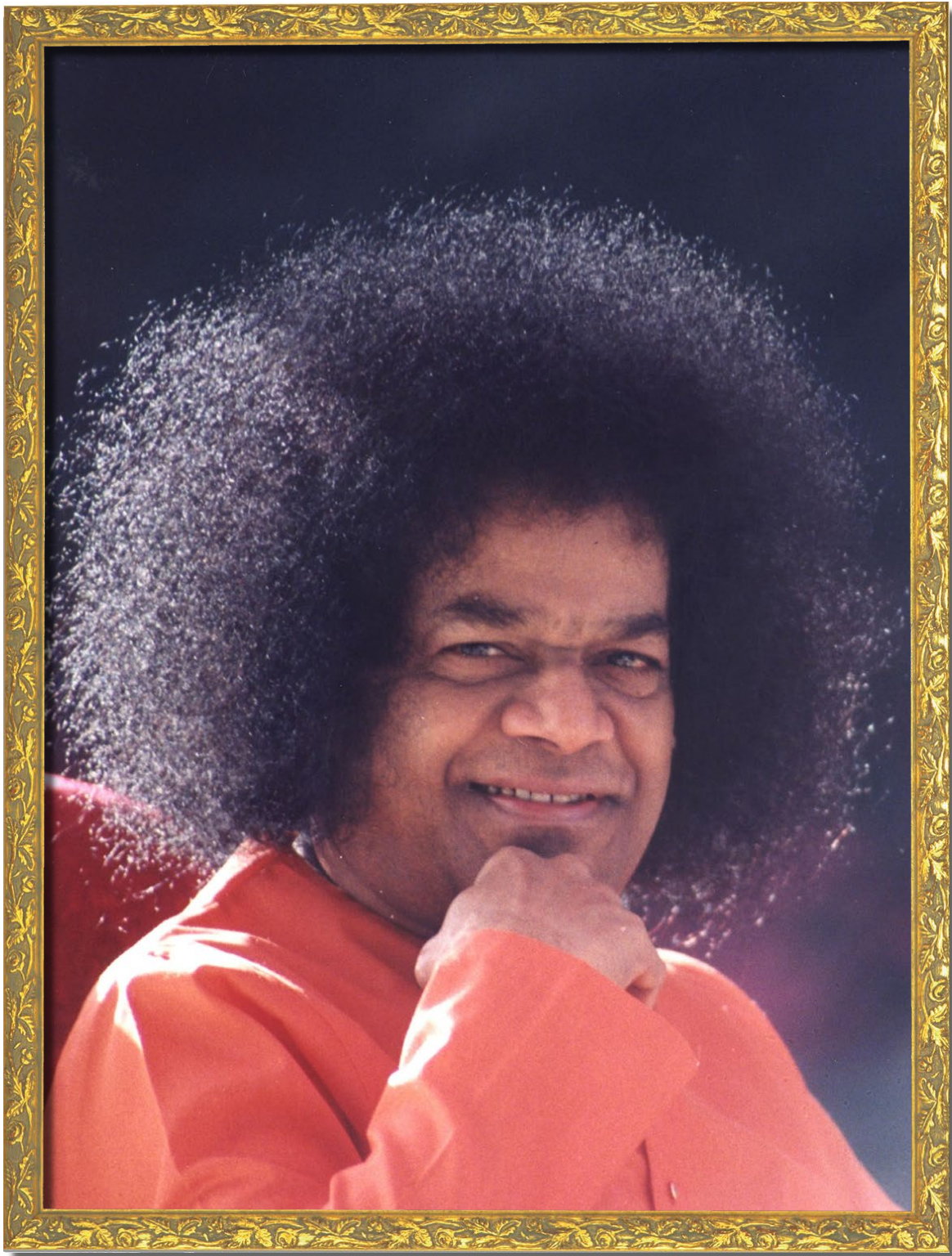


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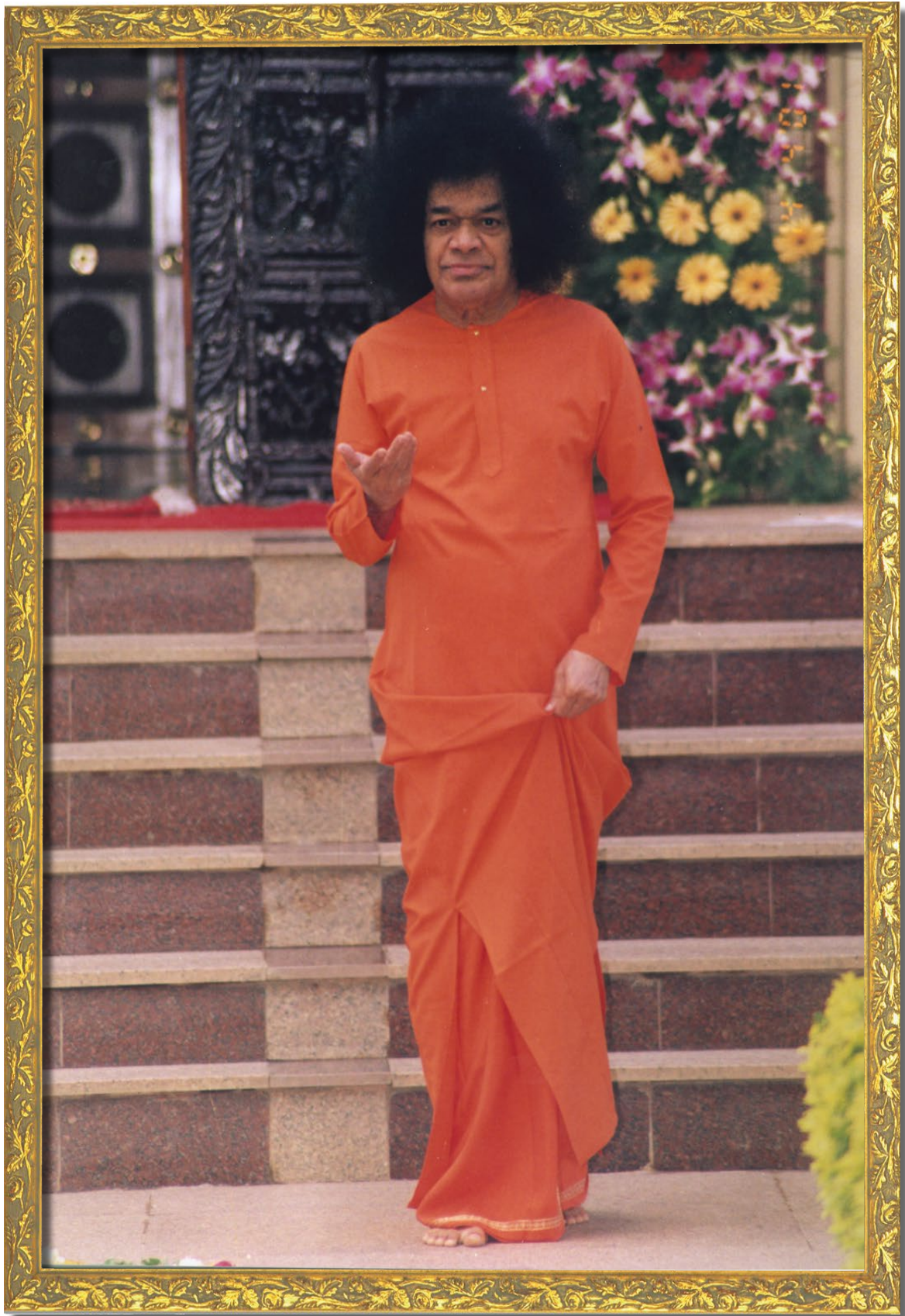
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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear sisters and brothers,

The New Year season is always a time for reflection and gratitude. This New Year is special because this is Swami's 100th year of advent. This issue is a testament to how Swami's teachings continue to inspire and guide alumni across different fields and countries, transforming individual lives and communities through love and service. In *Bhagawan Uvacha*, we have a profound account of how Swami taught the deep meaning of *Shraddha* through a series of personal interactions. What began with a simple question about the Bhagavad Gita led to a transformative understanding of spiritual dedication.

On the cover, we have inspiring stories of two of our alumni who have dedicated themselves to carrying forward Swami's divine mission. The story of L.V.M. Kishore, State President of SSSSO Delhi, shows how Swami's teachings can transform organizational leadership. His innovative youth program "Life is a Game, Play It" and various service initiatives demonstrate how spiritual principles can be adapted for contemporary challenges. Similarly, the Sri Sathya Sai Jagruti Medical Centre and Sure Trust initiatives by Amar Vivek offer powerful examples of love and service. Amar's work bridges the gap between education and employability for rural youth, showing how spiritual motivation can lead to practical social solutions.

In From My Diary, Sai Subramanian Manickam shares a deeply personal account of how Swami taught the lesson of humility and trust through everyday interactions. The stories about German devotees and financial assistance beautifully illustrates divine omniscience and compassion.

In the same section, Ravishankar Ghandikota offers a unique perspective on capturing the divine through photography, showing how even a technical skill can become a spiritual practice. His experiences photographing Swami taught profound lessons about preparation, humility, and seeing divinity in every moment.

In Gratitude Corner, we have a compelling story of organizational leadership infused with spiritual purpose. As a national coordinator, Dr. Gopi Krishna Pidatala's work in education and healthcare shows how divine guidance can shape a life of service and leadership.

The Love in Action section carries beautiful accounts of how the alumni continue to express their devotion through creative arts. The drama team's spiritual connection and the band's annual performances demonstrate how artistic expression becomes a form of worship and unity. We also have heartwarming accounts of alumni groups carrying forward Swami's message through practical service, from feeding programs to winter clothing drives, showing how love can be expressed through simple acts of kindness.

In Alumni Profiles, we tell the stories of Sarika Pradhan and Sree Rama Murthy Garuda. The first one is a touching narrative of a civil servant who embodies Swami's message of social service in her role as Secretary of Social Welfare in Sikkim. Sarika Pradhan's story illustrates how spiritual teachings can be applied in government service, leading to impactful social development while maintaining work-life balance. Sree Rama Murthy's journey from academic difficulties to becoming an independent director at OSEL Devices showcases how Swami's teachings shaped both his personal and professional life. His experience demonstrates how divine intervention can guide one to their true calling.

We wish you a year of love, service and happiness.

*We dedicate this edition at the Lotus Feet of Bhagawan. Do write to us at [Vidyullekha@saistudents.org](mailto:Vidyullekha@saistudents.org) with your feedback*

With gratitude and love,

**Team Vidyullekha - Sri Sathya Sai Alumni**



# Bhagawan Uvacha

**Bhagawan on Shraddha** – Dr. K, Anil Kumar (PhD 1990)

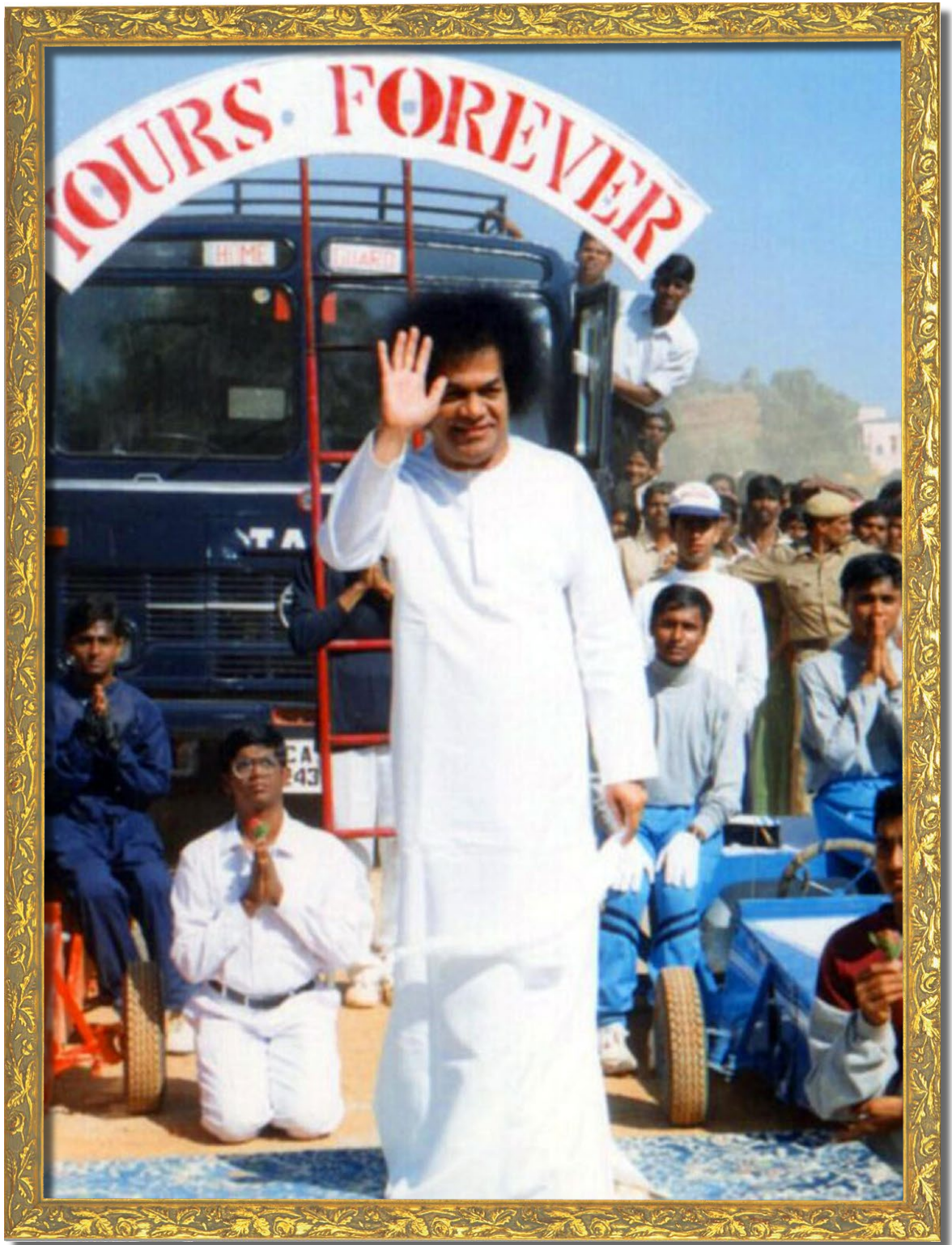
I recall a sequence of wonderful “sambhashanams” that He granted to guide us on the right path. I was one of a group of students Swami had called to the interview room. I was seated at the far end corner of the room. The topic of the discussion was the Bhagavad Gita (what a coincidence – His Will, I am writing this on Gita Jayanti day), He turned towards me and queried whether I knew the first verse of the Bhagavad Gita. I recited the first line “*dharma-kṣhetre kuru-kṣhetre samavetā yuyutsavaḥ*” since that is all I knew, and then fell silent. Swami then looked deeply at me and said, “You have a lot of Bhakti but no Shraddha.” This made me start thinking about what “Shraddha” actually meant. I researched and became more confused than ever before. The Lord, having ignited the lamp, will ensure it burns bright. He will, in His infinite Love, continue the guidance until we learn it in its totality. In a subsequent interview which was almost a year later, Swami spoke to me on Shraddha. He gave the most profound yet simplest meaning of Shraddha – He said, “Shraddha consists of two aspects – *Asakti* and *Sthiratwam*.” He then went on to explain that *Asakti* is a never-ending yearning to be with the LORD, a deep yearning coupled with enthusiasm (in Telugu – “utsahamu to koodina tapas); *Sthiratwam* is steady pursuit, an unwavering mind (in Telugu – “chalinchani manasu”). Then, Swami said, “Follow what Sai Mata tells Shraddha will naturally come.” Such a simple but profound and practical explanation for Shraddha, only our Dear Lord can convey in such a manner. Every word of our Lord is suffused with deep significance. I was wondering why Swami referred to himself as “Saimata”, a rare mention and whether there was any deeper significance to this. Yes, every doubt is cleared in His presence – “Om Sri Sai Sakala Samshaya Haraya Namaha”. In the following festival discourse, Swami said that Mother (Shakti) is “Shraddha” and Shiva is “Saburi”. Prayer to Mother will bestow us with Shraddha. HIS love and guidance are “purnam – total”. Swami did not stop this lesson there. In the next interview a year later, He explained, “With Shraddha even a small tiny spark of amber can be made into a mighty flame.” Swami said that we are a spark of fire, through shraddha we can become Our Lord.

Like a loving and dedicated Guru, the Lord is

प्रेरकः सूचकश्चैव वाचको दर्शकस्तथा ।

शिक्षको बोधकश्चैव षडेते गुरवः स्मृताः ॥

“He is the motivator, the guiding post, the eloquent preacher, the example, the teacher, and the enlightened one.”





# COVER STORY

## **A Divine Symphony of Service: Alumni Harmonizing with Bhagawan's Vision**

As we commemorate the centennial birth anniversary of our dearest Swami, we celebrate a legacy of love, service, and spiritual transformation. This special edition features inspiring stories of our esteemed alumni who have dedicated their lives to carrying forward His divine mission. Through their selfless service and unwavering devotion, they exemplify the power of love and compassion. Join us as we delve into their remarkable journeys and explore their visionary plans to honor Bhagawan's centenary with a multitude of service initiatives that will touch countless lives.

### **Sri L. V. M. Kishore: Carrying Forward Bhagawan's Vision**

As the sun rises on the centenary of Bhagawan's divine advent, we are reminded of His message of selfless love, service, and spiritual transformation. Sri L.V.M. Kishore, the State President of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization (SSSSO), Delhi, exemplifies this commitment with his steadfast dedication to service and his efforts to inspire youth.

Kishore recounts his time in the hostel as a transformative phase that instilled values he cherishes to this day. "Inclusivity was at the heart of everything we did," he reminisces. Whether it was organizing dramas or participating in sports meets, students from different age groups—from 8th grade to PhD—came together as one cohesive unit. These experiences taught him to work harmoniously across diverse groups, a skill that now comes naturally as he leads SSSSO activities in Delhi.

Another lesson etched deeply in his heart was the importance of stepping back to allow newcomers to take center stage. "It is as profound an act of service as participating actively," he shares. Guided by Swami's example, he learned the delicate art of mentoring with humility, enabling others to grow and shine. As he reflects on this principle, he emphasizes the critical role it plays in inspiring the next generation of youth.

### **A Unified Front for Service**

Kishore's role as State President is further enriched by the seamless collaboration with alumni who serve as office bearers in Delhi. Spiritual coordinator Shyam Kishore and service coordinator Jagannath Duvuri bring their expertise and passion to ensure every initiative resonates with Bhagawan's vision.



### **Building Faith: A Patient Pursuit**

"Youth can be attracted to Swami gradually," Kishore explains. Faith, he believes, is not an overnight phenomenon; it takes time to build. "We must remember that when people look at us as alumni of Bhagawan's institution, they see us as representatives of His teachings," he states. This awareness, he says, carries a weight of expectation that constantly drives him to live up to the highest standards.

For alumni communities, especially where their numbers are small, joining the larger fold of SSSSO is invaluable. "It provides an avenue to leverage collective strength and amplify our impact," he says.

### **Centennial Celebration: Small Acts, Big Impact**

As the world honors Bhagawan's 100th birth anniversary, Kishore underscores the significance of individual acts of service. "While mega-events mark the milestone, the true celebration lies in small, consistent acts of kindness. These individual efforts, when combined, create a wave of transformation," he asserts.

Delhi, under his leadership, has embarked on various initiatives to commemorate the occasion:

1. Education: A scholarship program aimed at empowering underprivileged students.
2. Health: A dedicated initiative to support the well-being of lactating mothers.
3. Narayana Seva: Scaling up the "Amrut Kalash" program to provide dry ration kits to the needy.

### **Landmark Youth Program: "Life is a Game, Play It"**

One of the flagship initiatives spearheaded by SSSSO Delhi is the college-level training program, "Life is a Game, Play It." Designed to impart timeless Indian cultural values in a contemporary context, the program blends life lessons from the Bhagavad Gita, Quran, Swami's teachings, and Swami Vivekananda's wisdom. The curriculum covers essential skills such as handling failure, communication, and confidence-building.

The highlight of the program is its practical approach:

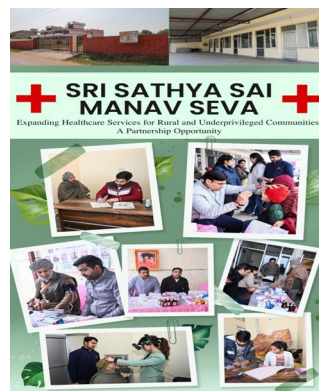
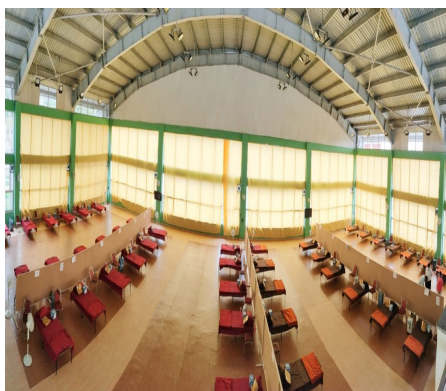
- Eight interactive classroom sessions.
- One service-based activity session.
- A grand convocation titled "Power of One," emphasizing the ability to initiate positive change as an individual.

"This program is led not by eloquent orators but by individuals who have walked the talk," Kishore proudly shares. For instance, one of the mentors actively practices the principle of "ceiling on desires," embodying Bhagawan's teachings. Running successfully across 10 colleges and 30 schools, the initiative is a beacon of Swami's message of self-transformation and societal upliftment.

## Sri Amar Vivek: A Beacon of Selfless Service

Amar Vivek's efforts in the healthcare sector are deeply inspired by Bhagawan's teaching that service to man is service to God. At the heart of his contributions lies the Sri Sathya Sai Jagruti Medical Centre, located 110 kilometers from Chandigarh in Yamunanagar, Haryana. The center serves as a diagnostic facility while implementing the "Jan Aushadhi" scheme, ensuring affordable medication to underserved communities.

However, it is the recent strides in Mohali, Punjab, that have amplified Amar's vision. At the Sri Sathya Sai Manav Seva Charitable Hospital in Kurari, state-of-the-art outpatient services (OPD) and a dental OPD are operational. Patients benefit from free medicines and emergency diagnostic services. The hospital is poised for expansion to commemorate Bhagawan's 100th Birthday with plans for a comprehensive eye care center, palliative care unit, and an addition of 52 in-patient beds. This ambitious growth reflects not only Amar's determination but also the values instilled by Swami—treating every patient with love and respect, regardless of their socioeconomic status.



## Uplifting Rural Youth: The Gift of Employable Skills

While healthcare remains a cornerstone of his work, Amar Vivek also envisions a brighter future for rural youth through skill development programs. Recognizing the vast untapped potential in India's villages, he co-founded the Sure Trust (<https://www.suretrustforruraleyouth.com/>) along with fellow alumna Vandana Nagesh and Professor Radhakumari Challa, Department of Management and Commerce, Anantapur Campus. Established on July 9, 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the initiative has transformed the lives of thousands of students by bridging the gap between education and employability.

Sure Trust offers over 40 courses including emerging fields such as robotics, machine learning, and Android programming. Collaborating with industry trainers, the program equips students with the tools they need to excel in modern industries. Today, over 2,500 students have successfully completed the program, and 400 more are currently enrolled. Amar attributes the program's success to the dedication of a passionate team, which includes fellow alumni like Vijay Lakshmi, Kritika Ram, Praveen Sharma, and Kumar Chella.

The program's goal is far-reaching for the 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday: extending these opportunities to 6,000 villages across India, with the robust support of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization (SSSSO). Amar sees this as not merely an act of service but a collective endeavor to transform society by enabling young minds to achieve self-reliance.

## **A Unified Vision to Empower Generations**

Recently, we had the privilege of speaking with a small group of alumni who are part of National Youth Team, Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organizations—Lakshmikant Sharma, National Youth Coordinator (MBA 2015); Osho Sai, (MTech 2015) ; Varun Talreja (MFM 2015); and Sai Santosh Shetty (MSc 2013)—who have come together to strengthen SSSSO's activities with a vision inspired by Bhagawan. Formed in 2019, their team is committed to spreading Swami's message with regional flavor while focusing on the vital role of youth in carrying forward His mission.

The cornerstone of this group's endeavor is to build a cohesive and inclusive environment, not just within their team but also in their approach to serving society. Emphasizing the principle of unity in diversity, they have created foundational structures—or “pillars”—to facilitate and expand their efforts in areas like education, outreach, and social media engagement. These pillars serve as tools to sustain the legacy of SSSSO and are designed to ensure that Bhagawan's message reverberates across generations for at least the next two decades.

“Pleasing Swami has always been paramount,” shared Lakshimikant Sharma. “What we do is not driven by personal agenda; it is for the joy of serving Him. That is what sustains our youth's unwavering commitment, even if they have not seen Bhagawan in person. They feel connected spiritually and are deeply touched by His love.”



### **Driving the Change: Service Projects with a Purpose**

Guided by Swami's teachings, the group has rolled out impactful projects that embody His ideals of love and service:

1. **Prema Tharu (Tree of Love):** Reflecting Bhagawan's emphasis on caring for the environment, this ambitious initiative aims to plant 10 million trees across India. By addressing environmental concerns and promoting ecological harmony, the project mirrors Swami's message of seeing divinity in all creation.
2. **Liquid Love:** This nationwide blood donation program taps into youth participation as a means to save lives and foster a culture of empathy and compassion.

### **Mega Projects for Bhagawan’s Centenary:**

- Cricket League: With participation from 850 teams across the country, this initiative uses the universal language of sports to instill values like teamwork and integrity
- Unity Run: A six-month-long marathon spanning India, the Unity Run will culminate in Puttaparthi on Swami’s 100th birthday, bringing communities together through the symbolic lighting of a torch of unity.
- Ratha Yatra: Five grand yatras from different directions of India will travel to Puttaparthi over 18 months, carrying Swami’s message to every corner of the nation.
- Short Film Festival: Harnessing the power of modern media, this program will encourage youth to create Instagram Reels and short films on the theme “Service to Society.” The festival aims to amplify Swami’s message in a medium that resonates with the younger generation.

### **Inspiration Rooted in Hostel Life**

The seeds of these inspiring projects were planted during the alumni’s transformative years at Swami’s institutions. Recalling their time in the hostels, they shared how inclusivity and unity were a way of life. “We were shaped by an environment where selfless love and teamwork were the norm. One of the key lessons was learning when to step back and let someone else take the lead, knowing that creating opportunities for others is as significant as doing the seva yourself,” said Osho Sai.

Bhagawan’s constant guidance, they said, instilled the understanding that faith develops gradually. As stewards of His teachings, they emphasize patience, knowing that for many, faith is nurtured over time through personal experience and observation of those who live by Swami’s principles.



### **Service in Action: Beyond Comfort Zones**

A moving example of their service came to light during a seva activity in the remote, Naxal-affected region of Dantewada in Chhattisgarh. Despite warnings from the Border Security Force about potential risks, the youth proceeded courageously. Their act of love and dedication inspired the village youngsters so profoundly that they adopted the neighboring village to continue the chain of seva.

“These are the moments when you feel Swami’s invisible hand guiding you,” said Varun Talreja. “Bhagawan ensures that an individual connection with Him is established for everyone involved, be it the volunteers or the beneficiaries.”

The group attributes this unwavering determination to the gratitude instilled by Swami’s teachings. As alumni, they are ever-conscious of how Bhagawan worked tirelessly for the welfare of society—building institutions, offering free education, and providing health care—enabled by the hard-earned contributions of devotees. This spirit of gratitude drives their focus on leveraging the SSSSO infrastructure to maximize their reach and impact.

### **A Legacy of Love and Service**

As Bhagawan’s centenary celebrations gather momentum, the efforts of these alumni serve as a testament to His enduring impact on humanity. Their dedication to nurturing the next generation, enriching lives through seva, and fostering unity exemplifies the transformative power of Bhagawan’s love.

“Our journey is Swami’s message in motion,” concluded Lakshmikant Sharma. “Through His grace, we strive to light up lives, one act of service at a time. Swami once said, ‘Your life must be My message.’ As we celebrate this milestone, our goal is to live by those words and carry His legacy forward.”

With projects that heal, nurture, and uplift, these alumni are not only honoring the centenary of Bhagawan’s earthly advent but also paving a path for generations to walk in the light of His love. Indeed, they are living examples of Swami’s timeless wisdom: “Love All, Serve All.”



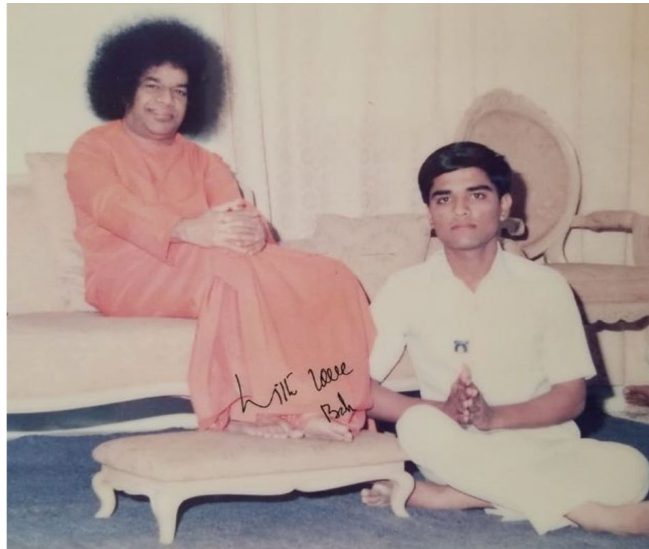
## FROM MY DIARY

### Omniscience, Omnipresence & Omnipotence- Sai Subramanian Manickam

As students of Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, we often witnessed Swami bringing many western devotees into the interview room and we would frequently hear bursts of laughter from the interview room. I was particularly curious about how overseas devotees interacted with Swami. During my Post Graduation at Prashanti Nilayam, some of us were called for an interview along with devotees from Germany. Swami was talking to us in Telugu and Tamil. He then turned towards a German devotee and asked, 'What do you want?'. When the devotee did not respond, I assumed he hadn't understood Swami's accent and repeated the question slowly. The devotee remained puzzled. I had mistakenly assumed that all overseas devotees who came to Swami spoke English, not considering that many might not understand the language. Swami then started talking to them in German and had a wonderful interaction with them.

Afterward, Swami looked at us and made a piercing statement, "You boys, have limited knowledge of a subject but you act as if you know everything in that subject, but Divinity is the other way. The Divinity knows everything but stays humble and does not feel the need to show off. In this case, I had to talk to them in their language since they have come from far and some of them cannot afford to come for a second time." This is an example of how Swami used His **omniscience** to give Ananda to His devotees.

One morning, the hostel warden informed a few of us that Bhagawan had summoned us to the Mandir. That afternoon, Swami took us into the interview room and explained that He was our mother and that anything we received from Him was a blessing, not a mere give-and-take transaction. He then announced that He would cover all our hostel fees. Although there were no educational fees at Swami's colleges, there was a nominal charge for food. We expressed our gratitude, took His Padanamaskar, and left.



I was troubled about why I was receiving financial assistance since my father was still the family's breadwinner, and I didn't seem to qualify for an exemption. A few days later, I received a letter from my father revealing that he had accepted voluntary retirement from Railways and had relocated to our hometown. It was an awe-inspiring moment - Bhagawan had addressed my financial situation even before I became aware of it. His timing was perfect - preempting our needs before we realized them ourselves. This incident highlighted not only His omnipresence but also His infinite compassion and His perspective of seeing the giver and receiver as equals. In the Divine eye, such semantic distinctions hold no meaning.

Once during our MBA interview, Swami created a beautiful, huge diamond and spoke about it including the physics of light passing through it. He then got up and walked to each of us and showed us the diamond up close. After showing all of us, He said, "How foolish of all of you, that when I walked so close to each of you, you focused on the creation, paying your respects to the diamond when the Creator was right in front of you."

## FROM MY DIARY

On contemplation of this, I realised how important it is to see the world through Swami's eyes and not see Swami through the eyes of the world. That is the way to cut through the noise which can easily come with assumed ownership of the happenings of life.

Working with creation is pressure, but working with the Creator is pleasure. We can practice this by dedicating everything that happens to us as gratitude to Bhagawan - both positive and negative. Everything, then, that we go through is His Blessing and slowly this dissolves the difference between His view and our view. I believe that this vision protects us with the **omnipotence** of Bhagawan, and we can stand facing the world with service in our hands, compassion in our speech, and love in our hearts.

*(The author is from Coimbatore, India who joined the Brindavan campus (Bangalore) for 11th Standard in 1982 and graduated with an MBA in 1991. In his student days, he was blessed to be part of the Sai students' music and drama group and had the good fortune of accompanying Bhagawan to Chennai, Kodaikanal, and Mumbai. He has been instrumental in organizing Sai alumni and young adult sessions in Sai centers in the US, Canada, India and West Indies to share Swami's glory through music and speaker sessions. He works with children at Ashraya (Home for underprivileged children in Bangalore) along with his friends providing support and guidance for the children. He is currently President & CEO of Lasatek Solutions based in North Carolina providing technology solutions to the clients globally.)*

### Always Be Ready - Ravishankar Ghandikota

From my first days as a student, I had the good sense to realize that the life of the Avatar must be captured and in my own small way I did what I was able to - recording His discourses and taking His pictures. In those days I used a manual zoom camera (Canon AE-1 Program with 75-210mm zoom) and am ever grateful to my parents and elder brothers for unconditionally supporting me with cameras, film, tape recorders, and cassette tapes. In the early 1980s it was not easy getting all these and maintaining them in India but that is where Swami encouraged me directly and through my family. I would say that all those of us students who had the opportunity and His permission took on this role seriously of capturing the life of the Avatar. One of the important lessons Swami taught to students and lecturers, is to always be ready, especially for the call from the Divine. Accordingly, when taking photographs in His presence, one must always be ready to take photos of the event, of Swami, individual pictures of Swami, and of students with Swami. In the 1980-90 period, we had 35mm film cameras with 36 exposures per roll. Unlike digital cameras nowadays with large memory cards allowing you to take hundreds or thousands of pictures, with film rolls we needed to be deliberate and frugal and allow for time to wind the completed roll back into the film canister and to load a new roll

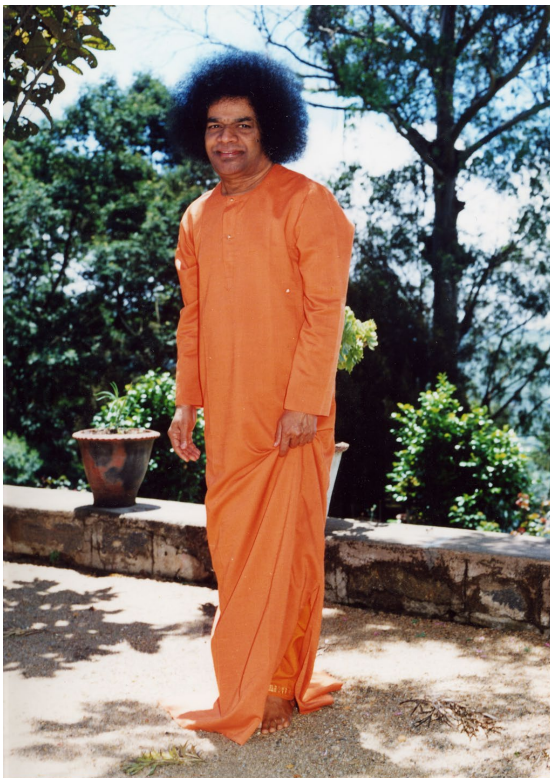




## FROM MY DIARY



Because of this I always had two cameras (the second a Canon EOS 650), multiple lenses (zoom and wide angle), at least 10 rolls of film (360 shots), and batteries for the flash. All of this with the intention of not wasting the precious time of the Yugaavatar. On one occasion in Brindavan, around 1989 when I was a Lecturer there, the final year students had prayed to Swami to take photographs with Him, and seeing their yearning, Swami agreed. As lecturers and elder brothers, we had prepped the students earlier in the day, in case He agreed to the coveted photos, to quickly assemble in a line for photos and to not waste the time of the Lord. On that day there were hundreds of devotees waiting for Darshan in the Sairam shed and when Swami graciously agreed for individual photos with the graduating students. All the students did marvelously by forming a neat line and waiting for Swami. Swami then called me forward and asked where we on the lawns of Brindavan should be for taking the pictures. Now, this is not a simple question - when the Lord asks, who am I to speak or suggest a location. I deferred to Swami and prayed to Him for the spot. He then “admonished” me and said that I was the photographer and therefore should suggest a good spot.



By His grace I had the good sense to say that Swami knows everything and that He should guide. Swami then smiled, and approvingly, and proceeded to pick the best spot from a lighting and scenic perspective! .As I started to take the pictures of the students who came forward one by one to stand beside Swami and move, I made sure to keep both cameras loaded and ready and made sure to switch to the next camera as the film got over in one of the cameras. The students were efficient and disciplined in their posing quickly and moving on to give the chance to the next student. As this went on for a few minutes, Swami suddenly said to stop and seemingly very seriously asked if we all noticed what was going on. We were all afraid that someone had transgressed to waste His precious time, or had displeased Swami in some way. Swami then explained in His loving and simple way the eternal truth, that Divinity is the constant and just as the students are coming standing next to Swami and then going, so is the material world and those in it are just coming and going! What a lesson while taking photos on the lawns of Brindavan! Divinity is permanent, everything comes & goes.

The nearness and dearness we year for was achieved by the deer in Brindavan. One evening, after giving darshan at the Sai Ram shed, Swami came back to Trayee and made His way to the deer cage. It was always a sight to see Swami with the deer - the yearning of the deer and the love of Swami on them. The deer would normally be spread out grazing in various parts of the large enclosed area, and even when the attendant came with food, they would not come running the way they did for Swami! On this day, Swami entered the cage, and I also slipped in to take pictures with my zoom lens from afar, lest I disturb Swami with the deer. What a sight to behold - the deer running from all directions to Swami, skidding in the loose dirt and stopping just at His feet! Swami would then so lovingly feed the deer the cut apples that the deer would take so enthusiastically from Swami, but not from the attendant with the same enthusiasm. The deer had found the Source and did not want to lose the precious chance of being with Him and being fed by Him!



### **The Near and Dear Swami**

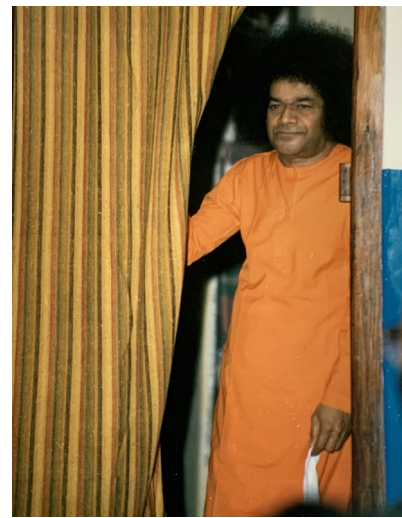
In His graciousness, Swami gave me the opportunity to “capture” Him through photos. This gave me the golden opportunity to see the informal facet of Swami where He was casual and so loving. In Ooty we saw Swami staying partially hidden behind the curtain, lovingly watching the Ooty school children chat vedas. Swami stayed like this without revealing Himself so that the children were not disturbed. Later, the interactions Swami had with the children was a sight to see!

One of the things I realized early on was that Swami was the Divine photographer. I was just there to get the opportunity and enjoy the bliss that the Lord gives! Though I was carrying the camera and pressing the shutter button, without His will and His grace none of the photos would come out right. There were days when you could go through a whole roll of film and not get one good picture. On other days, like when He waited for me to press the shutter button, that one picture would be heavenly and be seared in your heart! In a literal sense, Swami was also a Divine photographer par excellence! It was in 1988, and I was a Lecturer in Brindavan at the time. In April of 1988, Swami took a batch of MBA students, some lecturers from Puttaparthi, and from Brindavan to Ooty and Kodaikanal for a month-long trip. It was literally a heavenly experience, and fantastic photo opportunities - of Swami and with Swami! One morning, Swami took students to a devotee’s house on the hillside for photos. It was perfect - a pleasant and sunny day with the Lord in the hills! Swami found a fabulous spot for photographs, at the edge of the garden wall overlooking the hills and valley below. After taking individual pictures with everyone, Swami started casually strolling in the rose garden.

## FROM MY DIARY

It was quiet, but for the noisy 35mm SLR cameras with motor drives that a few of us were using to take pictures of Him. Swami looked at us and waved His hand and said how noisy we were. Then Swami then said he would show how He took pictures! He waved His hand in front of a yellow rose and materialized a 3D hologram of that very same Rose! It was a sight to see the creator in creation, and then the Creator capturing that creation in the palm of His Hand!

*(The author is the grandson of late Br. Sri Ghandikota Subrahmanya Sastry garu (renowned Vedic scholar) and son of late Sri Ghandikota V. SubbaRao (retired senior United Nations official). He was born and brought up in USA, and had the privilege of joining Swami's college at Prasanthi Nilayam in 1981, completing his undergraduate and post-graduate degrees in commerce. After receiving the gold medal for best all-round student from Swami in 1985, he served as a lecturer in Commerce from 1986 to 1992 at the Brindavan campus of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning. Currently, a Senior Director at S&P Global Market Intelligence in New York, USA.)*



# ALUMNI PROFILE

## Sarika Pradhan(B.Sc. Zoology 1992-1995)

Secretary, Social Welfare, Government of Sikkim, Director (Government Nominee), National Housing Bank

Sister Sarika is a member of the Sikkim State Civil Service since 2002. She has managed several complex multi-stakeholder development projects of national and state governments including Indo-Chinese border trade through Nathula Pass and management of Border Area Program. Her current role entails leading her team to implement schemes Government of India schemes under the Ministry of Social Justice, Ministry of Minority affairs and Ministry of Tribal Affairs



Earlier as Project Director of the state government's Rural Development Department she headed flagship programs as Project Director, MGNREGS and Mission Director, Swachh Bharat Mission. Her effective leadership in rural development led to her team winning more than 25 national awards.

She has been a member of Project Review & Steering Committee, Department of Electronics & IT, Government of India and been part of Working Group on Himalayan Springs (Niti Aayog, Government of India)

As a student of Bhagawan's Institute, her fond memory is of Swami calling the graduating batch for an interview where He advised the students to focus on social service and family welfare. As a civil service professional, she gets massive scope for doing seva which for her is Bhagawan's blessing of following His advice. Her roles are diverse and challenging with multiple postings. She takes these challenges in her stride, being detached from worries with firm belief that it is all Bhagawan's will.

She has been able to balance her work and family commitments by giving quality time to her children and having served her late in-laws. She is an integral part of the seva initiative 'Sai Daughters' of Sikkim & Darjeeling hills. Since 2015, she has been the Sikkim State Coordinator for Sri Sathya Sai Vidya Vahini.

Her word of advice to the alumni community is that some alumni may have time and energy while others may have resources - all should come together and channelize their energy and resources to serve Bhagawan's mission.

# ALUMNI PROFILE

## Sree Rama Murthy Garuda (B.A. Economics 1990)

Sree Rama Murthy Garuda is an independent director at OSEL Devices. A seasoned professional in business development, strategic consulting, and operations management, he brings expertise across e-commerce, FMCG, Medical, and AgroTech sectors, with a strong focus on strategic growth. An alumnus of Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning (BA Economics, 1990) and Andhra University (MBA Marketing, 1993), he began his career with industry leaders like P&G, ITC Tobacco, and Bharti Airtel, excelling in operator tie-ups, regional leadership, and revenue growth.



Over the past four years, he has collaborated with startups & mentored ventures like Helanbikes and Foodcolours at NITI Aayog's AIC. As a Principal Consultant, he has contributed to the growth of organizations like Thinksynq, SafeHarvest, WayCool, Swift-I Consulting, and ToyEnabler.

His time at SSSIHL was profoundly transformative. The opportunity to learn from seniors about Swami's teachings left a lasting impact on him. Swami's mantra, "Love All, Serve All," became the cornerstone of his life, guiding him to build meaningful relationships and achieve success in both his personal and professional endeavors.

Throughout his career, brother Sree Rama Murthy has been recognized for consistent performance, earning international recognition and multiple Bharti Airtel Great People Manager awards. Notably, He achieved two Guinness World Records with Airtel in 2012 and 2013. He was also part of Airtel's achievers club, topping nationally three times. One of his recent accomplishments was his project shortlisted as an achiever for the "Save the Soil" campaign. He is passionate about building businesses, fostering innovation, and driving value-based leadership in all my endeavors. One of the highlights of his career was leading a 600-member sales team in Karnataka for Bharti Airtel. Together, they achieved a Guinness World Record, and he ensured that every member's name appeared on the certificate. He credits this success to Swami's teachings, which inspired his leadership style of inclusivity, love, and collective growth.

Staying connected with Swami has always been his priority, whether through listening to His podcasts, attending bhajans, or collaborating with alumni. This connection has significantly influenced his career, which has revolved around building relationships and connecting with people across rural and urban landscapes.

In times of challenge, Swami's grace has been his guiding light, enabling him to overcome hurdles, secure opportunities, and resolve issues. Swami's presence continues to inspire and strengthen him at every step of his journey.



## GRATITUDE CORNER

*Dr Gopi Krishna Pidatala is a second-generation devotee; Swami chose him as the National Youth Program Coordinator for Swami's first World Youth Conference. He's held many eminent positions in the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations since, including being the Chief Public Relations Officer of the Central Trust. He's based in Hyderabad and is Group CEO of Vista Imaging and Medical Centre – a diagnostic centre with twelve centres across the country. Plus, he's the Managing Director of Deno Source India, a sales and marketing analytics company.*



### **On his connection to the Sai Mission**

When I was fifteen, my father Late Sri P Sitapati, IAS, a former Chief Secretary rank officer of the Government of Andhra Pradesh forcibly put me into a 3-day Sri Sathya Sai Winter course in Indian Culture and Spirituality at Hyderabad as he felt that I was whiling away my time with friends. Reluctantly, I joined but this was the turning point of my life—the sessions were so inspiring! It triggered an unknown energy in me! I started discovering myself and intended to realise the purpose of my very life! My lifestyle started changing!

I was amazed at the commitment and Love of the Sevadal serving us in those three days. I soon wanted to be one of them and became part of the Sri Sathya Sai Organisations, Hyderabad in 1981. I started rendering seva in Sivam and soon became the CCS of Sivam – the Chief of Chappal Staff looking after the Chappal stand which today I realised has helped me the dignity of labour.

During this course, I befriended like-minded youngsters of my age and rest all is HIS STORY – the History of the Hyderabad Youth. In 1985, during Bhagawan's 60th birthday celebrations, Swami would lovingly refer to us who helped in the canteen loading and unloading rice bags from trucks as His 'Hyderabad boys'. The strength grew from year to year with His Love, His guidance, His direction. From few, we became hundreds and in Andhra Pradesh thousands. He directed the Hyderabad Youth to involve in village youth and perform Gram Seva with the right attitude – as an offering to Him. Under His divine umbrella, for the next 15 years, every Saturday and Sunday was dedicated to Sri Sathya Sai Grama Seva.

Over many loving interactions spanning three decades, He taught me the importance of simplicity and high thinking, to stay grounded and yet aim high and that Seva was the best way to reach Him! He has since, in his infinite grace, provided me with multiple opportunities to serve and I did not hesitate to grab any given opportunity.

Seva initiatives such as the Sri Sathya Sai Vidya Jyoti Program, where the Organisation has adopted over 800+ schools, medical support at 12000 ft height in the Himalayan mountains, and the tribal villages seva in Andaman and Nicobar Islands made me understand why Swami made Seva and Sadhana so important to progress towards GOD! As the convener of the Sri Sathya Sai National Leadership Program for Self-Transformation, Swami made sure that Transforming Self is the first step in Sadhana to get closer to him.

### **Interaction with SSSIHL Alumni**

I always envied the students and alumni of Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning. I begged Swami multiple times to give me admission into the university. At first, He never responded, but one time when I pleaded hard, He said, "Aye! You have been asking so many times... and I have not responded... don't you understand? No, you must work outside." This divine guidance has been close to my heart since that moment.

I've observed that alumni have a clear picture of what they need to do and how to lead their lives for they have been trained to do so at the University and by Swami Himself. Their clarity of thought, execution plan, and understanding of what Swami likes is phenomenal. It's always been a great pleasure to work with Sai students. In fact, you may meet any Sai student, they are directly connected to Swami. Even if they're not connected to the Organization per se, they'll share profound values they adhere to as per Swami's divine dictum.

### **Your perspective on the role of a Sai Student**

I recall an incident from an interview in Trayee Brindavan when a Governor of a North East state remarked, "Swami, your students who are your soldiers seem to be rushing towards you all the time!" Swami smiled and said, "they are rushing to me... I am theirs! so what is the issue... it is to me that they are rushing to!" He then immediately corrected the Governor and said, "My students are not Soldiers, they are all Generals!" This is how Swami sees his students—the ones who lead!

### **How do you connect with Swami in His physical absence?**

Connecting with Him is only through His love, benevolence, grace, and blessings! I feel His presence every minute! When the Lord of the universe came down to mother Earth, He took off many hours guiding and blessing me and many of us. There must be something that He expects from this child of His called Gopi. This for me, is a great responsibility! All devotees who have partaken Swami's love must lead their lives in accordance with His message. As long as my breath holds, Swami is my dearest friend, whose presence I always feel. I don't think at all about His physical absence. I never saw Rama, Krishna, Jesus, or any other... but I have seen my Lord Sathya Sai - His beautiful form is embedded in my heart. So, I never make Swami a part of my life, I ensure that He is my life and I move forward. This is how I stay connected to Bhagawan.



# LOVE IN ACTION

## In His presence – Beyond time, Beyond stage

In 2015, the first alumni drama was performed. The applause was loud, the success undeniable, yet the cast and crew couldn't shake the sadness that Swami wasn't there to witness it. A few days later, in a dream, the team found themselves seated before Swami. The room was heavy with silent anticipation until someone gathered the courage to ask, "Swami, were you not happy with the drama?" Swami's response was simple yet profound: "The fact that I am here with you is proof enough that I liked the drama." At that moment, silence turned to joy as they realized that His presence was eternal — unbound by the years He walked among them.

This very yearning to feel His presence and carry His message forward drives them to perform. It is not merely an act; it is a spiritual commitment, a chance to relive the days spent as students in Puttaparthi, where the seeds of devotion were first planted.



Sleepless nights are spent piecing together dialogues, and recording sessions stretch into the early hours, driven by a singular purpose — to perfect every emotion and gesture. Alumni from over 40 batches unite, setting aside personal struggles to channel their love for Swami into their performance. The preparation, which begins months in advance, reveals the essence of what binds them: the love that God is. Even though the tasks may seem mundane, they are, in truth, reflections of the divine play.

As the drama enters its tenth year during the centenary of the Divine, little is known to the audience about the untold stories behind each scene. Behind the curtain are tales of failure, patience, and redemption, of rediscovering their connection to the Lord. And sometimes, these stories emerge from moments of doubt — those times when we mistakenly believe we are alone in our journey. These moments push us to act, to seek answers that only the Divine can resolve.

We are but human, fragile and flawed, wandering through life's storms. In the aftermath of chaos, when the tempest quiets and the path behind us lies clear, we pause to reflect. There, on the rain-soaked earth, we see only a single pair of footsteps trailing through the storm's fury. In anguish, we cry out, "God, where were You? Why did You abandon me when I needed You most?" And in the stillness, a voice responds, "My child, I was always with you. Those footsteps are not yours — they are mine. When the storm raged and you could walk no further, it was I who carried you."

Faith, like love, is a quiet strength — unseen but unfailing. In those moments when we feel forsaken, it is not the absence we endure, but His eternal Presence we embrace.



## Sai NAAM : Rekindling Divine Bonds

The annual Sai North America Alumni Meet (Sai NAAM) in Atlanta this year stood as a testament to the enduring love and unity inspired by Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Alumni from across North America came together, answering Swami's divine call to "Come together, spend time with each other, and spread ANANDA amongst each other." Participants, spanning generations from their twenties to sixties, gathered to relive the sacred moments of their student days and reconnect with the essence of their alma mater.

The day began with Suprabhatam and Nagar Sankeertan, infusing the space with devotion and nostalgia. Alumni and devotees of the Atlanta Sai Center had beautifully adorned Swami's altar and chair, creating an atmosphere reminiscent of being in His physical presence. Sessions throughout the day included inspiring talks, experience-sharing, and discussions on ways to support and express gratitude to the alma mater. Bhajans resonated with heartfelt devotion, and a soul-stirring musical offering brought the alumni closer to Swami's omnipresence.

The meet was not only a time for connection but also for service. Alumni prepared peanut butter sandwiches for the needy, singing bhajans as they worked. This simple act of love transformed into a divine offering, with each sandwich infused with prayers and care. The synergy of service and devotion exemplified Swami's teachings, filling the room with vibrations of compassion and unity.

Sai NAAM reaffirmed the alumni's commitment to Swami's declaration: "My students are My property." The gathering not only rekindled the joy of being Sai students but also strengthened their resolve to carry forward His legacy of love and service, spreading His message across borders and generations.



## Alumnae Activities in Indianapolis, USA

Guided by the teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, alumnae from the Anantapur campus in Indianapolis have dedicated themselves to heartfelt service, spreading love and compassion in their community. Following Swami's principle of "Love All, Serve All," their activities reflect a deep commitment to His message of selfless giving.

On the first Saturday of every month, alumnae, alongside local Sai Center devotees, gather at the North United Methodist Church to serve meals to those in need. From 9:30 AM to 12:00 PM, they lovingly prepare and distribute simple yet nourishing meals, including cheese sandwiches, vegetable sandwiches, bananas, oranges, and protein bars. Their efforts go beyond the act of feeding, as they ensure the space is left clean and welcoming, embodying Swami's ideal of service with humility and respect.

Every winter, these alumnae extend their love through a Winter Drive. Together with the Sai Center devotees, they distribute new coats, socks, gloves, hats, thermals, and care packs to help the needy brave the cold. This annual tradition is a tangible expression of compassion, ensuring Swami's message reaches those who need it most. These activities are more than just service—they are an offering of love, a way to keep Swami's teachings alive. Through these acts of kindness, the alumnae not only bring comfort to others but also experience the fulfillment of serving selflessly. They continue to light the way with love, reminding us that even simple acts can transform lives and bring joy, as Swami's presence is felt in every heartfelt gesture.



## A Symphony of Love: The Alumni Band

Every December, the alumni band comes together in a heartfelt tradition that transcends borders and time. Musicians from across the globe unite to recreate the magic they once shared during their student days as members of the university band. This gathering is not just about music; it's a celebration of shared memories, camaraderie, and devotion.

The alumni band officially began in 2007, making this their 18th year of performances. However, their journey began two years earlier, when informal meetings laid the groundwork. Back then, the lack of instruments and a dedicated practice space posed significant challenges. Slowly but surely, instruments were acquired, and the super-speciality hospital in Whitefield became their rehearsal haven, offering a place to play every weekend.

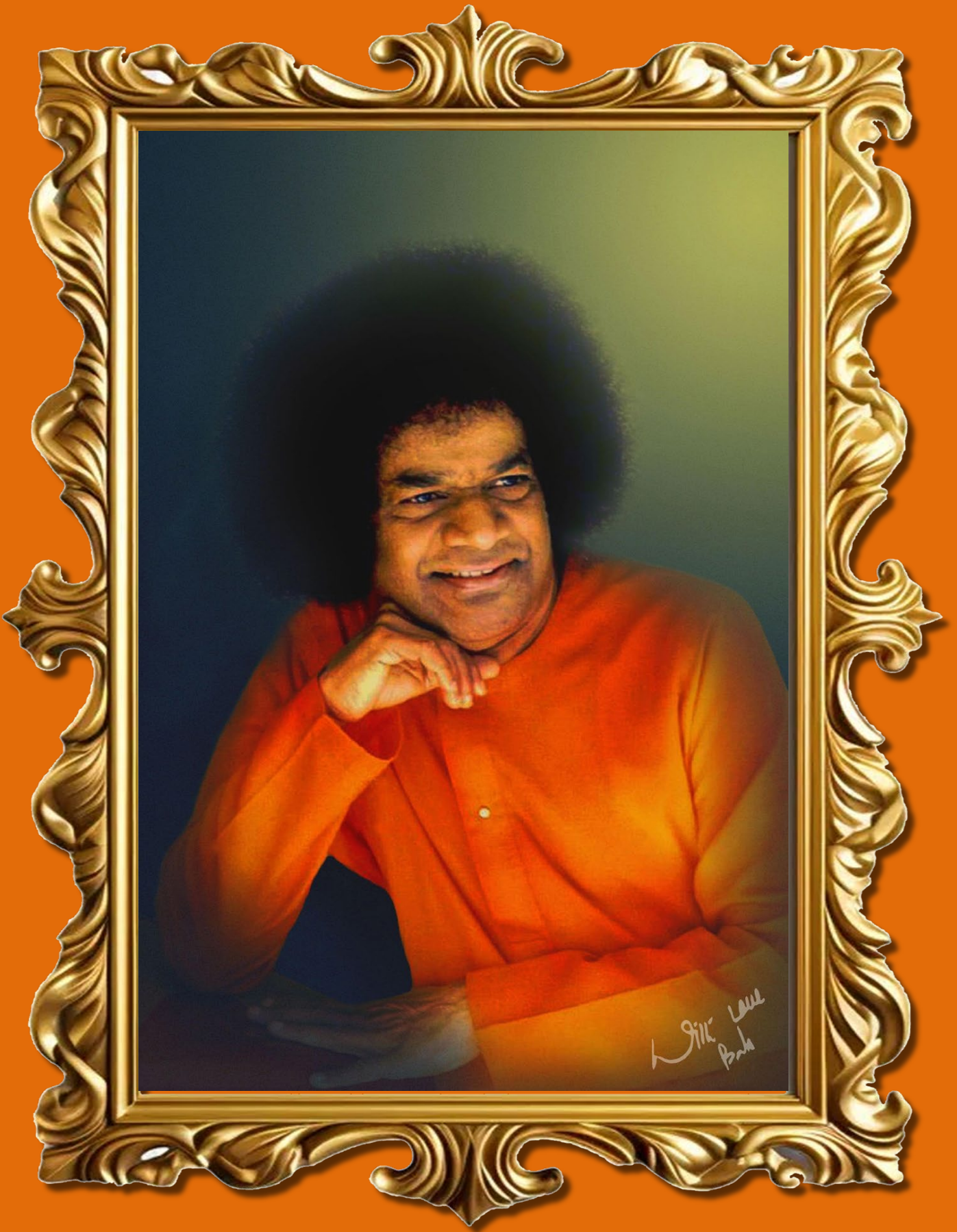
Preparations for the performance begin months in advance, with alumni gathering in Bangalore starting in November for weekend practice sessions. What once relied on long-distance calls is now organized seamlessly using Google Forms. Each piece is carefully selected and arranged through a collective effort, with suggestions from many helping to shape the performance. The alumni, who learned composition and arrangement during their time in the institute, take charge of crafting the music for the meet.

This year, the band will perform pieces such as *The One*, *Dance of Krishna*, *Mahadeva Maheswara*, *The Quest*, and *Sankara Siva Sankara*. Sometimes thematic, sometimes a collection of emotions, the music always carries one purpose: spreading joy.

Music, after all, is the language of the soul. It touches hearts, transcends barriers, and unites everyone in love. The alumni band's performance is not just an event—it's a celebration of the divine, a testament to how music binds us to each other and to the memories that define us.







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