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**HINDU SEVA PRATISHTHANA**  
*a service movement...*

# SEVA VRATHIS

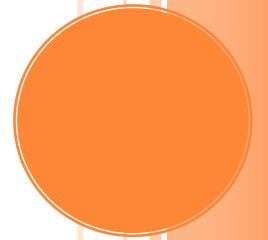
## *The Impact of Social Change-Makers*

*Seva-vrathis work with an objective of “Lokahitham Mama Karaneeyam”, meaning “Our duty is to do good to humanity”. Seva Vrathi is not a profession but a vow taken to serve the society selflessly.*

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## INTRODUCTION

A number of organizations and institutions focus their efforts to build people. They toil to produce engineers, doctors, lawyers, financial advisors, artists, etc. They concentrate on every factor, every facility and every force that can help the learners excel in their domain of expertise. While the world has aggressively adapted to certain segments of human skill building and life value enrichment, this aggression has left behind a large number of people who could not participate in the growth story. A nation sees real growth when all its stakeholders are a part of the journey. Several organizations are now working to get board all those who missed the previous opportunity so that they can be a part of further developments. When we speak of such unusual people-building organizations, **Hindu Seva Prathisthana** (HSP) is one of the prime names that emerge. HSP aims to bring about a transformation in the society where people and communities are self-reliant.

HSP has strong network of volunteers and people have extended enormous support in all terms. The organization has consistently contributed towards the common welfare cause and has won people's trust. A strong bonding between people and communities has been built over a period of time, leading to a strong impact on people's life as well as living conditions. It has taken thousands of volunteers to create this impact over decades of selfless volunteerism.

मनसा सततम् स्मरणीयम्

वचसा सततम् वदनीयम्

लोकहितम् मम करणीयम्

Let us always remember,

Let us repeatedly speak out:

Our duty is to do good to humanity.

A significant role in this process is that of the *Seva Vrathis* – young volunteers – many of who dedicate their lives fully to the noble cause of serving the society. *Seva Vrathis* have been a pillar to the projects that are run to support various causes. *Seva Vrathis* are the building blocks on whom the organization can rely on a 24x7 basis to perform any activity for people's welfare. *Seva Vrathis* undergo a rigorous training of 45 days to build their competencies, develop their skills and abilities to handle people and projects in the optimal manner. The training aims to consciously nurture the already present but dormant qualities such as patriotism, perseverance, humility, etc. This enables them to acquire skills to serve in domains like Rural Development, Literacy, Eradication of Untouchability, Child Education, Common Health Education, Individual and Family Counseling, Propagating Yoga and Spoken *Sanskrit* language, Rehabilitation of Street

Children, Rehabilitation of Physically Challenged and/or specially able children, Environmental protection, Drive against alcoholism and Environmental protection.

### Key Insights

- HSP has a strong presence across the state of *Karnataka*, especially the backward and tribal villages as well as certain regions of North *Karnataka*.
- *Seva Vrathis* are the nodal point of management for the organization. They take up the responsibility of building the community on various notes and support in resolving prominent issues in the society.
- *Seva Vrathis* are trained by the organization to explore their passion for the society in several ways and work efficiently on the causes they support.

Several *Seva Vrathis* are young girls who come from different villages and tribal places. Many of them could have undergone sufferings and challenges at their places. These young girls are motivated, talented and willing to bring about the change in the society. They want to cut the challenges for their peers as well as the forth coming generations in order to provide them a holistic opportunity to grow in a better environment.

In a nutshell, *Seva Vrathis* are the Change agents of the society, who are strongly backed up by HSP, impacting thousands of lives around, working with a vision to provide a helping hand to all those who need it. They enable a different outlook of life and help uplift people from the challenges they face, support them to move up and turn them into better citizens.

HSP's Activities	HSP's Achievements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seva Training Camps</li> <li>• Makkala Mantapa</li> <li>• Yoga Training Camps</li> <li>• Samsrkuta Speaking Classes</li> <li>• Seva Day</li> <li>• Matru Sangama</li> <li>• Gokulashtami</li> <li>• Parents'/Guardians' Meet</li> <li>• Meet of Newly Wed Couples</li> <li>• Rakshabandhana Celebrations</li> <li>• Deepa Pooja</li> <li>• Samarasya Dina (Day of Harmony)</li> <li>• Personality Development Camps</li> <li>• Varshikotsavas (Anniversaries)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trained more than 4200 Sevavrathis in 32 years</li> <li>• Conducting more than 1500 activities in over 150 locations in Karnataka</li> <li>• Many students of the <b>Nele</b> program are now pursuing undergraduate and graduate courses</li> <li>• Children from <b>Aruna Chetana</b> program are able to lead their live with self confidence and dignity</li> <li>• More than 1000 volunteers spend their time at various projects of <b>Youth for Seva</b> (YFS) during weekends</li> <li>• Over 40,000 have been benefitted through the organizations' initiatives</li> </ul>

## MYTREYI GURUKULAM

For nearly 16 years, *Mytreysi Gurukulam* has strived and succeeded in blending traditional values and modern education. The world changes every day and so do the cultures. Preserving cultural values is of utmost importance in order to see a balanced world. *Mytreysi Gurukulam* has been working on these objectives to develop the youth as a competent and equally responsible citizen.



The *Gurukulams* existed in ancient India and they played the role of a modern school. They had their own syllabus which focused mainly on emotional, mental, spiritual as well as physical development of an individual. They also laid ample focus on teaching skills, which can enable an individual to choose the right path and keep moving amid life's challenges. These ancient *Gurukulams* were run on public donations. The key differences between other

residential schools and the *Gurukulam* are that teachers and the students live together and perform all activities as a family. Such form of schooling is prominent in several cultures including *Hinduism*, *Buddhism*, *Jainism*, *Sikhism*, etc. The students paid no fees for education. However, they could offer *Gurudakshina*. *Gurudakshina* is a gesture of acknowledgement as respect and thanks to the guru, in material or kind. There are many instances in the past where Gurus ask their students to achieve a task, which the *Gurus* would consider as the *Gurudakshina*. *Gurukulams* existed Vedic age. The Vedic school of thought prescribed *Upanayana*, a compulsory *Sanskaror* activity for Hindus, to all individuals including women before the age of 12. Till the age of 25 they are prescribed to be in *Gurukulam* as students and remain unmarried.

### Insight into Mytreysi Gurukulam

A woman is the nucleus of Indian culture. She plays various roles such as mother, daughter, sister, wife, etc and in each role she plays, lays the welfare of the family, the society, and the nation. Mother is regarded as the first *Guru* of the child. She grooms the child so as to make him a responsible citizen. *Mytreysi Gurukulam* has revived the tradition of Vedic education for women that was lost in the passage of time.



The *Gurukulam* for women was started to induce ideal womanhood and make the girl child service oriented. It is obviously through her that the ideal society of the future is going to be shaped. The project is run under the aegis of a local Trust that is a part of *Hindu Seva Pratisthan, Karnataka*.

The Gurukulam is situated in a serene atmosphere in *Moorukaje* village, 4 km off *Vittla, Bantwal taluka, Dakshin Kannada* district, *Karnataka*. *Hindu* tradition does not approve commercialization of education, medicine and food; the three essentials in life. *Mytreysi Gurukulam*, being true to tradition, does not charge fees from the students. Education, including lodging and boarding, is provided free of cost in the *Gurukulam* that is run on public contributions. As the education was supported by a philanthropic society in the vicinity of the project, it was looked down by many. However the Gurukulam has now grown, gaining recognition and the society's appreciations. Currently, the admissions to the Gurukulam happen after an entrance test.

The *Gurus* sit on the platforms and the *shishyas* (disciples) sit on the floor, right beneath the huge 'cool' green trees. With no blackboards, chalk pieces or dusters, the knowledge is transferred through the oral communication medium, unlike the modern world where extensively use audio visual aids. The admission is open to girls above the age of 10 years. *Mytreysi Gurukulam* has an intake of 20 students per batch. Most of the girls come from rural areas. The first phase of the course runs for 6 years and after its successful completion, the students are admitted to the second level. The evolution of a personality is being experimented in this lab of human performances.

### Salient features of the Gurukulam

- Learning through the medium of the mother tongue-Kannada
- Working knowledge of conversation in *Sanskrit*
- A perfect blend of Traditional Knowledge and Modern Information. *Vedas, Yoga, Agriculture, Native Medicines* and Modern Science are core subjects of this multi-dimensional curriculum
- Revival of the tradition of women learning *Vedas* is also an important aspect
- Motherly care of in-charge matrons and learning with a spiritual outlook
- Extra facilities to study literature, music and other fine arts





Usually, we see people complain about lack of time to do even those things which he/she is bound to perform as a part of their duty or even those things which they desire/love to do. On the contrast, it is also said that the busiest person has all the time to do everything. A day at the *Gurukulam* is an example of time management backed with strong performance skills. The day is scheduled with numerous activities including classes, activities, discussion hours, cultural activities, time for personal work and hobbies, interaction time with teachers and fellows, reading hours, time with guests or visitors, a walk in the fields embracing nature, games as well time to rest - a perfect mix of emotional, personal, intellectual and spiritual activities

### The Obvious Choice



An interesting part of the Gurukulam is the 'Avalokana' (Self Evaluation System). The students write about what they have learnt so far, what are the tools they used, what are the grounds on which they have grown, what are the values they have inculcated, what are the subjects they have learnt, and what is the relationship of all these to life. Student here learn according to the capability, the skill they

possess and the pace at which they can study. *Katha Upanishad* says "He, who is possessed of supreme knowledge by concentration of mind, must have his senses under control, like spirited steeds controlled by a charioteer". We see from the Vedic age that the concept of education in India is that of a source of illumination and enlightenment. Someone has appropriately quoted, "Knowledge is the third eye of man, which gives him insight into all affairs and teaches him how to act."

It's interesting to know on the reason why these children chose this system of education which is completely different from the majority, in fact the only existing form of education. For these children, education is not about preparing to make a living out of learning, but about self development. They say that their inspiration to join *Gurukulam* is to preserve the tradition and the culture, which were built with centuries of efforts but are being forgotten in this fast changing world focused on economic growth. They believe that the relevance of ancient sciences are even more today as the ancient sciences focus entirely on building foundations for life, which are the key elements missing in our society today as today's world teaches us to aim for the stars even before we are born. So, we always intend to fly without setting up a strong foundation. It is only after reaching a certain height that we feel that something is missing down there. At this

moment and forever, we neither fly up as the skills needed to move up are not in the middle of the air, nor do we come down to build the foundation for the fear of losing what has been gained till then. Thus, life becomes an irony.

There is a need to strengthen the foundation. The world has slowly started recognizing the need for an all round development and we see changing facets in education. Children must be given more time to study themselves than to study about technology or the world around, which could be done a bit later with better understanding. On similar thoughts, the students of *Mytreyi Gurukulam* intend to master themselves in Sanskrit and Vedas and pass on the knowledge to as many people as possible. While the focus of the world is '*learn to earn*' and now, we also see, '*learn while you earn*', the focus of Gurukulam is to impart education for the betterment of people.

### Concluding Note

At a time when the world is running behind measuring everything in monetary terms, when the world is worried about the growth rate/GDP all time, when the world is worried about building good physical infrastructure rather than building the human infrastructure, when the nation is focused to achieve an economic powerhouse status rather than working for people without access even the most basic needs of life - food, clothing and shelter, it is amazing to learn about the *Gurukulam* system preserved and applied in everyday living at *Mytreyi Gurukulam*.



It gives a sense of satisfaction and achievement to see these excellent values and resources preserved for access to the future generations. It would be of great help to people if the number of admissions to the *Gurukulam* is increased, from the current number of 20 per batch. The objective of education must be to aid in self actualization and not in mere acquisition of objective knowledge. Education will do a real service to the nation when it focuses on training children to achieve this objective.



## Shrimati

Seva Vrathi	Shrimati
Location	Moorukaje, Mangalore
Years of Service	31 years
Area of Impact	Education

*Shrimati* feels happy and proud to be a part of the *Mytrei Gurukulam* and for successfully taking care of all its operations since inception. She's been able to do it without any high flying degree from a b-school. She has something new to learn each day. She believes that age is no bar for education and it is with her interest and dedication that she is a scholar in *Sanskrit* today. Her work is no less challenging and she has continued to learn from every situation to handle challenges in a better manner and continue to move on the path of progress. *Shrimati* feels blessed to be part of the *Gurukulam*, where they build the youth to become powerful citizens who exhibit more control on their lives than try to exercise control on others, a primary education motivation in the modern education system. She feels greatly contented to live an enhanced life at the *Gurukulam*.



## Savitri

Seva Vrathi	Savitri
Location	Moorukaje, Mangalore
Years of Service	30 years
Area of Impact	Education



*Savitri*, an arts graduate by qualification, is rendering her service as a *Seva Vrathi* for 3 decades now. *Savitri* handles all the managerial activities relating to *Mytrei Gurukulam* in addition to teaching English and Science. *Savitri* is of the opinion that the students in the modern world are almost trapped to read and learn what the world wants them to know and in the process, students focus on such subjects

that can result in economic benefits. After all, the business of education has made it unaffordable. *Gurukulam*, therefore, strives to keep its focus on building people to build a good society. The relevance of *Gurukulam* education is even higher in these times and it is essential for the world around to learn from such systems. *Savitri's* family too has supported her journey and feels proud of her selfless services to the society.

## Netra

Seva Vratbi	Netra
Location	Moorukaje, Mangalore
Years of Service	18 years
Area of Impact	Education

While *Netra's* family wanted her to work for the Government or a reputed company after she completed her education, they also considered her interest to continue working for the society. She started working at *Mytreysi Gurukulam* at a young age. Netra holds a Bachelors degree in Commerce and a Diploma in Banking. She teaches mathematics at the Gurukulam. *Netra* says that principles of *Vedic* mathematics are



practiced at Gurukulam because of multiple advantages. Mathematics derived from the *Veda* provides one line, mental and super-fast methods to solve a number problem, along with quick cross checking techniques. There are several general techniques as well as special pattern solution techniques in this system. The element of choice and flexibility at each stage keeps the mind lively and alert. It develops clarity of thought and intuition, thereby enabling a holistic development of the brain. The psychological problem associated with Mathematics is Anxiety and with Vedic Mathematics, anxiety gets ruled out and learning become fun. *Netra* feels happy to do what she loves to do, teach the children *Vedic* Mathematics, making the subject something that they love to learn. If not for people like *Netra*, we would be devoid of the numerous advantages baked in our ancient learning system, which, in a way, is being encroached by the English system of learning in current times.

## Rajeswari Bhat

Seva Vrathi	Rajeswari Bhat
Location	Moorukaje, Mangalore
Years of Service	13 years
Area of Impact	Education



*Rajeswari Bhat* has rendered her service as a *Seva Vrathi* for more than a decade. She is passionate of education and women empowerment and has faced challenges in her journey as a *Seva Vrathi*. Her personal journey gave an understanding of the importance of education for the girl child. She resigned from her Central government job and decided to dedicate her life for this cause. *Rajeswari* became a part of *Mytreyi Gurukulam*, where she started with teaching Science and further, Yoga. She believes that Yoga helps in stabilizing the mind and the body. This essentially helps the individuals to become active and remain focused throughout the day in all activities that they engage themselves in. It also helps in better communication and understanding. Yoga is more about the mind than about the body. It teaches a disciplined way of life and shows how simplicity excels in every form of work. Someone has rightly quoted, "*The most complicated task in this world is to design things that are simple*". May be, the world always taught us to aim for difficult and complex things, and in the process, we never learnt the simple ones. *Rajeswari* feels the energy of each day as each day has a new horizon of learning for her. Her continuous commitment has led to positive transformation of the lives of many people at the *Gurukulam*.

## Padma

Seva Vrathi	Padma
Location	Moorukaje, Mangalore
Years of Service	12 years
Area of Impact	Education

Due to the extreme hardships of life, *Padma* started working at a garments factory at a very young age. After some time, she got an opportunity to render her services at

*Mytreysi Gurukulam* and she grabbed it. *Padma* had no idea about a life changing experience that was in store for her when she joined the *Gurukulam*. Today, after 12 years of service, she feels that it was one of her best decisions to embark on this social journey. *Padma* teaches History and *Vedas* at the *Gurukulam*. She feels happy and content to be a part of a system working to create better individuals. She takes keen interest in studying the *Vedas* and history. She researches on how these can be applied in our life today and attempts to build solutions around them. She has built her communication skills, teaching capabilities and other inter personal skills over the years. She believes in all round development of the personality and inculcates these disciplines in children too. She is also very of the fact that what matters the more in life is how we lived it to make things better for others, than for ourselves.

## SHANKARAMMA: SEVAVRATHI AT MUDHOL

Seva Vrathi	Shankaramma
Location	Chinchkhundi, Mudhol
Population	~2000
Years of Service	10
Qualification	The population's average qualification is SSLC (10 <sup>th</sup> )
Primary Occupation	Farmers, Coolies
Lives Impacted	~500 Children, Hundreds of women and the community as a whole
Areas of Impact	Education, Women Empowerment, Community Development

### Introduction

*Shankaramma* is one among those very young and energetic women who are always on their toes to help people. In her decade long service with HSP, she has reached out to a large number of children and women of the community. She has dedicated herself to work for the betterment of the society. Though a 12<sup>th</sup> grade by qualification, she is no less than any management graduate who manages the show, all by herself.



One will be stunned to listen to the changes she has brought about in the community. This was possible because of the mutual trust, love and respect the people in the community have for one another. The entire village recognizes her by the name "*Mataji*", meaning "*a mother (teacher) who guides children on the right path*". She is an epitome to the fact that one can achieve anything if one is willing to work hard with passion and dedication. *Shankramma* came in with an intension to render service for 3 years in an educational project near *Bidar*, where she was responsible to teach *Kannada*, and now, even after 10 years of service *Shankaramma* feels it's a very short time and she is yet to do a lot. She wishes to continue as long as she can and try to reach out to more and more people in the society. One thing that keeps her moving is the success and growth that she witnesses in the people. A clear difference is evident in their behavior, thoughts and approach towards life. After meeting *Shakaramma*, they have started dreaming of greater possibilities in life and wish to be excelling in their field of choice rather staying ignorant about what happened around them and while away the precious time of life.



Around 250 students were benefitted by the holistic teaching programs held by *Shankaramma*. The students could see improvement in every aspect of their lives. There are several instances where children have learnt the art of managing arguments and examples of they have resolved issues within their own family, especially the disputes between parents, thereby creating a happy environment at home. This is even more incredible because, in villages, the elders generally do not tend to listen to their younger ones, especially children. In such a scenario, a child has learnt values and importance of the principles in life that he/she could create such a significant impact in the family. Several programs like *Kishore Bharati*, *Balagokulam*, etc, teach kids about the various principle and values, preparing them to become better people.

*Shankaramma* also served for 4 years at *Chinchakhandi* in *Mudhol Taluk*, where she played a pivotal role in improving education, removal of blind beliefs, discouraging communal riots and the most importantly, it was during the period that she introduced the Self Help Group (SHGs) concept for the women, cultivating the savings habit among them and building confidence in to their lives, especially to take key decisions.

*Shankaramma* is just 24 years old but the work and the respect she has garnered over these 10 years is just incredible. India is an extremely diverse nation with multiple cultures, castes, communities, etc. To bring together the people in the community, *Shankaramma* initiated the "*Beladingala Oota*" concept, which gets all the villagers together once in a while for a feast. Such initiatives have paved way for peace, harmony and oneness among the villagers. *Shankaramma's* bold steps and courage have helped in removing some of the blind beliefs as well as put an end to the communal riots in the village. *Shankramma* has keen interest in *Balagokulam*, *Kishore Bharati*, *Shishumandir* and *Matru Mandali*.

### Shishumandir

A Comprehensive Education Platform for children in the age group of 3-6 years. *Samskaras*, meaning human and cultural values, along with basic education is part of the curriculum. Through this initiative, *Shankaramma* has witnessed a large number of children grown day by day. Each child has his/her distinct abilities, thoughts and potentials and accordingly, *Shankaramma* prepares herself to teach the children. *Shishumandir* provides a platform for the kids to explore their potentials and capabilities - mentally, physically and spiritually through involvement in various activities. The 3 year old kids are raised to become disciplined and well mannered in all terms including



maintenance of health and hygiene. Cleanliness and Hygiene is one of the most neglected factors in villages. *Shankaramma's* says that the children at *Chinchakhandi* are lucky to begin schooling at the age of 3 years. About 5 years ago, children would start going to school from the age of 5. More than the academic part, it is the life values building part that plays a very significant role in kids' lives. At this tender age, they learn the foundations of life, which will live with them for a long time. They practically understand the meaning of honesty, truth, brotherhood, and other values. *Shishumandir* began with 5 kids in the first year and now, around 65 kids attend it. This was possible because of *Shankaramma* networking with the residents, making them understand the importance of early schooling.

### Balagokulam

*Balagokulam* is a similar kind of initiative (as *Shishumandir*) for the students of the age group of 8 to 15 years. *Shankaramma* conducts *Balagokulam* at the Government school as well for the community children. At the Government school, around 90 students form a part of this activity and at the community center, around 70 kids are the beneficiaries.



Discipline and Principles are stimulators of growth. Thus, *Shankaramma's* main focus to guide the children to do what they aspire to do and keep them motivated and focused towards their dreams. Often, stories of great personalities are narrated to them with translation and inferences that help in character building. At the beginning there was lot of resistance from the parents to send their children to *Balagokulam*. Now, the scenario has reversed. After seeing the results, parents take the steps to ensure that the children head to *Balagokulam* each day, evidencing improved lives. Most parents are of the opinion that *Shankaramma* did a great job by diverting the attention of the kids towards productive and self improvement activities rather than let them engage all their time before the television or on the grounds. *Balagokulam* has, in effect, helped children and parents strike a balance in life.

### Matru Mandali

Parent's involvement is of utmost importance for bringing up of the children. *Matru Mandali*, a unique initiative in itself, was started with the purpose of increasing the involvement of parents in children's activities. At first, it began with the purpose to involve the women and update them about the progress of their kids. As and when the participation of the women increased, *Shankaramma* took it as an opportunity to

develop this platform for the betterment of those women as well. Thus, with this motive a SHG was formed. Formation of a SHG was a herculean task as women in villages were not allowed to engage themselves into such activities. Over a period of time, due to the trust and confidence that *Shankaramma* gained, the elderly villagers supported the cause and encouraged this activity. Now, the group has grown to such an extent that each woman is capable of hosting the event every week, in which they discuss on various topics such as health and hygiene of a pregnant women, behavior with various stakeholders, responsibility towards the children and family, etc. They conduct quiz competitions, hold debates, sing patriotic songs, recite bhajans and also perform yoga sessions. These activities have led these women to build confidence, gain more knowledge and create their own identity in the family and the society. Financial benefit is another major benefit, which helps them feel confident in facing any financial adversities or expenses that pop up all of a sudden in the course of life.

### Fight against Blind Beliefs and Communal Riots

Even in this millennium, we witness people who still believe in myths and blind beliefs. This is still prominent in a large number of villages and over the time, they have become a part of their culture. *Shankaramma* faced serious consequences when she tried to educate people on such beliefs as they did not like anyone to interfere in their customs and practices. Yet, she made efforts to convey that everyone has their own ways of practicing certain things. Despite initial resistance, she went on to communicate to people and today, we see that the community is living in peace and harmony due to her bold steps. They have learnt to respect each other and value each other's practices. The "*Beladingalu Oota*", meaning "*Moonlight dinner*", has helped her in bringing people together on the same platform and improves understanding between them. They say, "*The best way to resolve an issue is to speak with the person rather than speak about the person*". On this grand day, everyone joins hands, cooks together and celebrates together the oneness and unity with a sign of promising to live in harmony with one another.



### An end in itself a new beginning to Shankaramma

*Shankaramma* is proud to be associated with HSP, which has given her all the support and took care of her as a family member. She wants to continue progressing on this meaningful journey of joy in life. Over the last 10 years, she has been extensively working for the welfare of the society and wishes to continue rendering her services in many years to come.

## KOUSALYA: SERVING VANAVASIS

Seva Vrathi	Kousalya
Location	Ambika Nagar, Dandeli
Years of Service	30
Impact Region	~30 villages
Areas of Impact	Livelihood, Education, Health

*Kousalya* is passionate about reaching out to the people who almost do not have access to the most basic facilities. Her heart cries out for the struggle that *Vanavasis* (people living in the uninhabited areas) face each day. She is determined to work for *Vanavasis* all her life and get them the right to live as a normal citizen. Her passion to make the *Vanavasis'* lives better has created a tremendous impact on their lives.



It been nearly 31 years of consistent effort towards this objective and she still feels there is ample room for making things better. She explicitly says that she derives immense happiness and satisfaction from her services as a *Seva Vrathi*.

*Vanavasis* refers to a community/group of people who reside in uninhabited lands, especially jungles, having no occupation for their livelihood. They reside at the interiors of jungle. Their lifestyle is completely different as they do not depend on any work for their food and shelter. They are just living their life. The amount of effort it takes to inform or motivate these people, regarding the purpose of life or the world away from their world, is enormous. When *Kousalya* took up this task, she had to prepare herself mentally and emotionally as there were enough hurdles on the way. Moreover, back in 1990s, she was all alone to drive this mission. Staying all by herself with unknown community who completely differ from the outside world was another big challenge and risk she ventured in to. Instead of thinking about the challenges, *Kousalya* focused on her work and dedicated herself to this goal of upbringing the *Vanavasis*. When she saw the work of *Shri Prakash Kamath* in this field, *Kousalya* was very inspired and it was then that she decided to dedicate her life to work for the welfare and development of *Vanavasis* to make them a part of the society. It became a purpose of her life.

Beginning her service at *Gundolli*, *Kousalya* stepped into the community by engaging the children by conducting *Shishumandir*. It was very difficult to even get 1 kid every day. *Kousalya* had to go to each of the houses, almost beg the parents and drag the children

to the class. Language was another barrier. Over period of time, however, *Kousalya* succeeded in imparting education to these children. Later, she was sent to *Shivanagar* village in *Dharwad* district of *Karnataka* to work for *Danagar Goli Vanavasi* community. The village had comparatively very less facilities in all terms - no drinking water, no electricity and no roads. The conditions were so bad that they didn't even have food to eat. Kids would come to the school with an empty stomach. *Kousalya* discussed this issue with other villagers and started meeting government officials to resolve this. In the meantime, *Kousalya* went to the city and requested few women to contribute some grains, cereals, etc. She distributed these proceeds among the needy families. She repeated such drives till she received some assistance from the local Government. There was another major issue that had formed dark clouds in the community. As the villages fell under the Forest Ministry, no house or plot was allotted to them and thereby, the officials disagreed to provide them any facilities. With *Kousalya's* constant efforts and commitment, the community got the privilege of owning a ration card and further, she even ensured to they get access to safe drinking water and electricity in the next one year.

### Education Impact



The literacy rate was less than 2% in the community. In order to educate people, the organization decides to start with a residential school for girls. They visited around 40 villages and it was difficult to find even one parent willing to send their child to the school. After a lot of pestering and cajoling parents, the school began with 3 girls who were of the age 8-9 years. Seeing the children's growth in

terms of their lifestyle and behavior, others too were motivated to send their children to the school. *Kousalya* began to empower these children with the *Seva Vrathi* training as well. This resulted into additional centers to conduct late evening school, *balwadis* and *Shishumandirs*. This training, further, enabled them to form a SHG, which made a remarkable progress in the times to come.

### Economic Development

An initiative of forming the SHGs in the community was an achievement in itself. People who were not even motivated to work for their living, who lived with most minimal facilities, women who were not supposed to speak to anyone except people at home, children who wandered around like nomads, men clueless about life, began to explore a

brand new journey of life. SHG was a life changing move for the *Vanavasis*. Over a period of time, about 20-25 families became a part of the SHG and the cash flow improved. Women saw an improvement in their communication, healthiness as well as awareness levels. This initiative has now made its mark in 8 different districts. The system started functioning in the urban areas and has seen an impressive penetration in rural areas as well as the *Vanavasi* communities.

### Sustainability Lightens

Any system needs to be self sustainable in order to witness continuous growth. The scenario of sustainability in the community was very much evident. The *Vanavasis* got enough understanding of the world around and the courage to reach out. There is marked improvement in the literacy rates, healthiness and several other social perspectives. HSP took the first step to approach these communities that existed in isolation. From that day till now, things have evolved rapidly and change makers like *Kousalya* and several other *Seva Vrathi* have made this evolution possible by working together, holding hands of the people, leading them in all their endeavors, enabling them meet their needs and helping them carve an identity for themselves in the society.



### A Final Note

Sacrificing an entire lifetime in service of an unknown community requires a lot of determination, energy and complete commitment. *Seva Vrathis* like *Kousalya* are examples of supreme selfless sacrifices. During these years, *Kousalya's* family and friends coerced her to come out of this job. However, she remained dedicated to serve the community all her life. On a couple of occasions, some bad elements threatened *Kousalya* to stop helping the *Vanavasis* but she had a firm belief in her divine work and she kept moving. People like *Kousalya* are the unsung heroes/heroines who get unnoticed even after impacting thousands of life around. They are the real heroes and a source of inspiration because everyone talks about the solution but a very few get on the ground to dirty their hands. *Kousalya* has truly dedicated life in serving the society and makes everyone proud.



## CHAYA PRABHU: AMAYA CREATIONS

Seva Vrathi	Chaya Prabhu
Location	Bangalore
Years of Service	28
Area of Impact	Livelihood, Women Empowerment

*Chaya Prabhu*, a commerce graduate by qualification, always had the heat of entrepreneurship running through her. She always kept scouting for opportunities to learn new things and exploring different areas in which she can start up a business enterprise. She is a firm believer in hard work and dedication, which are the most important ingredients of success according to her. It's the urge in your belly that makes you run. It's the passion running in you that makes you work beyond your assumptions and beliefs.

Over the last 18 years, her entrepreneurial journey has been an enriching experience. One of the active members in the organization, *Chaya* has taken up several consulting projects, training activities and has been source of guidance in several women associations.



*Chaya's* father was associated with HSP and when *Chaya* completed her graduation, he introduced *Chaya* to the opportunities that she could explore as a part of the HSP, amid the limited opportunities that the world offered women in those days. *Chaya* decided to join HSP as a *Seva Vrathi* in 1985. Her first assignment was at *Anathasisu*, an orphanage for the children below 12 years of age. She took up the administrative activities as well as other activities relating to welfare of children.

After having worked for a year, *Chaya* was moved to *Udupi* in an altogether different role, which required her to lead people and manage events. The leadership position came on to her life at a very young age and it was very tough for her to manage it. It took all her energies and in about 6 months, she was competent to handle everything like a professional would.

After a couple of years, *Chaya* was placed at '*Seva in Action*', an organization which works to empower the differently able children. She was required to work on this project from scratch. All that she was told was the objectives of the project. This was a new experience



for her and over a period of 8 years, she built a strong organization that has, till now, provided services to nearly 10,000 children with special needs and has trained more than 2,000 teachers in the field of inclusive education through NGOs and government. *Seva in Action* was a great experience in her life through which she built all the skills to be an entrepreneur.

She decided to start working on her dream and started '*Amaya Creations*'. The company produces several products including clothing, everyday utilities and stationery. It employs nearly 20 employees and also provides seasonal employment to more than a hundred people every year. The company also produces a large array of its products using left over or disposed material, hence enabling a better environment through recycling.

*Chaya* believes that when we empower women, we empower the family and when we empower the family, we empower the society and further, the nation. A woman might not earn but contributes significantly to the earning potentials of the family. *Chaya* has helped many women believe in themselves, igniting hope for a better life.



## VARADA HEGDE: SEVA-IN-ACTION

Seva Vrathi	Varada Hegde
Location	Bangalore
Years of Service	27
Impact Region	~6 villages
Area of Impact	Livelihood, Women Empowerment

*Varada Hegde* had no clue about the kind of job she would be taking up after she got selected at the interview. After all, her focus was to find a means to livelihood. She was placed at *Chintamani* near *Kolar* at a school that was being run for the children with special needs. She was confused and at the same time afraid, wondering how to cope up with the job environment that was new. She started working on her job objectives and interacting with people around. The

more she involved herself with children, the more she loved her job. *Varada* was seeing a new world and understanding people's lives. There was hope. There was joy.



Today, after nearly 27 years of working with thousands of children, especially children with special needs, *Varada* feels that it was the best move of her life. She is one among those who enjoy great satisfaction creating value for the society. Her academic certificates speak about her till PUC (12<sup>th</sup>) while her work was so impressive that she moved on to become a Deputy Director for the Program at *Seva in Action*. She consistently acquired skills, creating impact on children she worked with. She has advanced her education and today, she holds a "Diploma in CBRIED" (*Community Based Rehabilitation and Integrated Education for Disabled*). She went for further studies about the children because she felt the need to do more not only providing them with education tools but also work on providing them livelihood.

*Varada* joined HSP in the year 1985 when there were only 3 kids at the school. Her job involved of conducting surveys in various communities, including those at slum, which was quite challenging. Language was a barrier and parents refused enrolling their disabled children at school. Most parents were daily wage earners and *Varada* had to go in search of them to seek their permission to enroll their child at school. After 4 months of rigorous efforts, she was able to get 30 children at school.



The school focused on 3 different kinds of rehabilitations – Early Intervention, Educational Intervention and Medical/Health Support Intervention. These initiatives were taken to primarily support children below 3 years of age. *Varada* would visit the homes of these kids to train the parents on general hygiene and ways to take care of the child. This was very essential because the parents'

focus on these kids was minimal. This regular intervention helped children get parents' love and attention. This initiative was spread over to 5-6 other villages. While kids world over were getting ready to take on all challenges in life, there was a different set of kids that required a lot of attention and support to gain ordinary needs of life. After several discussions with the Government and seeking numerous permissions, these children were let to attend initial years of schooling in any school. Further, special schools were set up to train these children on such skills that focused on employability. *Seva in Action* began training these children on various skills based on their potential. Today, some products made by these kids are even exported. From being seen as a burden on the family, *Varada's* efforts have led to create such an ecosystem that these kids earn, not only some money for their livelihood, but also foreign exchange for the nation. Creating an opportunity and laying a foundation to launch careers/lives of people has been the most fulfilling part of her journey.

After serving for more than 27 years, *Varada* feels that *Seva in Action* makes her life complete. The continuous learning that her work has offered and the consistent efforts that she has put in have brought happiness and success for hundreds of children in the community. She strongly believes that HSP has had a profound impact on her life. It is a tough

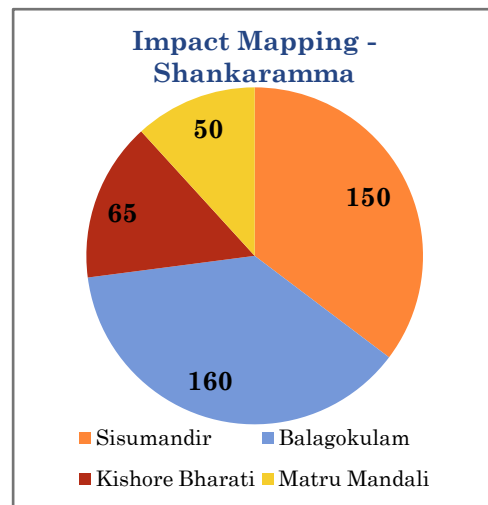


task to work in the social sector's grass roots as there are a lot of people with a lot of thoughts, ideas and opinions on each of the topics. Every step is under watch and thus, the decisions have to be taken with a high precision as they directly relate to people. *Varada* says that she feels very happy to see a smile on the parents' face when their children start moving up in life. She observes that, often, the tiniest things give them the greatest happiness. *Varada* has worked towards developing an inclusive society, which values the abilities and potentials of specially challenged persons and considers them as contributing members of the community.

## CONCLUSION

We live in a world that is changing colors at a super fast pace. The prime focus of the modern world is economic growth. While one may prove that it is not wrong to have such an objective, we are missing the larger picture due to this focus. Though economic activities were pushed into human life with an objective of bridging the gap between the rich and the poor, the world has only seen the divide increase, especially in case of developing nations like India. A great number of NGOs have mushroomed in the recent past to work on such grounds on which the economy has failed. While education is the most stressed seed in the modern world, the cost of sowing it has been skyrocketing. In simpler terms, today, the significance of social organizations is more than ever.

Volunteering, without monetary reward in this age, is an enormously tough task that requires great volumes of commitment. *Seva Vrathis* have not just decided to volunteer but to take up volunteerism as their goal in life. The study evidences the fact that they have created immense impact in lives of people in their community. The adjoining graph shows the kind of impact a single *Seva Vrathi* can have in a community/village. *Shankaramma* has been able to impact nearly 425 people through various welfare initiatives in a village with a population of



~2000 people, i.e., more than 20% of the population. While women account for 20% of the beneficiaries and children (aged 3-15 years) account for another 35%, it is interesting to observe that men account for as much as 40%. This number goes to prove a strong involvement of all stakeholders of the society, and as we have already noted, when every stakeholder is a part of the development process, we witness definite and sustainable growth. **Empowering women is perhaps the best way to empower a nation.**

The *Hindu Seva Pratishthana* has played a serious role in upbringing people who have been left out. In true senses, *Seva Vrathi* is neither a responsibility nor an obligation, but a sense of commitment to the society. *Albert Einstein* once said, "Not everything that counts can be counted. And not everything that can be counted, counts". *Seva Vrathis* have been doing an immense job through sheer hard work, dedication and passion for community services. We must continue to encourage these systems of excellence in order to make the world a more meaningful place as well as preserve our ancient culture, tradition and values that have the power to impact lives of the future generations.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND REFERENCES

This project to study and evaluate the Social Impact created by *Seva Vrathis* was taken up as a part of the Pro-Bono Consultancy project for IDEX Fellowship. When I volunteered with Youth for Seva, I had learnt about the *Seva Vrathis* and their contributions to the society. On a later date, when I was asked to work on a research project of my choice, I decided to take up this project.

Over the last 3-4 months, I have been meeting a large number of people and organizations to work on this project. In addition, I have also traveled to meet all the *Seva Vrathis* in person (those mentioned in this report). It has not only been a great learning experience but also a great feeling to interact with so many people. Moreover, the response of the *Seva Vrathis* to this project has been overwhelming.

There are a large number of people who I ought to thank for making this project happen right from the people who trusted me with this opportunity, to the people who backed me up at all times, to the people who took keen interest in sharing their stories with me, to the people who ensured that my travel and stay are comfortable. I thank everyone who has helped, either directly or indirectly, in making this happen.

I must acknowledge that it has been one of the best learning experiences of my life. The energy and commitment that I saw in the volunteers who are a part of the HSP network was a great attraction to me. The kind of love and respect they shared among themselves and the ease with which they were able to interact, without anything to hide or inhibitions, was an amazing sight for me. They say, *"Think twice before you speak"*, but through my journey with these people with super clean hearts, I realized, *"When your thoughts are clean and wishes are for common welfare, you can just speak, without even a first thought"*. I would like to once again thank everyone who provided me with the privilege of working on this project and I firmly believe that I have been extremely benefited through this exercise in numerous ways.

### Web pages for Reference and Further Information

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<http://youthforseva.org>

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*Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high  
Where knowledge is free  
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments  
By narrow domestic walls  
Where words come out from the depth of truth  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection  
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way  
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit  
Where the mind is led forward by thee  
Into ever-widening thought and action  
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.*

***Ravindranath Tagore***