

## **Sivanjali: Spiritually Inspired Social Entrepreneurship**

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### **I. Introduction**

This case traces the history and evolution of Sivanjali, a social entrepreneurship programme pioneered by Swami ShantanandSaraswathi who inspired his devotees to come together ‘as volunteers at Shivanjali, in various service oriented projects to transform themselves by selfless service through arts and charities’. Through their various economically viable projects Sivanjali has transformed lives of many underprivileged of the society.

Present in India (Chennai and Coimbatore), Singapore, Malaysia and Australia, Sivanjali’s vision ‘is to be an organization of loving souls who are channels of love and compassion, through whom many will be nourished in body, mind and spirit.’ The guiding principle is ‘reaching God through service, charity and love.’ Sivanjali’s services are as diverse as Temple of Service, Temple of Fine Arts, Annalakshmi Restaurants, Shiva Sakthi Production Unit, Siva Shantha Mother & Child Health Centre, Shivanjali Sweets & Spices, Shivanjali Printing Works and Lavanya Craft Shop.

This case documents the philosophy, vision and mission of Sivanjali, in particular Siva Shantha Mother & Child Health Centre – its maiden project - and delves into the secret of success of a spiritual and socially sustainable approach to service in these times of market based capitalism and commercialisation. The aim is to evolve a social entrepreneurship model that would be suitable to a collective and spiritually inclined culture like India.

### **II. Inception of SSMCHC**

Siva Shantha Mother and Child Health Centre (SSMCHC) is a not for profit medical centre run by a small group of people devoted to spiritual growth, specially the philosophy and teachings of Swami ShantanandSaraswathi, who said that human life is a journey towards perfection and it can be achieved by selfless service to fellow human beings. The core belief of SSMCHC is that service is an opportunity to worship the divine. In summary their operating principle is, Serve ... Love ....Give.

The mission of SSMCHC is

- To start and run clinics, in rural areas
- To provide free / subsidized health care for the poor and needy
- To give special emphasis to the care of women and children
- To save children from mortality and morbidity

SSMCHC’s motto is

- To touch people’s life through medical service
- No one should be denied medical help because of poverty or un affordability

SSMCHC follows a unique approach that is characterised by being

- Whol(y)istic
- Indiscriminate
- Genuinely compassionate
- Comprehensive
- Considering physical, psychological, social and environmental background
- Get to the root of the disease

Swami ShantanandSaraswathi believed that service to mankind is service to God and he brought his devotees together under various service oriented projects right from performing arts to medical charities. Health care service was the major focus and he said that love and care should be given to every human being in physical pain, ailment and suffering irrespective of the monetary status.

As a means of extending such service to the poor who cannot afford expensive medical care, Sivanjali Trust started a small one room evening clinic, in 1986, in Coimbatore. It has now grown into a four storied multi-functional holistic medical centre. In the 3 decades of its existence, SSMCHC has grown more than

threefold. Initially they were catering to about 15 patients a month, which has now grown to more than 40. There were about 5 child births per month then. Currently on average one child is born every day in the centre. Annual expenditure then was about Rs.60 lakhs, which is now over Rs.1.5 crores. SSMCHC caters to patients from the rural, urban and suburban areas of Coimbatore surrounding its location, namely Vadavalli, P N Pudur, Seeranaickenpalayam, Linganur, Thadagam Road, Thondamuthur, Annur, Thudiyalur, and Ramanathapuram.

### **III. Services and structure**

SSMCHC provides a holistic comprehensive mother-child care under its 3 months to 3 years programme. The services offered are as follows:

- Maternal Care Services
  - Antenatal, perinatal and post natal care
  - Cancer Screening
  - Reproductive care
  - Gynaecological care
- Special Services
  - Embryo therapy
  - Pregnancy Yoga
- Child Care Services
  - Essential newborn care
  - Ensuring proper nutrition and hygiene
  - Immunization
  - Monitoring of growth and development
  - Treatment of Childhood illness
- Holistic Healthcare
  - Yoga and Naturopathy
  - Ayurveda
  - Acupuncture and touch therapy
  - Counselling and psycho therapy
- Comprehensive Health Check up
  - To ensure early detection of illness

The centre is manned by a team of 7 doctors, 6 administrative staff, 9 nursing staff, 3 pharmacy technical staff, 3 lab technicians, 2 ambulance drivers, 9 helpers and 3 security staff.

### **IV. Operational Dimension**

Operational strategy in SMCHC to decide on the services to provide is organically emerging and evolving and is not pre-determined. Examples are the way child day care centre or the other support services emerged based on the emerging needs of the stakeholders, who are primarily women who seek support and are in need, from the socially disadvantaged sections of the society.

In keeping with the foundational philosophy, SSMCHC does not budget its finances. They appeal to people round the year and some donations come in. It is a perpetual struggle. But it has not deterred their cause or spirit. Nor has it led them to charge the economically unaffordable patients. The deserving ones receive free service even today. The only planning that is done is to get the facilities ready for the growing number of patients.

Recruitment and staffing is carried out purely by word of mouth.

Operationally, SSMCHC is the pivotal point of all the activities of Shivanjali. Even the business projects of Shivanjali are not run for profit. Whatever small profit they make is directed towards SSMCHC.

Future operational plans include expansion of the holistic wing and to make facilities for in-patients in the Ayurveda department. Considering the growing demand from the stakeholders, plans are afoot to make semi private rooms for patients in the existing wards.

## V. Support Systems

Running a free service centre like SSMCHC needs resources. Till date its finances are provided by volunteer donors. But it has also put in place a support system which generates a modest income to run SSMCHC, but more importantly provides livelihood to several women in and around the locality. The formation of these support enterprises itself make an interesting story.

SSMCHC right from its inception could accommodate free consultation and distribution of free medicines. But in the process, SSMCHC were to learn more about the poorer section.

An oft repeated advice to patients by doctors was 'Drink a little more milk and eat more fruits and vegetables'. What is natural and normal advice in clinics for the upper and middle income groups is almost a joke when repeated to patients from the poorer strata of society! The advice is received with a look of incomprehension and sad resignation. For many families meals do not always include fruits and vegetables daily. Milk is a rare treat. Malnutrition was an underlying cause of most illnesses in the clinic-especially among women and children. Added to this, was the depression of poverty and the burden of debts – all of which contributes to recurrent ill health in this section of society.

It did not take long for doctors working in the clinic to realize that unless a more comprehensive approach is taken in the treatment of patients most health problems would recur and all attempts to prevent illness would be futile. It is common knowledge to health service planners that improvements in the socio economic status would bring about more health benefits than mere medical treatment. Shivanjali Creative Arts & Crafts was born out of this need to help patients help themselves.

Several schemes provide regular employment. Women in particular, are encouraged to learn a skill. Patients who are too ill or old to work are encouraged to send any other female member who could then become a source of income for the family. Women being a vulnerable group in society are given priority. Young girls are encouraged to seek economic independence prior to marriage-thus giving them a safety net should problems arise later.

Three income generating schemes are currently operational.

- Tailoring and hand embroidery and doll making - are relatively easy skills to learn and for which there are always steady employment opportunities.
- Pickle and snack making- benefits older women who already possess culinary skills and find the process of acquiring new skills tedious.
- The Shivanjali café - women skillfully run a small cafeteria which serves multi cuisine vegetarian food, snacks, chaats as well as Malaysian food as a speciality. They are quick to learn the innovative new dishes and the result is a good feast for the guests.

The hand embroidery cum tailoring unit was started in 1996 and the first candidate was the daughter of a patient with chronic pulmonary tuberculosis that had become resistant to most drugs as she had been so irregularly treated and she was too ill to work.

From this humble beginning the unit now has trained over 600 women and employed 250 of them. Once the training period of 2 months is over workers are paid according to the pieces produced. Workers are encouraged to work from their homes, as space is a major constraint. Many who have been trained have left to work on their own-an option given to all trainees from the beginning. The unit has grown only by word of mouth and no attempt is made to actively recruit workers and no attempt is made to hold workers by written contracts etc. All workers are only encouraged to use the skill they have acquired to earn well – whether within the unit or outside it.

Shivanjali Sweets and Spices, the pickle and snack making unit started operations with the production of snacks and pickles in March 2003 for underprivileged women who had expertise in culinary skills. The unit launched itself with 5 women and has now grown into a 15 member team. Under the Shivanjali Creative Arts & Crafts the workers are provided the following

- Training and subsequent employment in hand embroidery, tailoring, manufacturing of soft toys, cloth bags
- Manufacturing of herbal products, pickles, sweets, savouries and snacks
- Educational aid to children of workers
- Financial aid during marriages and other major events
- Health care

Items manufactured by the workers include:

- Ethnic garments – with special emphasis on ethnic kids wear
- Bags, pouches
- Table linen
- Stuffed animal mobiles and toys
- Decorative wall hangings, letter holders and other miscellaneous items.

These products are marketed both locally as well as in the Sivanjalicenters abroad. Items are designed and manufactured keeping in mind the current market trends to facilitate sales. The income from sales are channelled towards the needs of the unit members and also to procure raw materials.

### **Spiritual dimension**

Interviewing the chief administrative officer of SSMCHC revealed the spiritual dimension of the whole enterprise. According to her, spirituality is compassion. To understand the situation and awareness of the other person and be compassionate, without any prejudice. Her guiding spiritual principle is, 'Do everyday duty as an offering to the Divine. That is spiritualize whatever you do with no feeling of doer-ship.' She quotes the following verse as her guiding value.

*Kaayena Vacha Manasendriyairva Bhudyathmanava Prakruth Swabhawath  
Karomiyathyath sakalam parasmai Narayanayethi Samarpayami*

Whatever I do with the Body, Speech, Mind or the Sense Organs, either by discrimination of the Intellect, or by the deeper feelings of the Heart, or by the existing tendencies of the Mind, I do them all without Ownership and I surrender them to the Supreme Divine.

### **Spiritual Leadership**

'Spirituality may be an inspiration in the beginning. But it has to become a way of life to be able to lead a team of mixed professionals without compromising on the quality of service and the regulative systems.' Some examples of how spirituality is infused in the leadership of the centre are presented here in the words of the chief administrative officer.

#### **Example 1**

*Though I am well known in Sivanjali and have been actively participating in the activities, I took office only 4 years back. Only then the clinic turned into a nursing home and everything had to be brought under working systems. In the beginning I was not accepted at all. People were satisfied with the chaos in the office and refused to think beyond. Imposing rules will never work. Nobody was ready to take orders. It was patience that was required. I took time to make people understand that systems will make things easy. I had to physically move furniture, carry stuff, clean up, dust and wash, while the staff watched. It was not easy. But after 4 years, today people understand deep down that I mean well. They know I am helping them grow. They are able to understand that administration requires firm rules. They feel free to approach me with their problems – official or family. All this happened only because they have seen me speak the truth, be the same always and do what I say. They have seen the spiritual strength. We need only love and compassion to make things work.*

#### **Example 2**

*Our Guru's brainchild, "Three months to three years" is the prime theme in our centre. When I came across a person who conducts a programme for expectant mothers, I immediately realised that this will bring about a great change. It so happened that her program exactly coincides with what our Swamiji has said about holistic health. This is a beautiful complement to the services that we already have at the centre.*

*It is only divine grace that has made this happen. When you allow spirituality to flow, things fall in line automatically.*

*The mothers who come to the centre not only go out with a bundle of joy, but a heart full of happiness and fulfilment.*

#### **Example 3**

*Our ambulance driver, a young boy had some family problems and took leave saying that his grandmother died. We found out that it was not true. When confronted he felt very bad and ashamed. I could understand his*

*feelings and exposing him in front of others will be insulting. So I called him and spoke to him in private and made him understand that problems do exist in every family and there is no need to feel ashamed about it and guided him on how to bring an amiable solution to the problem. This boy, who married against the wish of his parents and who had problems handling his wife is now settled well. We have given a good job to his wife and his child is taken care of in our day care centre. He attends the prayers with his wife and child and is always ears to listen to good things.*

#### **Example 4**

*Through our prime project “3 months to 3 years”, we have been doing everything that we can for the pregnant mother until delivery and the immunization and physical wellbeing of the child up to three years. Our approach is always comprehensive and we believe that development means, physical, psychological, social and spiritual wellbeing. This was bugging my mind for a long time. The children born here were touching 3 years already. Swamiji has asked us to do the most during this period. Suddenly one day the day care centre was started! The women who work at Shivanjali had no place to leave their children when they come to work. So we have started a day care centre in a small way for the children of our employees. It is a place where the spiritual seeds are sown in the young minds. It is not a place to compete with other play schools. One day we will grow and take care of all the children born here and give the best during the formative years for them to bloom into beautiful human beings. Following are answers to some questions as answered by the chief administrative officer.*

- How does spirituality influence your daily work?

Once you give yourself up to spirituality, it is divinity that runs your daily work. Challenges will come. But the spirituality alone is enough to take care of any problem.

In this position, I have to discuss with the patient about the bill payment. I try to make the patient comfortable enough to be truthful about their position. There are times when we come across a family in a temporarily bad financial situation. Some people do deceive us. But we do not analyse. It is their problem. Not ours. We try our maximum best to help all those who come to us.

- How do you “grow” yourself spiritually – what are your current spiritual practices? What is the role of your work in this regard?

My work is worship. All my life I have grown in a spiritual background. I have learnt a lot of mantras and chanting and hymns. My Guru has taken care of my growth and I cannot assess myself on the spiritual growth. I am just obeying my Guru. Everything I do is a spiritual offering. Constant mantra on mind is the only spiritual practice now. All the rituals and practices have dropped off. My work demands meeting so many people and I extend my compassion to all whom I meet. People feel comfortable with me.

- How have you evolved spiritually to where you are today and how does it reflect in SSMCHC, in the form of rituals, practices, people’s attitude and behaviour, traditions etc.?

I don’t know about my evolution. I feel the inner “Anandam” (Bliss) within me and I feel the “Sakshi” (witness) within me. It has been a long journey. I chanted mantras without knowing the meaning, just for the love of it. I listened to discourses, read books that were not very easy to understand in the beginning. Once the quest started I became vigorous in reading, chanting and listening. I searched and searched. My Guru is an abundant source. His talks answered all my questions. I fasted, performed elaborate poojas, didjapa and meditation for years.

Today my work is my Yagna. At SSMCHC, when people come to me, I have the answers to their questions. I can pacify them with their own conviction. There are people belonging to other religion, who have questions on Hinduism and I am able to give them a satisfying answer. I am able to see all equally. People understand the power of prayer. They are willing to follow spiritual guidance and change their lifestyle. There is a huge attitude difference that is taking place here. We reach by example. We pray every day in Swami Sivananda’s words –

*Grant us an understanding heart, equal vision, balanced mind, faith, devotion and wisdom. Grant us inner spiritual strength to resist temptations and to control the mind  
Free us from egoism, lust, greed, anger, hatred and jealousy  
Fill our hearts with divine virtues*

- How does the atmosphere at SSMCHC influence its stakeholders, like doctors, employees, patients etc.?

The doctors and other employees have come into SSMCHC on employment. It takes quite some time for them to understand the real spirit of the place.

Today all of them have understood the basic principles and are trying to grasp as much as they can. All of them will truly agree that this place have reformed them. All of them have one declaration to make – “We will work here until our last breath”.

The patients are so thankful. It is only through word of mouth that the number of patients have increased 4 times now. During an external audit interview, the patients who have delivered here said that SSMCHC is like mother’s place for them. Never in their life they have been so comfortable.

- How is SSMCHC different from other enterprises?

Actually there is no enterprise here. SSMCHC is an avenue given to us to refine ourselves. It is an opportunity for us to complete our journey in a fulfilling way.

Here the patient is God. Our motto is “ManavaSevaheiMadhavaSeva” meaning service to humanity is service to God. The treatment is the same to all the patients. We see the patient as a whole human being taking into account the background they come from. We do not see them as a set of organs to be treated. We believe in holistic treatment and do not solely depend on medicines.

In the end, we feel that we did not do anything. We are only instruments in the hand s of a higher power that decides everything. This is how we differ from other enterprise.

There are several ways in which SSMCHC differs from the regular medical services.

- Combining Socio economic aid with medical aid to improve health status
- Complementing ancient methods of treatment effectively with the modern
- Cost effective methods of promoting health and preventing disease
- Reducing emphasis on expensive curative care.

## **V. Conclusion**

To conclude, SSMCHC is a live example of conscious reciprocity where the giver feels he/she is the real benefactor in the process of service, as the receiver is giving an opportunity to serve. A social enterprise emerges from the joy of serving and not from a one-up position of charity or philanthropy. The leadership, organisation, processes and daily conduct of SSMCHC is an exemplary case of spiritually inspired social entrepreneurship. In a country like India where there are still millions below poverty line, such social experiments are needed to provide basic livelihood for the under privileged closer to their doorsteps based on their emerging needs and not on any commercial or capitalistic interests.

The future challenge for SSMCHC would be to find ways to scale up their operations to reach out and serve many more communities that are in need of such altruistic projects.

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