

## **Our Message: 2018-19**

A transitioning year at Sri Ramakrishna Sevashram (SRKS). Under the able guidance of our beloved founder Sri Sudhanshu Biswas the Ashram has been rendering service for the last 46 years to individuals and the community. However, on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018 our founder departed from this world. Last rituals and a condolence meeting of this patriotic centenarian son of India was held in the Ashram – attended by hundreds. This Ashram is a result of our founder's austerities – thus we decided to put a fibre statue of him. In the coming days, we have plans to construct a small memorial of him, to instil patriotism and higher values among the future generation.

As wished by our founder and due to the help by his family members along with the local community – the 'nitya puja' (daily worship) of Bhagwan Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Maa Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda is going well in the Ashram. All our service activities are with the philosophy of "To serve man is to serve God." The birthdays' of the Holy Trio was celebrated with special puja, visits of rural devotees, readings from the holy scriptures and *bhajans* being sung in the evening.

As you might know, we have three streams of primary service. The boys home provides education, shelter and food to on an average 30 to 35 kids. These kids are either orphan or destitute. Then the old age home houses around 10 senior citizens. Regular medical check-up of the kids and senior citizens were conducted throughout the year. Kids are encouraged to pursue at least one sports. Games are a special focus area in SRKS. We are delighted to see a couple of kids from the Ashram excelling academically in their class. The Ashram kids were runners up in the football tournament held by Rescue & Relief Foundation in the Presidency college in Kolkata. The kids also attained to painting classes.

To empower rural youths, we conduct a Vocational training program. Every Sunday classes are held on mobile repairing, electrical works, health assistance and sewing. Higher classes students and the Youths from the nearby villages are the participants of vocational classes. They attend these classes, get trained, write the examination and gets certified. Most of the students have either got decent jobs or have started their own small business. It is wonderful to see the enrolment of women students on the rise. This program is having a quick impact by generating additional income to needy families.

In order to serve the local community – with the help of our MP Shri Abhishek Banerjee, Diamond Harbour and Shri Dilip Mondal, MLA, Bishnupur -1, the Ashram received an 800 feet deep submersible pump. Two taps have been constructed on the boundary wall facing the village roads. Almost two hundred villagers are getting clean drinking and cooking water daily. By the grace of Sri Ramakrishna this uninterrupted water service is being carried out throughout the year, a big boon to the beneficiaries, especially in the summer months.

In November 2018, at the Ashram – a free health camp was organised in association with Dr. Devi Shetty's Narayana Health (R.N. Tagore Hospital, Kolkata). The camp provided blood test reports, cancer screening and a check-up by a doctor – to 118 needy people. We feel satisfied to see the majority of them being women. We thank Narayana Health team for the tireless seva throughout the day.

The Ashram believes in upgrading skills and so had sponsored this year a training program for our sewing teacher. It was held in Madhya Pradesh for advanced sewing by a Swiss national instructor. In the operations front, Digitalisation of accounts was kicked off and going smoothly. Such initiatives are helping us to run the work smoothly and efficiently. In the coming days, we plan to digitalise all other records like food, student, Ashram assets, alumni, visitors, etc. Sri Ramakrishna Sevashram remains committed to good governance.

Also, the Ashram continues to have a strong focus on community serving. 40 blankets were distributed among the needy villagers from the neighbouring areas of the Ashram. The blankets were sponsored by 'Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Bhav Prachar Samity'. Swami Animeshananda ji Maharaj, from Belur Math - welfare department had kindly agreed to distribute the blankets and address the gathering. Tea prasad was served to all. Additionally, owing to the help of long-time donors, blankets were distributed to Ashram kids, old age home inmates, teachers, cooks, staffs, etc. – amounting to another 50 beneficiaries. We are glad to see the blankets bringing a 'warm' smile to the end beneficiaries.

In our Ashram, there are 9 employees including teachers, cook, farmer and security guard. Regular festivals such as Durga Puja, Ratha Yatra, Saraswati Puja, Diwali & Holi were celebrated. Special days like the Independence Day, Republic day, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's birthday and Gandhi Jayanti were held with patriotic spirits in the Ashram premises.

Sri Ramakrishna Sevashram is part of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Bhav Prachar Parishad. The South 24 Paraganas bi-annual meet of the Bhav Prachar Parishad this year was held at our Ashram premises on December 2<sup>nd</sup>. The meet was graced by several monks from the Ramakrishna Math order. Monks had come from Belur Math, Nimpith, Narendrapur, Sarisha, Mansadweep, etc. Delegates from all the Ashrams & institutions in South 24 Paraganas took part in the daylong event. Future work, coordination and newer seva activities were discussed. Nearly 200 devotees took prasad.

The two biggest challenges that loom large on the Ashram are the last 400 meters road to the Ashram is still not a pucca road and we are devoid with the state Government's grant for last 24 months. The muddy road has been sanctioned to be constructed but the work is getting delayed due to reasons unknown. It is extremely difficult financially to run the boy's home without the grant. In the last two years, many homes and orphanages have sadly shut their services because of the delay in the grant. However, by the grace of Sri Ramakrishna and philanthropic support from our well-wishers we were able to raise the headcount of the boys this year. We remain hopeful that the processes will fall in place and state Government officials will address the challenges.

To address the grant delay challenge internally, in the middle of the financial year we strongly focused on farming. Owing to the hard work of our staffs ably supported by the Executive committee and donors we have scaled up our agricultural initiatives. We grew plenty of spinach, two varieties of radish (white & pink), cabbage, cauliflower, beetroot, beans, onion, gourd, banana and brinjal. The kitchen bought very few vegetables from outside, resulting in cost saving. Some varieties of the vegetables were in excess and sold to make farming a sustainable activity.

SRKS strives to make Ashram kids responsible and disciplined. For the first time since inception, we introduced uniforms for all the 35 kids. The kids like their new attire. The boy's

home was given a fresh paint. A long-standing benevolent well-wisher from Narendrapur, funded to construct wooden cabinets to the Ashram. In both the boys' rooms, these cabinets are being used to keep their belongings. The family members of the kids find them now less abusive and punctual after staying in the Ashram. The kids voluntarily clean the Ashram every Sunday, as we clean our homes. Also, over the years, we see the elder boys serving the younger kids as their own brothers and also taking old age home people in wheelchair around our big pond.

Our Ashram welcomes new ideas and supports literary research. We are thankful to Sri Thiago Formolo Dalla Vecchia, a Brazilian researcher from University of Bologna – Italy. He is currently pursuing a Masters degree in Orientalist History. He is researching on the Metaphysical Nature of Seva, as developed through the Practical Vedanta frame within the Ramakrishna Mission. It was an wonderful experience hosting Thiago between September to December, 2018. The kids learnt new culture, daily exercises, football and discipline from their very own “Mr. Thiago”.

As our founder is not anymore – we had two days meeting at the Ashram among the members of the Ashram, staff, volunteers and donors. Work allocation, new work streams, the safety of Ashram inmates, fundraising, projects cost estimations were made. Eventful two days with the exchange of ideas and alignment across the audience marked the meeting. Lastly, we are blessed to be part of this Ashram and we thank all our well-wishers for their wisdom, support and time for the seva work.

Jai Sri Ramakrishna Ki Jai !!

Jai Sri Maa Sarada Devi Ki Jai !!

Jai Swami Vivekananda Maharaj Ji Ki Jai !!

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