



MARCH 1998 (text only)

WHAT IS SHANTI BHAVAN?

Shanti Bhavan, literally translated from the Hindi language, means “haven of peace”. Shanti Bhavan is a world-class boarding school for children from underprivileged backgrounds. The goal of Shanti Bhavan is to give a select number of children a chance to become highly successful in life. Tender loving care, medical attention, psychological support and outstanding education is provided to the children free of cost.

Shanti Bhavan is non-sectarian. It has no affiliation with any religious or political group. It seeks to instill in children universally accepted values of honesty, integrity and transparency that are crucial for success. Respect for all cultures and religions is practiced. Fundamentals of different religions are taught but no single religion is propagated or promoted.

We seek to foster in our children self-esteem, self-confidence, discipline, and the zeal to succeed. They will also be inculcated with a feeling of respect for their families and communities. We encourage parents to visit Shanti Bhavan to observe their children's progress, be proud of their accomplishments, and believe in their future. Children also spend holidays with their parents. When the children grow up and become successful, we want them to help their families the way we have helped them. We count on the professional integrity of our staff to carry out our mission. Ethical conduct is a must for all members of the Shanti Bhavan faculty. The pursuit of excellence is to be worked at day after day.

All our children start at Shanti Bhavan at age four, except in the first year of operation when we also admitted five year olds. Malnutrition is correctable in early childhood and behavior modification is also easier when the children are very young. The children are selected from Tamil Nadu and

Karnataka by a recruitment team comprised of a social worker, a clinical psychologist, a pediatrician and the school principal. One to one interaction with parents and representatives of village and slum communities is an on going process.

Selection of children is a 3-way process. The social worker visits homes to ascertain the awareness of the child's parents or guardians. Are they genuinely interested in education for their Child? Can they make the commitment? Do they understand why children are selected at the age of four? Will they support their child by visits, taking her home for the holidays, or by talking well of Shanti Bhavan? Is the family below the poverty line? No criminal background? What about community consensus?

If these conditions are satisfied, the child is screened by the pediatrician. She or he must be in good physical health keeping in mind the obvious health-related problems related to poverty such as malnutrition, scabies and infestations. A child who is physically or mentally handicapped cannot be considered for selection as Shanti Bhavan does not have the resources to look after these children.

The most crucial stage of the process is the screening of a child for her or his cognitive ability. A clinical psychologist conducts culture-friendly tests to determine whether the child can go through a complete school program right through to the school leaving level. We need to be reasonably certain that the child will be able to complete high school, if not university, or other specialized courses.

MEET SOME OF OUR VIPs...

Ramesh - trills like a nightingale. He has a penchant for quaint objects like unusual birds' nests, rare flowers or berries.

Anith - has a sense of rhythm and music that makes him a possible future Ravi Shankar. He uses one hand or both to drum interesting rhythms on tabletops, tin cans, plastic jars, anything.

Abilash - mimics all and sundry, sending his audiences into gales of laughter. His dancing is creative, his dramatization convincing. He constructs interesting structures on the playground. He is meticulous about his ways and belongings.

Anand - has a keen artistic sense. His drawings come alive with vibrant and harmonious colors and designs. He has the makings of a computer graphic artist or a designer.

Sheeba - has natural grace which makes her dancing special. Her charming ways attract children and grown-ups alike. A born ingénue.

Triveni - has a strong aptitude for academics. She is heading for the honor roll at Shanti Bhavan.

Manikatan and Viji - are sharp in math calculations. Numbers turn them on.

Chaitra - grasps everything double quick. "Don't speak in Tamil," she tells Dr. Maya, "Speak ONLY English."

Saritha - is very observant and does not miss a thing. She is another outstanding student in the making.

Shilpa - loves dancing. She does not need an excuse to start gyrating her hips and moving her limbs.

Fernando - is quick on the take. His bright-eyed look and cheerful smile make it impossible to be mad at him for long.

Thomas - is whippersnapper smart. His endearing ways make him an instant hit. Some children at Shanti Bhavan have lost their parents because of death or desertion. They feel bad when the other children have visitors or go home for the holidays. They would feel just as special as the others if they can count on the love of surrogate parents who will keep in touch with them and take them home for vacations.

Shanti Bhavan will remain fully responsible for the children's education, health and welfare. But we would also like to provide them a home to go to during holidays where they can feel welcome and have a sense of belonging. Students who are majoring in child psychology, social work or education might consider spending some time with the children as older brothers and sisters. A Saturday visit planned with organized games, music, dance or any kind of suitable entertainment for children would make a big difference. Responsible and caring adults who can spare the time to tutor or entertain the children are most welcome.

Visitors to Shanti Bhavan remark on how happy the children look. In the bright and open atmosphere of Shanti Bhavan, even the most homesick children have settled in quickly. What transformed the poverty stricken children from quarries, slums and remote villages into lively bundles of energy?

There are many answers. Tender loving care, expert medical and psycho-social support, nourishing food, daily vitamin and mineral supplements, a structured routine and of

course state-of-the art educational materials have brightened their lives, strengthened their bodies and opened their minds to a new world of fun learning experiences. The children have adjusted remarkably well in a short time. Most of what they learn and do is new to them: sleeping on beds: using modern bathroom facilities, making their own beds; wearing smart clothes and footwear and interacting with unfamiliar adults. Their progress is the result of a team effort of hardworking housemothers, alert supervisors, experienced teachers, diligent support staff, a loving and friendly pediatrician, a gentle and caring psychologist, and an experienced social worker.

The children are confident with visitors. They approach adults spontaneously under the watchful eye of their caregivers. Their language at the moment is a blend of Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and broken English.

During home visits, the children tell their parents that they love the food and that they have fun at Shanti Bhavan. Parents say that the children want to return to school after just two days at home. They miss the comforts and the predictable routine at Shanti Bhavan. The love and sense of security they feel at Shanti Bhavan also contributes to their growth and well being.

As we watch 4 and 5 years olds take pride in their daily duties, go through morning hygiene routines mostly on their own, practice table manners and social graces, we cannot but marvel at their initiative, drive and quick learning. The good habits that they have acquired should stay with them for life.

We at Shanti Bhavan believe in what we are doing.

COUNTDOWN TO THE INAUGURATION

Dr. Abraham George met his Excellency, the President of India Shri. K.R. Narayanan in early January 1998 in New Delhi. The President will be the chief guest at the formal opening of Shanti Bhavan.

The inauguration is tentatively planned for early July 1998. The President's ADC paid a private visit to Shanti Bhavan towards the end of February. He was impressed with the children and the campus. He gave us a few guidelines about the proposed President visit. Shanti Bhavan is already abuzz with excitement for the Big Day. Music and dance teachers have been roped in to train the children for the inaugural function. A cultural program featuring performances by singers, musicians and dancers is being put together in Bangalore at one end and New Jersey at the other. Video films on Shanti Bhavan and on children of the world will be shown. Refreshments and dinner have to be organized. The event will end with fireworks.

Site laborers are working hard to complete the school building on time. Lists of invitees have to be drawn up. The children's costumes have to be sewn. A group of college students have committed themselves to serving as ushers at the function.

The grounds are being readied for landscaping. Lawns have already come up around the children's residences, and the vegetable garden is yielding large quantities of homegrown vegetables for our use. Fruit tree samplings are coming up slowly but surely. Communication between Bangalore and New Jersey spans continents and oceans but the miracle of modern technology makes it possible for us to plan together. Our belief that we are investing in a noble and worthy cause for the future of the children of Shanti Bhavan will see us through.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF SHANTI BHAVAN

The call of bird song awakens a new dawn. As the grey mists of morning begin to lit, a breathtaking golden rose and slowly ascends above the tree line on the Eastern horizon. In the dorms, children nudge each other awake.

"Look! The sun" a daily refrain. We suspend our morning actively to gaze in fascination as its color charges from rosy orange to a bright blinding disc of yellow white light as it journeys upward in the hot morning sky.

All the grown-ups and some children are early risers. Other children prefer to snooze awhile. Morning ablutions done, the children settle down to quiet play in the spacious play areas of their dorms.

Morning rounds echo cheerful Good Mornings. Almost always somebody has something special to show or something exciting to tell. From creepy crawlies to discarded cartons, everything is a wonder to behold.

Soon everyone is wide-awake getting ready for school keeps everyone as busy as bees. There is a time for a few morning exercises before breakfast. After breakfast, lessons commence. Dorms are cleaned and tidied, bathrooms washed down, and laundry is counted and handed over to the laundry staff. In the kitchen preparation for lunch is underway. All over the campus, construction teams are busy building the edifices of Shanti Bhavan. The sounds of drills, welding and hammering drown out the sounds of nature. Sometimes a truck laden with construction supplies or a bulldozer or a road roller noisily ambles its way across the grounds.

Mid-morning snacks done, it's back to activities for the children till lunch time. Clay modeling, water play, sand play or educational film keeps the children absorbed and curious. Their housemothers are busy mending clothes, or books or preparing for children's fun activities. Around this time, the Tamil, Kannada and English newspaper arrive. Those who are free catch up with current events. Sometimes visitors arrive. The children are used to greeting and responding to them.

Indoor play follows lunch, till it's time for naps. The heat of the afternoon makes it necessary for children and grownups to rest. The kitchen staff and construction workers go back to their tasks after a short break. Everyone is up again for the evening snack.

This is the time children have individual help or take part in group activities such as handicrafts, painting, drawing, story time or rhyming.

Evening is outdoor play time for staff and as well as children. The staff play volleyball or badminton, while the children do simple exercises, participate in a few group games or engage in individual play. Then it's back to the dorms for baths. As the children turn their reluctant steps homeward, the sky becomes rose tinged once more. The setting sun reveals itself magnificently arrayed in crimson glory before it sinks under the horizon. Again, "Look! The sun!" Each dawn and dusk brings new wonder and excitement in its wake. Dinnertime, TV time, bedtime. The grownups are relieved that the incessant chatter of the children has ceased for the time being.

It is time to wind down. Those who have the energy watch TV or read after the children have gone to bed. Somewhere in the busy day the children and staff have found time to gather together in non-denominational prayer. Common prayer is a part of the routine at Shanti Bhavan. The children are learning to be grateful for what they receive. The staff try to gain spiritual strength from this coming together.

Way above the star spangled inky black sky over Shanti Bhavan is a beautiful sight. On moonlit nights the campus is bathed with a gentle silvery glow. The peace and quiet is unbelievable. Another day in Shanti Bhavan has drawn to a close.

LIVING WITH NATURE

We want to teach them to live in harmony with nature and reserve it as our forefathers did.

Set on a rocky rise amidst agricultural land, Shanti Bhavan is part of the ecosystem of the Deccan Plateau in South India. The Deccan Plateau, according to geologists, has rocks dating from the Pre-Cambrian Era. The rocks lend character to the Shanti Bhavan landscape. We have tried not to blast natural rock formations for purposes of construction. Flowering bushes sprout from joints in the rocks. They are also the natural habitat of chameleons, snakes and many species of insect and plant life.

The rocky terrain has stray clumps of wild grasses and bushes. Tiny yellow, pink, purple and blue wild flowers grow at random in the grass. Flowers bloom on some of the bushes. Beautiful cactus flowers can be seen before sunrise on some of the wild cacti. Groves of Eucalyptus trees border Shanti Bhavan on the Eastern side. More Eucalyptus green the landscape around. In Shanti Bhavan hundreds of tree saplings have been planted. A five year old named Jyothi planted the first sapling on her fifth birthday. There are coconut, papaya, pomegranate, custard apple, mango, chico and tamarind trees. Gulmohar, pine and even a species of maple related to the chinar of Kashmir have taken root. In a few years these trees will provide shades, fruits, and other by-products. They will be homes for insects, birds and animals. They will also play a key role in the water cycle.

The rocky soil of Shanti Bhavan has carefully cleaned, mixed and fertilized to plant home grown vegetables. There are rows and rows of green, yellow, red and white vegetables. Lettuce, cabbage, capsicum, carrot, red and white radish, peas, beans, bitter gourd, ridge gourd, snake gourd, cucumber, pumpkin, tomato, okra, spinach, parsley, coriander, mint, turnips, beetroot, eggplant and green chilies are some of these vegetables. We have decided to use eco-friendly fertilizers and pesticides from natural products such as neem. Compost from kitchen waste is also used.

The garbage disposal unit has been designed with the environment in mind. Separate compartments for plastic, paper, glass, medical waste and metal have been constructed. We are educating our staff and children in the need for sorting and re-cycling garbage. Shanti Bhavan is considering the necessity of a landfill for solid hazardous waste. Solar heating and lighting make effective use of the sun's energy. Sunlight is in abundance at Shanti Bhavan. We have ample hot water for baths and cleaning purposes. In the South Indian winter when the north east monsoon is in full gale, flocks of migratory birds come to the lake. In the grove of trees near the lake, birds of varied plumage can be seen. They do not intrude on the parrots, crows, white cranes, sparrows, mynahs, hawks and kingfishers that live there year round. Their calls fill the air in the early mornings and late evenings. It is not usual to come across nests of different kinds at ground and tree level. Field rats and six-inch long scorpions are among the living creatures that inhabit the campus.

Shanti Bhavan is fortunate to have an abundant supply of ground water. Our bore wells pump up clear, fresh, cool water for domestic and horticulture needs. We aim to devise a strategy that will enable us to use this rich source of water judiciously. We are aware that if we do not conserve ground water, the water table will gradually be depleted. If the monsoon rains failed, the wells could run dry and Shanti Bhavan could face severe water shortages in the future even though the lakebed is a catchment area. Water, like all of nature's resources, has to be used with care. The air around Shanti Bhavan is unpolluted. We have the advantage of being situated far from main highways and of being surrounded by agricultural plots. As far as the eye can see there are acres of greenery, which will be our insurance against air and noise pollution. Since the atmosphere is so clean, we are able to view the star-studded night sky in all its brilliance.

The children of Shanti Bhavan are taking their first steps in environmental awareness by going on nature walks. They delight in catching butterflies and grasshoppers and in picking wild flowers and nests. We want to teach them to live in harmony with nature and revere it as forefathers did.

Shanti Bhavan strives to cultivate environmental awareness and conservation of nature in all its programs. We want to be model ecological concerns.

HEART'S AFIRE

Walk the path of a child
See one's dreams and wishes

Give a heart to a heart in need
And watch it heal

Go back to the past
And be a child again
Give a child a memory
And share the happiness of giving

Rhea Ittoop (8 years old - New Jersey, USA)

Christopher, a social worker, Maya, a specialist in pediatrics and community health, and Venkatesh, a clinical psychologist, were happy with the little boy they screened for Shanti Bhavan. His socio-economic background made him an ideal candidate. His health was good and the evaluation of his cognitive ability was positive. The social worker at Abhay Ashram, a government halfway home remarked, "Vinay is a very mischievous and active little boy.

"That was early August 1997. In a fortnight there was no trace of the bright little boy or his pretty young mother. Christopher was determined to track him down. After 3 months, in the sprawling slums surrounding the national games complex, his queries evoked a gory tale of suicide by burning. The young woman, said the slum dwellers, had poured kerosene over herself in the dark, dingy confines of her small hut. Her despair was the result of a gang rape she reportedly suffered when job hunting in a nearby city. As the flames began to devour her, she cried out to her five-year-old son. The child rushed in and put his arms around his burning mother, only to get burnt himself in the process. Neighbors heard their screams of agony and rushed in. They managed to save the boy but the mother was already gone. "Yes," said the laborers, "We are sure that is the child you are looking for." Christopher's search took him to Victoria Hospital where he found the severely scarred and traumatized child with his grandmother. Christopher decided in that meeting that Vinay would heal emotionally and physically in the company of the other children at Shanti Bhavan. The peaceful, loving atmosphere and structured routine of Shanti Bhavan would give Vinay a new lease of life.

Vinay's arrival at Shanti Bhavan was a red-letter day. His grandmother was asked to spend a few days at the school to ease the child into his new surroundings. Venkatesh and Christopher held a special conference with the staff at the request of the principal. The staff was instructed on how to attend to the physical, emotional and psychological needs of a severely traumatized and bewildered child. The jeep with Christopher and Venkatesh had scarcely left the outskirts of Bangalore when a distress call came from Shanti Bhavan. The child was emitting animal-like cries of fear and was trying to scale the walls of the dormitory. On seeing the other beds, Vinay thought he had been brought back to the Victoria Hospital ward.

Three weeks later, Vinay was engaging in lively conversation with his schoolmates. He is still distrustful of others. But he no longer has emotional outbursts. The once

unmanageable boy has become calm and unafraid. He is even mischievous on occasion, much to the delight of Shanti Bhavan staff. The other children seem to have no problem accepting his deep scars of disfigurement. On January 25, 1998, when Dr. George addressed a gathering of parents of children of Shanti Bhavan, Vinay's grandmother stood up and said, "I want to express my gratitude for what Shanti Bhavan has done for my grandson. Only we know the state he was in when he was brought here. Today he is a changed boy.

" Need we say more? "

HOLD THE DREAM

Dr. Abraham George addressed the parents of the children of Shanti Bhavan on January 25, 1998. He spoke in English, Staff members Kannan, Christopher and Venkatesh translated his talk into Tamil and Kannada

Dr. George welcomed the parents. He told them their children were wonderful and bright, just like his own children.

He came to India to start the school about three years ago, he said. The idea occurred to him in America. He went to America after spending his boyhood in India. In America he learned that all children, whether black or white, rich or poor, are equal. The road to success for children, he found, lay in opportunities to learn and excel, and in a good environment in which to mature. His dream is that the children of Shanti Bhavan, with their God-given capabilities will grow up to be achievers, find good jobs and become successful.

Shanti Bhavan provides opportunities for children to excel. Dr. George told the parents the children will start to dream of success and will work hard to make it happen. They will have a life free of many hardships their parents endure.

With the values they will cultivate in Shanti Bhavan, the children, he said, will want to take care of their families when they grow up. Dr. George told the parents that their responsibility was to encourage their children, speak well of the school, and make sure their children learn well and work hard. Children, he said, need to know that their parents have confidence in them. He said he hoped the parents have the same dream for their children as he has.

The parents were asked to make sure that their children do not drop out of Shanti Bhavan. They should remain to complete their education. Parents were assured that the principal and staff would do everything possible to ensure that the children succeed.

Dr. George invited the parents to ask questions and to express their doubts. The fathers spoke first. They wanted to know whether Shanti Bhavan was a private or government school. He replied that it was private and funded by the Foundation. They asked about the future of their children once they completed high school.

Dr. George said that he would make sure they got into good colleges. He would try to get sponsors for the children, but it was not a promise. He said he would be able to speak of Shanti Bhavan children with confidence to prospective employers to launch them into good careers.

Dr. George then said he would like to hear questions from the women. A few expressed appreciation and gratitude to Dr. George. They said that the children were happy and were doing well at Shanti Bhavan. The grandmother of the child whose mother had

committed suicide by burning herself wished to publicly acknowledge the good that Shanti Bhavan had done for her grandson.

As lunch was served, Dr. George had the children meet with their parents. The parents informally presented their children to Dr. George. He was happy he was able to get to know all the members of the Shanti Bhavan family.

The Children will dream of success and work hard to make it happen.

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A MODERN DAY MIRACLE

Social worker Christopher was directed to a burn victim in a poverty-stricken district in Karnataka. The woman had been set ablaze by her alcoholic husband. A familiar story, but unnerving to actually see with one's own eyes.

The criminal act was not reported to the police. "After all," the woman said, "he is the father of my children and I married him against my parent's wishes." The man had poured kerosene over his wife and set her alight in a fit of anger when she refused to give him the 25 rupees he demanded to buy liquor. She had wanted to use the money to pay for her children's school fees.

The woman's sister, a nurse, supervised her care in hospital. The woman's chief concern, even in her physical agony, was her children. Who would look after them if she died? Christopher knew he had to do his best to help at least the youngest of her children, a four-year-old boy. When the team from Shanti Bhavan went to screen children in that district, they visited the woman who had just been discharged from the hospital. She tried to hide the burns on her face with the end of her sari. She was shaky and obviously traumatized. Her husband, seemingly stricken with remorse, could not believe that he had been spared life imprisonment because of his wife's pleas and Christopher's intervention.

It so happened that the boy passed the cognitive screening test with flying colors. His father expressed deep gratitude for the immense responsibility that Dr. George was going to shoulder for his child. The parents accompanied their child to Shanti Bhavan a few weeks later. They were overwhelmed with the facilities and the cordial way in which they were treated. A couple of months later, when the recruitment team re-visited the district, the child's father came running to the jeep. "I know you are taking good care of my son, I do not have to ask," He said. He became an advocate for Shanti Bhavan in that district. "If any of the parents give you trouble, I will speak to them," he volunteered.

When the couple returned to Shanti Bhavan months later, we saw to our amazement that the woman's scars were barely visible. She had been transformed into an attractive, radiant, prettily dressed young woman. When the little boy went home for the holidays, he said, "Please don't fight. I just want you both to be happy." The nuns and priests who minister to the families in the district told us that the boy's father became a changed man after his child was admitted to Shanti Bhavan.

ARE YOU UP TO THE CHALLENGE?

If your particular interest is teaching and if you consider yourself a gifted teacher, you will find a very rewarding career awaiting you at Shanti Bhavan. Our children are being prepared to meet standards in the global marketplace. Your patience and determination will see them successfully not only through school but through life.

Perhaps your special concern may be the care giving aspect of bringing up children. We need housemothers who genuinely care for children and are prepared for the hard work it entails. If you feel confident that you can teach a child basic hygiene, good manners and whatever it takes to give her a sense of self-esteem, you will experience a sense of self-fulfillment at Shanti Bhavan.

You may possess good organizational skills and have the ability to get the cooperation of your team members. Residential Supervisors have an important role to play in Shanti Bhavan. They have to maintain standards of high accountability and yet have a place in their hearts for children.

Cooks who are able to provide nutritious meals for children and devise interesting menus for all on campus would play a vital role in Shanti Bhavan. Other staff such as gardeners, drivers and helpers in various areas who are interested in serving such a cause are also needed.

A suitably qualified and trained nurse who understands children and will maintain high standards of cleanliness on campus will be an asset to our institution.

Whatever your strength or talent, you are welcome to join us in our endeavor to build our children's lives. Recommendations from readers will be appreciated.

EAST MEETS WEST

Musicians from the U.S led by soprano Mallika Keister will offer a unique program of classical western music featuring vocal and instrumental selections.

Ms. Keister 19, has played leading roles in opera and musicals in U.S.A. and was also featured soloist in the American Youth Ensembles European tour that performed at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris.

Pianist Yannis Xylas in the accompanist for Amato Opera in New York City and pianist and chorus master for the New York Grand Opera.

Violinist Joseph Gluck is a member of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra and is the first violinist of the Stirling String Quartet in New Jersey. He was formally member of the Detroit and Saint Louis Symphonies.

These three artists will add wonderful flavor to the fine evening of entertainment.

The Natya Kala Group of Bangalore will present an India ballet "Shanti Kshethram". This ballet will be a combination of Indian classical, semi-classical and folk dance. It is choreographed by Shoba Dominic.

Vidwan Srivastava will be giving a vocal concert of Carnatic music accompanied by Vidwan Gurumurthy on the Mridangam, Vidwan Chandrashekar on the violin and Vidwan Srishylan on the ghatam.

Vidushi Mala Venkatesh will entertain us with a veena recital. Her recitals will feature Varna, Ganesha Kruthi, Kruthi, Indola and Devaranama.

'The Family', a non-profit social service organization which offers friendship, comfort, benefit performances, material help and practical assistance to those in need, brings us a song and dance routine which features their child participants.

The children will be singing an inaugural song especially composed for the occasion. The song expresses Shanti Bhavan's hopes for the future. They will also perform a folk dance from Kerala.

INAUGURAL SONG

This is a special moment
We've only just begun
There's a long long way to go
Before our day is done

We cannot see tomorrow
Yesterday's but a dream
Today's what really matters
We want to dream our dream

I might be a movie star
I might be president
A dancer or gymnast
Or a world champion

Children of Shanti Bhavan
We have a chance to share
To be someone do something
We are glad you are there

If you would just stay with us
Through all the years to come
You will see us blossom bright
Like flowers in the sun

I can be what I must be
Because people like you
Will always believe in me
We hope you share our dream too

I might be an astronaut
I might be a physician
An artist or designer
Or a great musician

Children of Shanti Bhavan
We have a chance to share
To be someone do something
We are glad you are there

Music and arrangement
Maya Mascarenhas

Lyrics
Lalita Law