

SERVAS INDIA NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 1 MONTH: July/August 2005

Dear Servas Members,

SERVAS India starts off the first newsletter after the unanimous election of the new committee at the National Conference held at Bangalore on 25th and 26th December 2004.

We apologize for the delay but as you are aware that while our conference was in session, we had the shocking news of the Tsunami disaster that struck the south-east coast of our sub continent. The first quarter was occupied with support and help to the Tsunami affected victims. Our National Secretary Dr. Ramesh Sharma left for the coastal town of Tamilnadu with clothes and food supplies. The details of the conference is covered in this newsletter and would appreciate if you could send in your views on this along with any interesting articles which you may like to share with other members by getting this published in the ensuing issues.

The conference was a grand success and was well attended by all the State Coordinators and it was this august gathering that unanimously elected the new committee headed by the

National Secretary	Dr Ramesh Sharma	M P.
Deputy NS	Mr. Shankar Kumar Sanyal	West Bengal
" NS	Mr. Pethu Raja	Tamil nadu
Host Coordinator	Mr. Pramod Kumar	Delhi
Peace Secretary	Ms. Geetha Mehta	Maharashtra
News Editor	Mr L V Subramanian	Karnataka
Asst. N. S.	Mr. Girish Rawal	Gujarat
" "	Mr. Shusham Bajpai	Maharashtra
" "	Mr. John Nagela	Andhra Pradesh
" "	MR. H A Mattoo	Jammu & Kashmir
Asst peace secretary	Mrs. Susmita Raut	Orissa
Asst. Host coordinator	Mr. Anand c Raje Shirke	Pune

By the time the our conference was in progress, we heard the shocking news of the Tsunami disaster which had destroyed the coastal areas resulting in loss of many lives. Dr Ramesh Sharma lost no time in organizing and accompanying the relief operations party carrying food, clothes and medicines to the homeless and the badly affected survivors. We have tried to include some interesting information on what SERVAS is all about and the wonderful organization which is spread in 130 countries

We are also pleased to inform you that our website www.servasindia.org is hosted and it contains the proceedings of the conference along with the group photograph .Copy of the proceedings are given for the sake of members who could not participate in the conference. Members are requested to send in their email ids so that regular information of Servas activities and International information could be sent.

We are also pleased to inform you of our formal office address of our National Secretary Dr Ramesh Sharma which is: 26 American Colony, Kumara Park East Road, Bangalore 560 001 Karnataka State Phone 080-22355342 or Cell 9448840930 email id ns@servasindia.org

We wish to make this newsletter more informative and we look forward to receiving your feedback and also articles which you would like to share or publish and which would make this a wonderful reading to all our members here and abroad.

Here is wishing you a very Festive Greetings for Janmasthanmi which is falling on 27th August 2005 and with this starts the festival months spelling out Dusserah, Durga Puja and Diwali all in a row full of joy and happiness.

Warm regards

LV Subramanian

What is Servas

Servas is an international NGO (Non Governmental Organization) based on understanding, tolerance, world peace, an organization of hosts and travelers, based on volunteer work founded in 1949 for non profit and divided into nine areas around the world. Each area has its own coordinators.

Servas began as a small network of hosts who were willing to open their doors in the cause of peace and offer hospitality to visiting travelers of whatever race, nationality or creed they would belong and provide them stay facilities for at least two days. This has now grown to over 13000 households in 100 countries and gaining momentum. In India we have crossed over 300 homes where Servas Traveler is welcome to stay and enjoy the hospitality. "Athithi Devo Bhava" (Guests are our Gods) is one of the main tenets of Hindu philosophy which is inter-woven into the cultural fabric of every Indian.

SERVAS Philosophy

Servas is an international NGO interracial peace association run in over 100 countries by volunteers. Founded in 1949 by Bob Luitweiler as a peace movement, Servas International is a non profit organization working to build understanding tolerance and world peace. It operates through a network of Servas hosts around the world who are interested in opening their doors to travelers, and, "on the other side of the coin" may open minded travelers who want to get to know the heart of the countries they visit. Servas International has consultative status as a Non Government Organization with the United Economic and Social Council currently with representation at many of the UN's hubs of activities. There are about 13000 Servas Open doors scattered throughout almost every country in the world.

How Does SERVAS Work

Membership takes two forms – host and traveler. Each is necessary for the exchange of ideas and sharing of cultures to take place. The host and traveler, not Servas arrange a mutually agreeable date and place for the visit.

The great majority of hosts are in private households, but as is the case in India, they may also live in an ashram or other community. Hosts' names and particulars – their work and interests, languages spoken, and how they can be reached – appear in their country's host list, which is made available only to approved travelers. Travelers carry a Letter of Introduction issued by Servas in their own country, which they present to hosts upon arrival. They apply to hosts(normally those with whom they have a language in common) and stay for two days, longer only if the host wishes. Hosts provide a place to sleep for the two nights, and usually breakfast and an evening meal. Or whatever is the custom of the country. The only exception is when the host is a day host – someone who wants to offer friendship, but cannot offer overnight accommodation.

The two days' stay is not long enough to be a burden on the hosts generosity, but is plenty of time for frank, sensitive and friendly people, behaving in the Servas spirit, to reach a remarkable degree of understanding. Hosts and travelers take the time to talk, and hosts try in other ways to include visitors in their daily lives. Travelers may be invited to join in a family party or some music making, or to go to a community meeting or in a rural area, they may help in the farm or the garden if they choose, Visitors do not offer money to hosts, but try to repay the hospitality by their willing and interested response to whatever invitation is given and by offering to help where they feel it is appropriate. Hosts are usually keen to help visitors see the local tourist sights, but good travelers are careful not to use Servas hospitality simply as an inexpensive base for sightseeing or as lodging for a single night, which defeats the Servas purpose.

The Servas experience does not end with the guests' departure. Hosts may report their experiences and suggestions to their country Servas office. Travelers may also send a report of their experiences when they return the borrowed host lists to their national office. In many cases hosts and guests remain in contact over the years, corresponding, calling one another, or making follow up visits. Perhaps upon seeing or hearing a news item about the other's country, they are reminded of the conversations shared or the work jointly undertaken, and the world suddenly seems to be a smaller friendlier more hopeful place. That is what Servas is all about.

How do I join SERVAS

The only requirement to join Servas as a host is willingness to offer hospitality to travelers of any race and culture. Servas encourages travelers to experience other societies more deeply and with most understanding than they would be likely to do as just plain tourists. In both cases, you would probably have to meet an experienced Servas member first.

SERVAS Host

The hospitality offered by the "open doors" is the cornerstone of "SERVAS" . Servas Host offer hospitality to approved traveler of every race creed and nationality. A host should provide bed for two nights (or longer but only at the host's invitation) and usually invite the traveler to share the evening meal. The host is not expected to provide transport for the traveler , although some may want to show the traveler places of interest. If the traveler does not present the letter of introduction on arrival, the host should ask to see it and make sure it is upto date. The host should explain the rules of the home to the traveler. A traveler should ask before using a host's phone and should pay for all calls. A host should set aside some time to talk with a traveler. If is not convenient for a host to have a traveler, the host should feel free to say no. In such a case it may be possible to suggest the names of alternative hosts. Hosts should try to answer letters from travelers asking to stay, especially those that enclose an international reply coupon. Hosts who are not able to provide overnight accommodation may wish to join as day host. A day host will find a convenient time to meet the traveler may provide info or a guided travel/tour /sightseeing.

10 Tips to get Travelers Calling

While Servas hosts in the major cities have many travelers, those in the outer suburbs or out of the way places get hardly any. If you want more travelers, fill out your form with the following tips in your mind:

- i. Make it easy to contact you: The Internet is fast becoming the most popular way for travelers to contact prospective hosts, making arrangements as they travel, instead of before they leave home. If you don't have a computer, but are willing to have an email address and check it at least once a week (with friends, the library or an internet café), it will increase your visitors. I use Yahoo, which is free, can be accessed from any computer, anywhere in the world and has a built in virus checker. To sign up, go to www.yahoo.com . Be sure to list your email address in your hosting form.
- ii. Allow people to leave messages when they call. Consider leaving your message in two languages. List your work and mobile phone number.
- iii. Make it Easy to get to you: Most travelers use public transportation. If you are willing to pick people up from town, mention it in your listing.
- iv. Include NPNR in your listing: (No Prior Notice Required) None of my 50 or so travelers has abused it by just showing up at the door.
- v. Include lots of interests: The more interests you list, and the more countries you have been to, the more likely it is that travelers will contact you.
- vi. Mention Longer Stays possible: Decide after the first night if you will allow your traveler to stay longer. You make the offer. Otherwise they will make other arrangements.
- vii. Welcome Traveler in your country: This is especially useful if you are far off the beater path and only travelers with their own transportation come to you.
- viii. Allow smoking outside: Smoking outside instead of non smokers
- ix. Mention Internet Access: Always I let my travelers check their email.
- x. Offer to Show them around: Travelers always appreciate local knowledge.
- xi. Include WMT The most important one : Want more Travelers

Servas in India

“With Every True Friendship We Build more firmly the Foundations on which the Peace of the Whole World Rests.Thought by Thought and Act by Act, with Every Breath We Build the Kingdom of Non-Violence That is the True Home of the Spirit.....Mahatma Gandhi

“Athithi Devo Bhava” is one of the tenets of Hindu Philosophy that has been engrained into the Indian Citizens who consider their Guests as Gods and give them the hospitality and love that would befit the Lord.

The founding of this organization coincides with India’s gaining Independence and this spirit of Servas has been prevailing in India from the mid 50s under the stewardship of Sh Harivallabh Parikh at the auspices of Anant Niketan Ashram at Rangpur in Baroda (State of Gujarat). The present Servas India office is in Bangalore, details of the contact address and telephone /email id given above.

We have a list of over 300 active members who have opened their doors of welcome to the Servas visitors and given them the hospitality in the best possible method which has brought well being and goodwill from the visitors.

To become a host, you should obtain one letter of reference, from the current member if possible. Then fill in the Host application attach a photo and return it to the Servas India Head office along with the letter of reference and the appropriate fee. Your name and particulars will then be printed in the Servas India Host List (published every two years) or in the next Servas India Host List supplement (published every 5 to 6 months) and you will soon be welcoming travelers.

To become a traveler, you could plan your trip using the host lists of other countries provided to you by the Servas India head Office. Before setting off on your travels, you apply to the same office for your Letter of Introduction which must be shown to the hosts you visit, to certify your membership. The Letter of Introduction is valid for one year. Before becoming an approved traveler, you are required to obtain one letter of reference preferably from a member, and an informal interview with a local member is strongly suggested. Then simply fill in the Letter of Introduction in duplicate, attach the two photos and send both forms to the Head office along with the letter of reference and the appropriate fee. You will need to ask the Head Office for the host lists of the countries you will be traveling to. Host Lists are not given to members but are loaned, since other travelers can reuse them once you have returned them.

Applicable Fees:

Host Membership (for Three year period)	Rs 500/-
And thereafter annual membership	Rs 100/-
Letter of Introduction Stamp Fee (one traveler)	Rs 1500/-
Host Lists of other countries (deposit for upto 5 lists when returned)	Rs 500/-

Members will receive newsletters and other supplements free of cost.

Proceedings of the National Conference of Servas International India held on 25th and 26th December, 2004 at Malleswaram Association, Bangalore. Minutes of National conference

1. The list of Members/Delegates who attended and registered for the conference is attached as Annexure 1.
2. The State Coordinators/Delegates from the following states/union territories who could not attend the Conference, expressed their support for the conference through letters:
 - i. Arunachal Pradesh
 - ii. Chandigarh
 - iii. Chhattisgarh
 - iv. Gujarat
 - v. Haryana
 - vi. Nagaland
 - vii. Punjab
 - viii. Rajasthan
 - ix. Tripura
3. Shri L.V. Subramanian, Organizer, National Conference, welcomed the delegates to the Conference with the traditional offering of sweets and kumkum/chandan.
4. Shri Lavanam, State Coordinator from Andhra Pradesh and a senior Gandhian worker, Shri Gurdev Singh Panu, State Coordinator from Delhi, Shri. Sankar Kumar Sanyal, State Coordinator from West Bengal and other senior members lighted a lamp and declared open the National Conference.
5. Shri Sankar Kumar Sanyal, State Coordinator, West Bengal and a senior Gandhian worker presided over the meeting.
6. Dr Ramesh Sharma, Deputy National Secretary and Chief Convener of the National Conference requested the members/delegates to introduce themselves. After the brief introduction, he read out a message received from Shri Geoff Maltby, Servas International President, expressing his best wishes for the success of this National Conference. Dr. Sharma then explained the background and reasons for convening this conference and the importance of formation of a new Servas India Committee, to be elected during the National Conference, which would be entrusted with the responsibility of effectively keeping aloft the Servas ideals.
7. The Conference recorded its appreciation of the good work done by the founder of Servas India, Shri Harivallabh Parikh. In appreciation of his services, it was decided to make him President Emeritus of Servas India. The Conference also wished him good health.
8. The Conference was also informed that in the last National Conference held at Nashik from 15th to 17th May 2004, it was agreed that the next conference would be held in Kurushethra, Haryana in October, 2004. Since this did not materialise, the present Conference at Bangalore had been organised with the general consensus of all State Coordinators.
9. Shri Gurdev Singh Panu, State Coordinator of Delhi informed the Conference that the minutes of the National Conference held at Nashik had not been circulated to anyone.
10. Dr Ramesh Sharma, informed the Conference that he had received a fax message from Shri Nagendra Patel, National Secretary of Servas India. He then read out the fax message wherein Shri Nagendra Patel

had expressed his inability to attend this conference and had submitted his resignation as National Secretary owing to personal reasons. He also sent his good wishes for the success of this National Conference and the formation of a new and dynamic Servas India Committee. Dr Ramesh Sharma updated the members about the activities of Servas India.

11. Shri Sankar Sanyal invited the State Coordinators and others to report about the activities of their respective states for the benefit of other delegates and also requested them to present their comments and suggestions for strengthening and improving Servas India and making it more active. The following State Coordinators presented their activity reports along with their suggestions about the procedures and policies to be adopted by the new reconstituted National Committee:

- i. Shri Pethu Raja, Newsletter Editor, Tamil Nadu
- ii. Shri Pramod Kumar, Assistant NS, Delhi
- iii. Shri H. A. Mattoo, State Coordinator, Jammu & Kashmir
- iv. Shri Shankar Singh Khuswaha, State Coordinator, Uttar Pradesh
- v. Shri Ram Bhuwan Singh, State Coordinator, Madhya Pradesh
- vi. Shri. Lavanam, State Coordinator, Andhra Pradesh
- vii. Shri K.R. Nanda, State Coordinator, Tamil Nadu
- viii. Smt Sumangala G. Math, State Coordinator, Karnataka
- ix. Shri Sankar Sanyal, State Coordinator, West Bengal
- x. Shri Gurdev Singh Pannu, State Coordinator, Delhi
- xi. Smt Susmita Raut, State Coordinator, Orissa
- xii. Shri. Abhay Shaha, State Coordinator, Maharashtra
- xiii. Shri Ravinder Chauhan, State Coordinator, Himachal Pradesh
- xiv. Shri E. P. Menon, Senior Servas Member, Karnataka
- xv. Shri M. Pappu, Joint Coordinator, Tamil Nadu
- xvi. Shri Pankaj Dube, Joint Coordinator, Madhya Pradesh
- xvii. Kum Rukshmani Ramdas Bhatia, Delegate, Mumbai.
- xviii. Shri Ram Krishana, Senior Servas Member, Pondicherry

12. Shri Bibendra Pradhananga, Servas International, Vice President and the Chief Guest, highlighted the aims and objectives of Servas International for the benefit of the visiting delegates, and also answered the queries raised by the members. He also informed the members of the tenure of the office bearers being three years for any position and that it would be subject to re-election at the next national committee meet. He however suggested that the tenure be reduced and the governing policies and procedures could be modified to suit local requirements. He also mentioned that the concept of life membership did not exist in Servas and this should be kept in mind since Servas India had introduced this concept since its inception.

13. The Chairman of the Conference invited the members to suggest the names for the new Committee of Servas India Board and also the office bearers. There were active deliberations and finally the following members were selected and presented for nomination:

Members of the Servas India Board:

- i. Shri.Gurdev Singh Pannu, Chairperson (Delhi)
- ii. Shri Lavanam, Member (Andhra Pradesh)
- iii. Shri Sankar Kumar Sanyal, Member (West Bengal)
- iv. Shri Pethu Raja, Member (Tamil Nadu)
- v. Shri Nagendra Patel, Member (Gujarat)
- vi. Dr. Ramesh Sharma, Member (Madhya Pradesh)

Office Bearers/Members and their positions:

Name	Position	State		
1. Dr Ramesh Sharma	National Secretary	Madhyapradesh		
2. Shri Sankar Kumar Sanyal	Deputy	West		Bengal
3 Shri Pethu Raja	Deputy	Tamil		Nadu
4 Smt. Geeta Mehta	Peace Secretary	Maharashtra		
5 Shri Pramod Kumar	Host Coordinator	New		Delhi
6 Shri L. V. Subramanian	Newsletter Editor			Karnataka
7 Shri Azone Tetseno	Youth Coordinator	Nagaland		
8 Smt. Sushama Bajpai	Asst. NS	Mumbai		
9 Shri Girish Rawal	Asst. NS	Gujarat		
10 Shri John Nagella	Asst. NS		Andhra	Pradesh
11 Shri H. A. Mattoo	Asst. NS	Jammu	&	Kashmir
12 Smt. Susmita Raut	Asst Peace Secretary	Orissa		
13 Shri Senthil	Asst news editor	Tamil		Nadu
14 Shri Anand C. Raje Shirke	Asst Host Coordinator	Maharashtra		
15 Shri Yagya Dutt Sharma	Executive Member	Rajsthan		
16 Smt. Helly J. Patel	Executive Member	Gujarat		
17 Shri S. Singh	Executive Member	Bihar		
18 Shri S. R. Singh	Executive Member	Manipur		

14. Shri Ram Bhuwan Singh, State Coordinator of Madhya Pradesh proposed the names and these were seconded by Shri Shankar Singh Kushwaha State Coordinator of Uttar Pradesh, Shri. H.A. Mattoo, State Coordinator of Jammu & Kashmir, Shri Lavanam, State Coordinator of Andhra Pradesh and Smt. Sumangala G. Math, State Coordinator of Karnataka.
15. Shri Sanyal invited the opinion of the house and the house unanimously accepted the panel nominated for the Servas India Board and National Committee of Servas India and also appreciated the fact that there was a fair representation of members from all corners of India in the reconstituted executive committee.
16. A two minute silence was observed as a mark of respect for the thousands of lives lost in the Tsunami disaster that had hit the coastal areas of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry, Kerala, Andaman and Nicobar Islands in India and Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives and Thailand and also for Shri P. V. Narasimha Rao, former Prime Minister of our country who had also passed away recently.
17. The policies and procedures for the newly appointed committee were deliberated upon and some of the points which were discussed and agreed upon are detailed below:
 - a. No more Life Members would be enrolled in Servas India. All new members would pay an amount of Rs 500 at the time of their enrollment and their membership would be valid for a period of three years. Thereafter, the membership can be renewed by paying a renewal fee of Rs. 100 per year. For the existing members termed as Life Members, letters would be sent to the members seeking their annual confirmation as to whether they would like to continue with their memberships. The names of those who indicate their desire to resign as members of Servas India would be removed from the Host List. Renewal fees for the continuing members would be decided upon at a later stage. It was also decided that of the membership fees collected would be

apportioned in the ratio of 3:2 between the National and State level committees of the states from where the members had been enrolled.

- b. The Cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai and Bangalore will have facilities for issuing Letters of Introduction to Indian travelers visiting foreign countries, as well as foreign travelers coming to India. A copy of the letter would be sent to the office of National Secretary to reach him within 7 days of issuance of the same. The fee for issuing letters of introduction will be Rs. 600/- for SAARC countries and Rs 1500/- for other than SAARC countries. The fee for Letters of Introduction for visiting foreigners would be Rs 2000/- . All stamp fees will be forwarded to National Secretariat. NS will forward the amount due to SI. After remitting amount due to SI, the NS will pay the State Committees as per agreed ratio.
- c. The national office will be located at Bangalore since the National Secretary is based in Bangalore.
- d. A new Bank account will be opened with three authorised signatories namely Dr. Ramesh Sharma, Shri Pethu Raja and Shri L. V. Subramanian. The cheques for the above account will be operated by joint signatures of any two of the above signatories.
- e. Servas India Newsletter will be published at least once in a year, and if possible, once in 6 months. It will include experiences of members as travelers or hosts. It will also contain new items from international arena and also from the states. A letter to the State Coordinators inviting news items for publication, would be sent shortly.
- f. The full postal address and email address of the National office would be circulated to all.
- g. Advertisements from commercial enterprises, if agreeable in principle would be accepted for publication in the Newsletter
- h. Group tours could be arranged to neighbouring countries having Servas hosts provided sufficient number of travelers were available. This idea was appreciated by all members and supported for implementation.
- i. It was also decided that States having at least 10 members would have a State Coordinator and the appointment of a Joint State Coordinator would be need based and decided based on the location and the spread of hosts in the particular state. The tenure for the position will be for 3 years. The State Coordinators will call for a meeting of their host members to select the new State Coordinator. The States of Jammu & Kashmir, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi have already selected their State Coordinators. The remaining States to complete this by end January 2005.
- j. It was also decided that annual general meetings would be held at various centres wherein the Executive Committee will present the annual report of the activities supported by audited accounts of Servas India and this will be circulated to all members. The National Secretary would require all the State Coordinators to send in their activity reports which will be consolidated and presented to the members in the AGM.
- k. It was also mentioned that all members hosting foreign guests will complete the prescribed format and deposit the same with the respective police stations. This is a police requirement and needs to be adhered to.
- l. It was also decided that in order to host such conferences and in view of the fact that funds were a constraint, there would be a delegate registration fee which would be based on the location and costs of the conference convened. The conference delegate fee would be intimated well in advance and the members would be required to settle the same at the conference site to facilitate timely payments to the service providers.

18. The National Conference concluded with a visit to Isckon temple arranged courtesy of Dr Ramesh Sharma and a Vote of thanks was proposed by Smt. Sumangala, State Coordinator Karnataka with special thanks to Shri Bibendra Pradhananga, Shri Bhajji, Shri Gurdev Singh Pannu, Shri.Lavanam and Dr Ramesh Sharma and to all delegates who had gathered to make this conference a success. There was a resounding vote of thanks from one and all to Dr Ramesh Sharma who took the initiative to convene and organise this Conference with all facilities for the visiting delegates.

Jokes : Some Lighter Moments

1.Hand Delivery: A 17 year old boy was offering Aarthi during the puja in a temple. As usual, all were offering coins or notes by putting the same in the Aarthi plate. All of a sudden an old man was seen removing the coins and notes from the Aarthi plate and putting the same in his pocket .The boy asked respectfully :this belongs to God why are taking these away. The Old man looked at the boy and said "My dear boy , how old are you ? The boy said 17 .The Old man said " I am 70 and I will be meeting shortly and hence I will deliver these money to him directly by hand delivery.

2.Marriage : Two men were at the Gates of Heaven when God were evaluating as to why they should go to Heaven . He asked the first one " Why do you think you should go to Heaven " ? The man replied " I have been married 20 years and have borne a lot of punishment " The God agreed and sent him to heaven. He asked the second man the same question. The second man replied " I have been married twice " God said " Please go to Hell since we have no place for fools in heaven.

3. Death Sentence : The judge passed the death penalty on the convict and asked him as to how he would like to die. The convict replied " In the natural way"

4.Hungry Husband : Please give me something .Rats are running in my stomach

Wife : Have some hot milk .

Husband : feeling relieved, Now the rats will be put to rest

Wife : don't worry .they will for sure since I have put some rat poison in the milk to kill them,

Visit of Mr Peter Postel From Hamburg Germany during the month of May 2005
By L V Subramanian, Bangalore

I have been hosting travelers from Germany/ France/Switzerland but I would like to narrate my family's experience of hosting Mr Peter from Hamburg Germany who came for a period of 2 nights and stayed at my place almost for a week understanding our culture, way of living and our family value systems.

I got an email from Mr Peter aged 52 of Hamburg and he wanted to know whether he could stay with me for a couple of nights. I explained that I was having my aged mother (who could not move about much for opening the door etc) and my daughter who was school going. He confirmed back that he would adjust to our family schedule and he would not be a hindrance to us. I reconfirmed with an welcome invitation that he could spend the two nights at our place. He arrived at our place and understood our family relations. He showed us his credentials and photos of his family. He valued respected and adopted Gandhian values and was a strict vegetarian and teetotaler and fitted in perfectly with our family.

He was a computer programmer working for the University and had taken a year off from his work to be in India and understand the diverse cultures prevailing here. He had traveled all parts of India and stayed with different families and enjoyed his stay with all.

He was keen to know about our customs, how we did pujas. I took him to temple and also to the shops and made him familiar with the bus numbers and bus stops. I thought he will have difficulty but he could manage to travel and reach home well in time. He would help me while preparing dinner and soon learnt the art of making rasam and sambhar during his stay at our place.

He helped my mother with the little household chores and also spent a lot of time speaking to her in English and understanding our culture. He saw the goodness of our joint family and asked me about why I keep my mother with me. I told him about our Hindu philosophy as to how children take care of their aged parents. He became very emotional and said " I am in Hamburg and my mother at the outskirts village all alone but after having seen you take care of your mother, I will also take her with me to Hamburg to the place where I stay." And this he confirmed after reaching Hamburg that he has brought his mother. This gave me and my mother lot of happiness since we could impart some of our valuable hindu value based advise to him which he accepted willingly.

He is regularly in contact with me and has sent us photographs of his family and children and also invited us all to visit Germany and stay at his place.

We found this association a wonderful experience and do look forward to similar ones in the near future.