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HINDUISM

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HIP !



Bakthi Co-ordinator Vidthiya and Keerthana

While other youths spend their time pursuing hobbies popular with the young, Vidthiya Ramasamy engages herself in teaching Hinduism. This, one would say, is a rather unusual interest for someone who is only 24 years old. A graduate from Nanyang Polytechnic with a Diploma in Information Technology and currently an undergrad, Vidthiya is the Coordinator of Project Bakthi, an initiative by the Hindu Endowments Board to introduce Hinduism practices and its values to the young.

"The objective is to show that Hinduism is hip," says Vidthiya, who faces quite a daunting task as she is after all referring to one of the oldest religions in the world. "Project Bakthi's aim is not to arm children with a vast knowledge of the culture and practices. We hope to excite, interest and make them more aware of why things are done a certain way. Hinduism should no longer be regarded by children as being old fashioned and out-of-style," she says.

Targeted at children between the ages of 3 and 14, Bakthi is very much youth driven. The

volunteer teachers are a group of young students and professionals between the ages of 18 and 30. Bakthi's curriculum is designed to show that vedic *mantras*, *shlokas*, stories from the *puranas* and even *bhajans* are meaningful yet enjoyable. Games, puzzles, songs and stories designed by the youth teachers themselves are weaved into the curriculum.

"The volunteers are required to read, research and sift through immense volumes of materials on Hinduism to choose and extract that which applies and suits our Singaporean kids," says S Nallathamby, CEO of the Hindu Endowments Board. "They possess a strong Hindu identity and share a desire to create a vibrant Hindu community in Singapore. Such enthusiasm we have to further cultivate and nurture," he says.

"Today's youths are without doubt up against more societal changes, uncertainties, complications and stress in their lives. However they tend to show more resilience, enterprise and creativity, and not only take things in their



stride, but seem to enjoy themselves too. Such youthful spirit is useful when communicating with children especially when the subject is as complex as Hinduism," says Vemala Rajamanickam, Chairperson of the recently set up Hindu Studies Committee, a sub-committee of the Hindu Endowments Board.

Like Vidhiya, her fellow team of teachers share a passion for the religion and work very hard at showing that the material is relevant in today's context. Some of the interesting features the group had organized for the recent 12-week session included a Hinduism Pyramid Game and a Treasure Hunt peppered with religious puzzles, questions and quizzes staged within a temple.

As little Keerthana Ravi, 3, a participant at the Bakthi workshop on 25th September 2005 chips in "I love Bakthi classes. I love the games we play." It comes as no surprise that over one hundred students decided to find out about the religion the novel way through Bakthi's recent session. Each of Bakthi's twelve-week terms are held at seven Hindu temples (also known as Bakthi Centres) throughout Singapore; these include Sri Sivan, Sri Siva Durga, Sri Vairavimada Kaliyamman, Sri Muneeswaran, Darma Muneeswaran, Murugan Hill and Siva Krishna temples. Each twelve-week term concludes with a special workshop where prominent Indians are invited as guest speakers or judges for the competitions organized.

"Teaching younger kids valuable life lessons is satisfying. What we most look forward to is the bonding beyond the programme. A passion for working with kids, a keen interest in Hinduism and great community spirit are basically what is needed to become a Bakthi teacher," sums up Vidhubala, 23, who has been with the programme since 2002.

Where to get more information?

Enquiries on Project Bakthi can be directed to

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Information is also available at the various Bakthi centres and HEB website : www.heb.gov.sg

