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Learning Journey

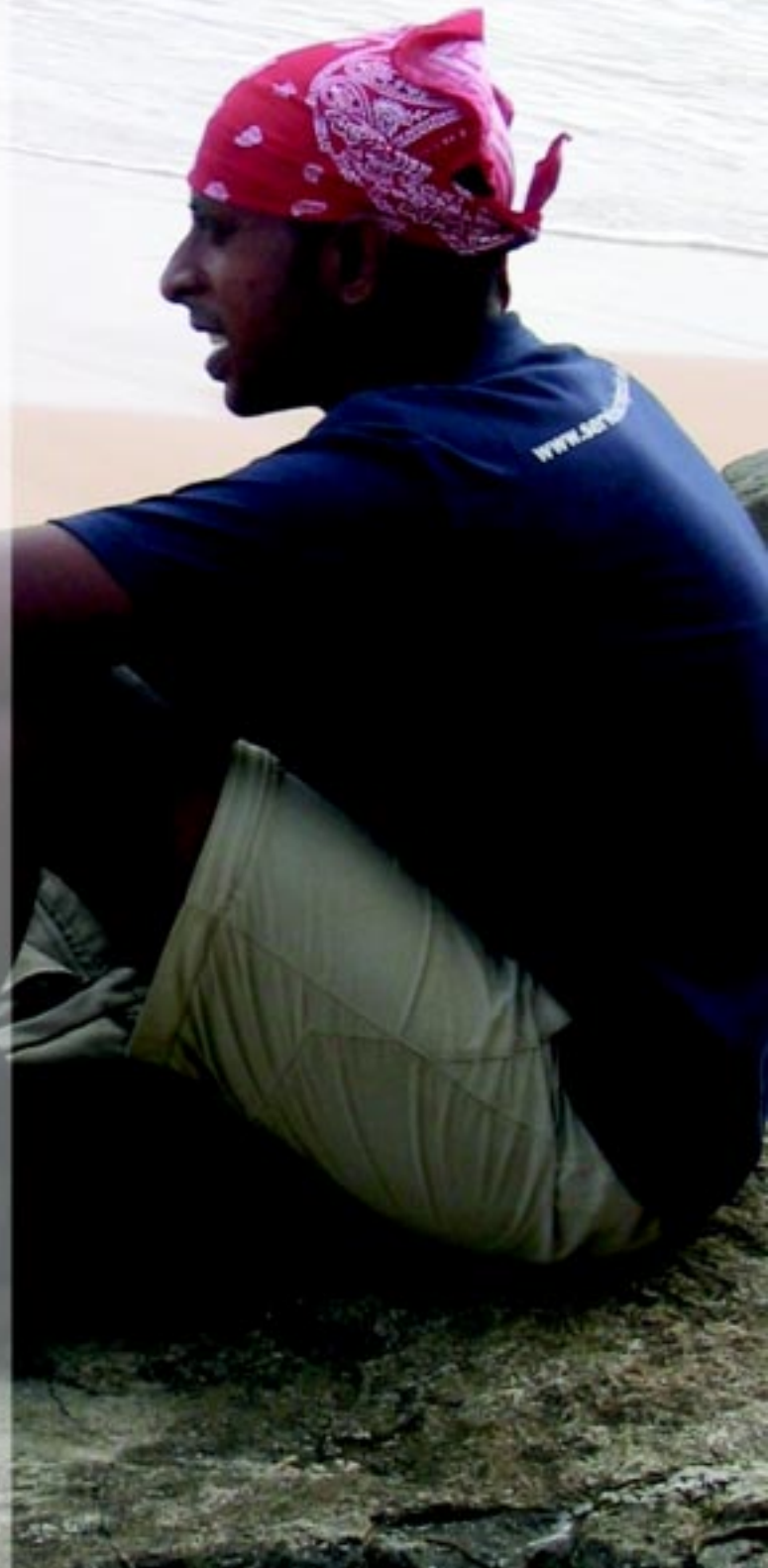
On 1st June 2005, the National Institute of Education (NIE) Service Learning Club (SLC) embarked on a 2-week learning journey to Welligama, Sri Lanka, in an effort to contribute to the community's post-Tsunami rebuilding endeavours. Our primary objective was to refurbish Polwatta School, which was damaged by people who took refuge during the Tsunami. The secondary task was to make beds and shelves for people in the Kathaluwa Internally Displaced People (IDP) Campsite, where those who lost their homes to the catastrophe stay in semi-permanent shelters. Our committed team of experienced and trainee teachers had the time of our lives. The impact of the learning was unbelievable. The trip gave everyone new perspectives in life and unleashed brand new cosmic energy in all of us, just as if we had attained nirvana.

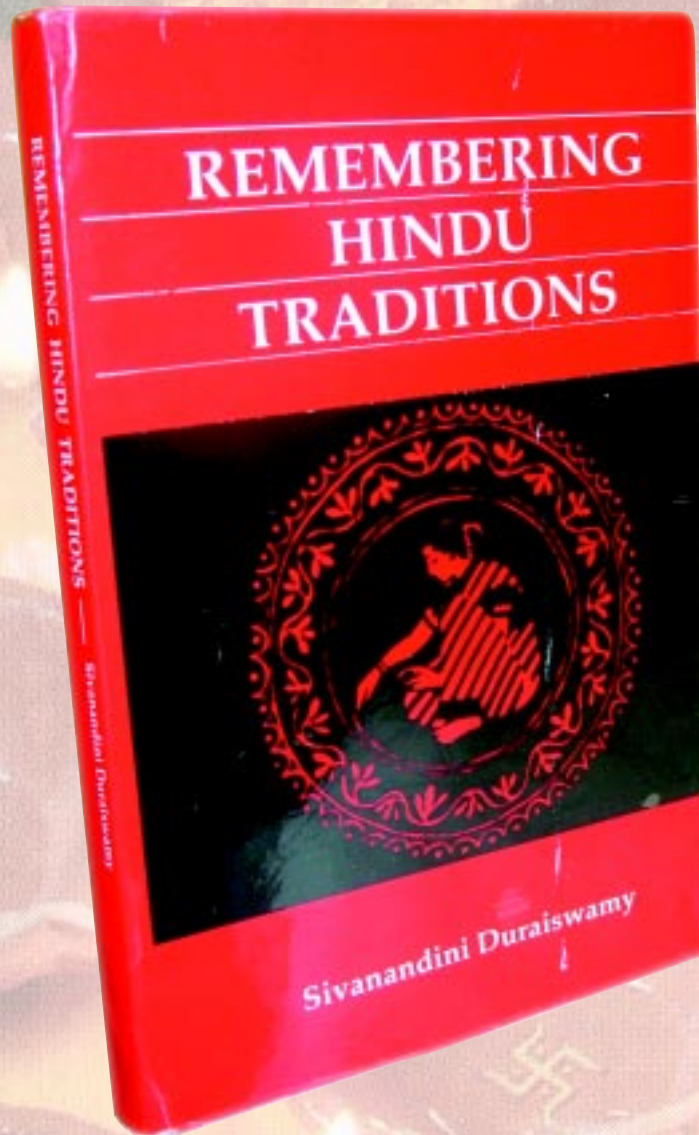
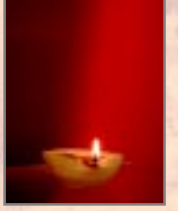
Having gone on a Youth Expedition Project (YEP) previously as a participant and subsequently as a leader, I would confidently say that this mission to Sri Lanka was uniquely beautiful on its own, and totally unlike the others. The finest display of the strength of the human spirit was found throughout the coastal village of Welligama; nobody would ever believe that this country had been hit by a Tsunami less than six months ago. There were young children orphaned by the catastrophe, the rich stripped to their underwear, people who had had seen their loved ones swept away, and others who had lost their businesses and daily livelihoods completely with the waves. But life has to go on. People had picked themselves up and were looking ahead.

A few teachers in Polwatta school drew a plywood mural that said, "The sea is not a demon; it is the gift from nature." Ironic it may seem but it is a fact. Not many of us would have the strength or courage of these fine human beings. Strangely, though we live in a country where basic courtesy, caring and love

for fellow mankind is slowly fading away. I had to travel a few thousand miles to a devastated country like Sri Lanka to rejuvenate in the love and hospitality and to celebrate the spirit of mankind. In a completely irrational and chaotic world, serving the needs of the destitute in serene and genuine Sri Lanka, has given me renewed hope and direction in life.

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This article "Deepavali - The Festival of lights" in Sivanandini Duraisamy's book 'Remembering Hindu Traditions' has been edited and adapted for the Singapore Hindu Readers.

A Bachelor of Arts graduate, Sivanandini has a Diploma in Carnatic Music and is an Associate of the Trinity College of Music, London, in Western Music.

Sivanandini has traveled widely researching and comparing Hindu Thought, Art and Culture with those of other cultures. At the time of writing her book, Sivanandini was editor of Hindu Voice, a publication of the Hindu Council of Sri Lanka and the President of the Saiva Mangaiyar Kalagam (Hindu Women's Society), Sri Lanka.