

Fond Memories of SSSIHMS – The Early Days



I will never forget that day in New Haven, Connecticut. My wife and I were doing our fellowships at the Yale University Hospital. My wife who is a Paediatric cardiologist encountered a lady of Indian origin who happened to be visiting the Yale Paediatric department. Her name was Dr Sridevi Hegde. We invited her home for lunch, which I had the pleasure of

cooking (she apparently took note of this). Over lunch, we happened to mention to her that we were planning to return home to Bangalore after a couple of years. She seemed pleasantly surprised, and warmly suggested that we connect with her if needed for any assistance when we returned. I am not sure if we expected anything, but we both felt that it was sweet of her to be so reassuring and supportive. The **future connection with Swami** was not yet apparent to us.

Fast forward two years. It was 1999 and we had followed our pledge to return to Bangalore. There was one problem, however. I had banked on joining NIMHANS as a Neuroradiologist and was convinced that I would be welcomed with open arms. It was not to be. There was no position available to me when I returned. Given the circumstances at that time, all other doors were closed, and I was obliged to travel back-and-forth to the US to continue to earn a living. At this point in my life, my phone rang, and I am convinced that **Swami's divine intervention** made it ring. At the other end of the phone was Professor AS Hegde, at the time the most renowned and eminent Neurosurgeon in all of Bangalore and Karnataka. He gently (he was always gentle), said to me that he had heard that I was looking for a position and wanted to know if I would be interested in joining the new Hospital being built by Sri Sathya Sai Baba in Whitefield and set up the Radiology Department. I was humbled, honoured, deeply appreciative, and slightly incredulous. For someone like him to reach out to me with such an offer seemed no less than a miracle. Somewhere among His many other divine interventions, Swami appears to have entered my life and opened His heart to me.

I visited the new hospital, both intrigued and fascinated. At that time, it was a huge construction site, and it was a miracle to behold an army of construction workers working night and day to bring to life **Swami's vision** which he had expressed some time before to his followers. It was, at once magnificent and deeply inspiring. I had no hesitation in gratefully, accepting Dr Hegde's generous offer. I received my appointment letter and began from a small temporary office, recruiting the members of my staff and meeting with the vendors of the companies that would be providing the hospital with imaging equipment. Eventually, when the **magnificent edifice** was complete, I recall the **profoundly spiritual** environment of the grand inauguration ceremony in the central hall, with the giant chandelier glittering above us all. To me, that chandelier was a symbol of all that is great about Swami, his **ability to inspire** the wealthiest of the wealthy from all around the world to **give to a cause** greater than themselves.

Moving into the new radiology department was a joy. The wonderful thing about it was the abundance of space, unusual for an Indian hospital. The other amazing thing was the **complete freedom** given to me to build it in whatever way I imagine. Breaking down the wall of the building to install the 1.5T GE MRI scanner is a memory that will always stay with me. The Siemens CT scanner, which was as I recall one of the first 64 slice scanners in the state, was another feather in the cap. For me in particular, being able to use my creativity in everything from uniform selection to designing the folders in which the radiographs would be stored, exercised my every grey cell, both left brain and right, and gave me deep satisfaction.

Able supported by DV Chandrasekhar, who is perhaps the most dedicated, selfless, and yet pragmatic individual I have ever encountered, I set out to build the department infrastructure. One thing I had realised from my years in the US was that it was imperative for Radiology departments to have a PACS (Image Archival) system in an era in which the profusion of images had made it impossible to continue to report scans from printed film. However the budget did not allow for a commercial PACS purchase. And so we came up with an innovation. We used an open source PACS software to design our own departmental archive, using the backbone computer network that existed within the department. It was deeply satisfying to build something from nothing and to experiment in a way that allowed for both **creative innovation and clinical fulfilment**. After all, **the mission was to deliver high-quality healthcare to the poorest of the poor using the best possible infrastructure in the most innovative manner**. Which is how I interpreted my role in Swami's holy mission.

What also made my job particularly rewarding was the presence of other doctors like myself who had returned from the US and were keen to use their skills not for monetary gain, but for **professional and social impact**. One such was Dr Satish Rudrappa, a dynamic and charming neurosurgeon from Detroit, who is today, one of Bangalore's most successful spine surgeons. Back in the day, he would come down in his scrubs with his team for radiology rounds and our intellectual engagement over a complex MRI scan was matched only by the cheerful and sparkling banter that accompanied it. The mix of physicians at the hospital was **varied and stimulating**, which made the workplace ever more enjoyable, and the mission of service inspired by Swami made it all the more deeply satisfying.

I also had the privilege of commissioning the newly deployed biplane Neuroangiography suite. Although I had performed many interventional neuro procedures while in the US at Yale, my skills were not at the level where I felt entirely comfortable doing complex interventions independently. Especially given that the kind of patients that were referred to SSSIHMS had the most complex conditions, and moreover presented at an advanced stage, where most other doctors had given up on them. Therefore, I proposed to the Hospital administration that we invite my former teacher, Professor NK Mishra from AIIMS down to conduct a workshop and perform a series of

complex Interventional procedures as a guide to our department to launch and build the service. The administration readily agreed and the program was a great success, both for the institution, for me personally, and also by **giving hope to the patients** who had till then been lacking in any hope and who benefited greatly from his considerable expertise. On his part, Dr Mishra seemed glad to be a part of such a **noble mission**.

In fact, several other senior Professors from AIIMS, including Professor Venugopal, one of the pioneers of Cardiac surgery in India, unstintingly devoted their time to build the foundations of the magnificent new hospital. In seeing their devotion to the cause of **Swami's mission**, I realised how **powerful** his **vision and purpose** was, that extended to the **highest echelons of academia and government**. Mr. Srinivas, the soft spoken leader seemed to be everywhere at a time when it was needed. Dr Veeravahu the Medical Director and his wife Mrs Veeravahu who headed the nursing department were also sweet and gentle influences that shaped the experiences of those early days. **Gentleness, simplicity and service** defined for me the **Sri Sathya Sai ethos**.

Other memories of those early days include conducting a **CME event/ conference** to which we invited all radiologists in the city to introduce the hospital to them. The profound satisfaction of **serving humanity's most deprived and needy** section, ensuring that they received the **highest level of care, completely free of cost** to them, remains a truly mind-boggling concept then, now and forever.

My time at SSSIHMS imbued in me a **deep sense of gratitude** and inspired me to be humble and selfless in my dealings with others. Seeing the passion and quiet devotion of the army of Swami's volunteers, regardless of their standing in life, made me realise that **Swami's enduring message** for me is that **true greatness lies in humility and service**.

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