

ASHRAYA-THE HOME FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

ABOUT US

Bombay South Kanara Brahmins Association popularly referred to as ‘Gokul’, which was started 90 years ago, is now one of the most prestigious social and cultural organizations in Mumbai. Established in 1925, the B.S.K.B. Association was founded with an objective to provide opportunity and care for deserving members migrating from South Kanara to Mumbai in search of a new vocation and work. Since the time of its inception, ‘B.S.K.B.A’ and ‘GOKUL’ have become names that have come to symbolize the spirit of community, culture and social service. The Association’s operating principles are based on the philosophy of equality, democracy and opportunity for all. Be it through various cultural programs and events organized by the active Youth Wing and Ladies Wing arms of the association or the numerous social service activities undertaken by its members, this organization has always concentrated on giving back to the society. Thanks to the selfless work of its members, the organization is held in high esteem and is respected by one and all in Mumbai.

THE BIRTH OF ASHRAYA

The Platinum Jubilee Year of Gokul was celebrated in a unique way. The Association decided to inaugurate an initiative that would create value and also benefit posterity. Based on the belief that service to humanity is the best offering to Lord Krishna, the members decided to set up ‘A Home for Senior Citizens’ - a home away from home for our elders who could live their twilight years with comfort and in dignity. The committee chaired by the then President Late Shri B.R.Udupa, decided to embark upon this project with this noble intent. The scope of the initiative was wide and was not restricted to only members of our community. Through GOKUL, the BSKBA was able to meet the cultural and social needs of its own community. The Association felt it was time to reach out to the larger cross section of the society with a project that was essential and relevant in today’s times. When we think of our elders and senior citizens, a flood of emotions like values, compassion, dignity, warmth and care swell our minds. They belonged to a

generation who sacrificed their own comforts so that we could have ours and spent their lives trying to enrich ours. For the sake of our happiness, they have made great sacrifices, both personal and professional. The least we must do is to endeavor to make the remaining golden years of their lives both enjoyable and comfortable. As somebody has rightly said “One act of selfless service, one act of real usefulness, is worth all the abstract sentiment in the world”.

THE ASHRAYA JOURNEY

The Association and its members decided to embark on this great new journey of building ‘Ashraya’ -a journey filled with hope, dedication and a deep desire to serve humanity. A home away from home for senior citizens to spend their remaining years in peace, hope and tranquility. The idea of ‘Living with Dignity’ was born out of this dream, an idea that was adopted after considerable debate and scrutiny. Shri A.K.Hebbar, son of one of our illustrious founder members Shri K.S.N.Hebbar, was requested to lead the project. Being very passionate about and wedded to the idea of serving the elders, he too, very willingly accepted this challenge and committed to do his best to bring this into fruition. It was unanimously voted that this dream project would be made in Navi Mumbai.

The search for suitable land/plot then began. Shri B. Balachandra Rao, Shri A.K.Hebbar, Shri K. Subbanna Rao and Shri Nagendra Acharya were requested to take up this responsibility of identifying and procuring the required plot, a process that took almost 4 years of rigorous search and interaction with the CIDCO and other government agencies. Thanks to the sheer perseverance and dogged dedication, the team was successful in getting one of the most prime plots in Nerul, Navi Mumbai. Today, at this very site, ASHRAYA stands proudly as an iconic landmark. One of the senior members of the association and an eminent Civil Engineer, Shri P.H. Shrinivasachar, was then requested to be the advisor for this project.

A project implementation committee was formed to bring this dream to reality. The first meeting of the implementation committee was held at the residence of the Chairman Shri A. K. Hebbar on 1st August 2004. The committee headed by Shri A K Hebbar comprised Shri Laxmish Acharya, Shri Vikyat Hebbar, Shri Gururaj Hebbar and Shri P H Shrinivasachar.

Looking at GOKUL'S impressive track record and strong fundamentals, CIDCO allotted a land, measuring 1825 sq.mts, in Nerul, Navi Mumbai. The land was strategically located and easily accessible with close proximity to both, the Sea-Wood and Nerul Railway Stations, with a 40 ft. wide double road in front, a mall on one side and a huge space behind that could serve as a walk area.

The Bhoomi Puja was conducted on 26th September 2005, in the divine presence of Sri Sri Vishveshatheertha Swamiji of Pejavara Mutt. Even though Shri B.R. Udupa was the then President under whose guidance the project was proposed, the implementation commenced during the tenure of Shri Rama Rao as the President. The final implementation and completion was effected during the tenure of Dr. Suresh Rao who was inducted as President after Shri Rama Rao relinquished the post due to health reasons.

THE FUNDING OF ASHRAYA

Having worked very closely with Dr Suresh Rao's hospital projects and various other charitable programmes for TB eradication and Dialysis treatment, Shri A.K.Hebbar requested Dr Suresh Rao, in March 2006, to support this unique project by taking up the responsibility of raising the required funds for this project. Being equally passionate and having the zeal to take up any charity related work, Dr Suresh Rao took up this challenging assignment. Dr Suresh Rao introduced and planned several activities to collect funds through direct and motivational appeals. As a Chairman of the fund raising committee, he created history in Gokul by mobilizing every member, getting support of high net-worth members, initiating various novel methods of collections to collect more than ₹ 3.5 Crores. He invoked a sense of participation among all members of the association. Collecting these funds was no ordinary task. Dr. Rao and his team put in place a solid strategy and then executed it excellently. The entire team lead by Dr Suresh Rao put up various cultural shows, met various donors and made presentations to them. A record breaking collection through souvenir advertisements, superbly supported by Dr. Suresh Rao and the Hebbar brothers, was a moment of true glory for all.

THE BUILDING OF ASHRAYA

The various processes of calling for tenders from the Civil Contractors, reviewing of contract tenders, short listing the contractors, visiting the sites of the work done by each of the contractors and then finalizing the contract on the basis of the strengths of each contractor were completed by the project implementation committee under the able advice of the project consultant Shri Shrinivasachar.

The contract was awarded to M/S Sabve Rohini. The following contractors and architects were awarded the jobs as enumerated below:-

- M/s Techno Arch Consultants as the architects and engineers.
- Shri. Nalavade as the main architect consultant and Shri. Gokhale as Advisor.
- The Civil Contract to M/S Sabve Rohini
- The Electrical Contract to Shri. Hoshner Subbawalla
- The Interior Decoration to Shri. Pravin Pathare and Mr. Harshad
- The Kitchen contract to Shri. Sadanand Acharya
- The Fire Fighting Equipment consultancy to Shri.Satish Upadhyaya
- The Gas Pipe Line consultancy to Shri.Iqbal
- The Air Conditioning consultancy to Shri. Shridhar Rao Matti and Shri. Pravin Shah
- The Elevators contract to M/s OTIS Elevators.

Prior to awarding the contract, the members of the project implementation committee, had visited several Senior Citizen's Homes in India as well as outside India all at their own costs. They evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of each of these Homes and conceptualized ASHRAYA- A HOME FOR THE SENIOR CITIZENS.

Several hurdles were faced during the construction of the building. The most crucial was when the excavation hit hard rocks with-in a meter and had to be close blasted

without disturbing the neighbours and in compliance with local rules. Then there was sudden escalation in prices of Steel and Cement.

Despite these hurdles, the project was successfully completed within a record time. Shri A.K.Hebbar with his implementation committee comprising Shri Laxmish Acharya, Shri Vikyat Hebbar, Shri Gururaj Hebbar and Shri P H Shrinivasachar, together with Dr. Suresh Rao, spent all their precious time and energy in making this dream come true. The active participation and support extended by the then Vice President, Smt. Suman Chiplunkar, the then Hon. Secretary, Shri A.P.K. Potty and the then Treasurer, Shri Haridas Bhat indeed need a mention of appreciation. A world class Home for the Senior Citizen, ASHRAYA was dedicated to the B.S.K.B. Association in the year 2008.

The Vastu Puja and the Vastu Homa were performed on 11th and 12th July 2008.

The final project cost break up was as under:-

Leased Land & Development	
At Nerul	₹96,82,485
Building at Nerul	₹6,38,04,065
Air Conditioners	₹27,55,250
Kitchen Equipment	₹9,60,836
Solar Energy Equipment	₹3,01,895
Furniture & Fixtures	₹25,62,438
Electrical Fittings	₹56,56,810
Other Equipments	₹5,60,072
Utensils	₹13,375
Lift	₹22,73,000
Gymnasium Equipment	₹1,77,887

Computer & Printer	₹1,48,000
Total expenses	₹8,88,96,114
Source of funds	
Donations Received	₹4,17,34,765
Loan from Bank	₹1,50,00,000
Loan from Members	₹1,28,00,000
Security Deposit from Caterer	₹90,00,000
Total Direct Collections	₹7,85,34,765
Out of Reserves	₹1,03,61,348

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

The financing of the project was a challenge by itself. The project did not look big when the idea was floated. However, when the project took off and construction began, the project cost became sizable. Donations were sought by way of naming the hall etc. Many philanthropists were contacted and further donations were collected.

The completion and finishing of the Senior Citizens' home needed more funds. Some of the commitments made were not fulfilled. There was a gap in the collections and the project cost. The non-earmarked funds available in the trust were also used up. A bank loan was availed for ₹ 100 lacs and a temporary loan of another ₹ 50 lacs was also obtained. The project was ultimately completed with the help of the project implementation and the managing committee members who chipped in funds as temporary loans and further donations for the smooth flow and completion of the project.

Later on during the year 2010-11, the Bank loan was reduced from ₹ 150 lacs to ₹ 50 lacs by collecting some more donations, and the project became self-sufficient

to pay the loan installments then onwards. The balance loan was repaid during the Presidentship of Shri. K.Subbanna Rao.

The project Ashraya was made possible by the relentless efforts of the project implementation committee members. Shri Laxmish Acharya, who was in-charge of the finances was very watchful and through due diligence promptly rectified the wrong billing made by the contractor and saved the project from a significant loss.

THE CREATION OF A HOME

Finally, the inauguration of ASHRAYA was done by His Holiness Sri Sri Visveshatheertha Swamiji of Pejavara Mutt, Shri Suresh Wadkar, a noted musician and the well-known businessman, Shri Rakesh Jhunjhunwala, on 16th November 2008.

Today, ASHRAYA, the Home for the Senior Citizen at Nerul, is one of the landmark institutions in the area with the following salient features:-

- It is open to all, at affordable rates. There are 26 well planned self-contained rooms to house 50 residents.
- On the ground floor Bank facilities, with a strong room in the basement is available for the benefit of the residents.
- A well-equipped Medical Centre, to facilitate the health-care of the residents and a Doctor and a Senior Nurse are available on call all 24 Hrs.
- An air-conditioned community hall for holding various social, cultural and spiritual activities.
- A Prayer Hall and a well-stocked library with 5 computer stations with 24 hour connectivity. Daily newspapers and illustrated weekly and monthly magazines are also subscribed for their reading.
- A Meditation Centre, where Yoga and discourses are being held.
- A self-contained state of the art kitchen with a common, spacious dining hall.

- A well-equipped Gym and a Recreational Centre to suit the Senior Citizens.

Apart from the above, some of the additional features are:

- a) The entire community hall on the 1st floor and banquet hall is fully Air-conditioned. This prevents any disturbance and minimizes noise levels.
- b) There is perpetual load shedding in Navi Mumbai. In order to ensure uninterrupted power supply for the Senior Citizens Home as well as for the entire premises, a 250 KVA noiseless generator has been installed for back up supply of power.
- c) Solar water heaters have been installed to cater to instant hot water requirements in all rooms of the Senior Citizen and also to the kitchens of the home. This saves costs on electricity and at the same time provides comfort to the residents.
- d) There are two elevators and one of them has been designed to transport patients on stretchers in case of emergency. The elevators can take senior citizens right up to the terrace for their evening walks.
- e) All fittings in toilets and bathrooms are of superior quality having longer periods of guarantee.
- f) A well-equipped medical centre has been set up with a view to even perform minor surgeries and a full-fledged first aid trained staff recruited. Dr Dhanavade who has been associated with the medical centre, has been a great asset to the Home.
- g) Intercom facility, Internet facility, CC TV, Cable TV network and Audio Visual entertainment facility for the benefit of the senior citizens.
- h) House Keeping and laundry facilities is provided.
- i) Specially designed and selected non-slippery floorings in bathrooms and steel railings with grip-bars have been installed all along the rooms in order to make movements of senior citizen safer.
- j) Installations of complete fire-fighting equipment and emergency pipelines.

Shri Arvind Ballal and Shri Anil Hebbar donated CCTV and fire security alarm system. Shri Haridas Bhat donated one LCD Television. Shri Chandrashekhar Achar donated Washing Machine and Dryer. Shri Satish S Rao, Dr. T Balakrishna Rao and Shri S R Bala donated computers. Shri A K Hebbar donated a Mini magic Water dispenser. Shri A P K Potty donated a Music System. Shri S V Rao donated moulded chairs. Smt. Jayaprabha Rao & Smt. Asha S Rao donated carrom board and other board games. Many members donated books for the library. Sanjeevani Charitable Trust has been conducting annual health check-up camps at Ashraya for the benefit of the residents as well as the senior citizens in the neighbourhood regularly since its inception and continues to provide medicines at free of cost.

Like all good ideas, the philanthropic thought behind this project was profound yet simple. Senior Citizens need independence, security, serenity and care to lead a dignified life after sixty. The quality of health-care increases the quality of life. At Ashraya, there is a visible positive change among the senior citizen residents. Elders who were admitted in depressed state are cheerful. Elders who came in wheelchairs dare now to walk! There are many elders, whom we know, who are sharing their wisdom, and are still shining in their glorious sunset years, living life with flamboyance and fun. They see life as a gift from God, waiting to be unwrapped each morning into a calm and peaceful life. The main objective of this project was to create a secure, stress-free environment for them, by taking care of every single need, whether it is the availability of a doctor on call, or providing special diet food in the kitchen.

LIFE IN ASHRAYA

ASHRAYA has been a great place that has witnessed unbelievable transformations in the lives of the Senior Citizens. The place is so blessed with positives vibrations that make every one residing there, very happy and cheerful. Added to the environment, it is the dedicated service by the honorary warden, Smt. Chandravathi Rao that needs a mention here. Smt. Chandravati, a retired teacher, has pledged her life to the service of the elders at this Home. Her greatest mantra, “Make them Feel Wanted” has worked wonders. The set of selfless volunteers who visit turn by turn, ensure a round the clock service to the elders.

There was an interesting case of one of the residents Smt. Shirali, who was admitted with multiple health problems. She was in her late 70's. She needed an oxygen cylinder by her side and she could not walk without a walking stick. Even though she managed to move in slow pace to independently attend to her routine calls, she had lost complete confidence in herself. She would not move out of her room and preferred even to have her meals in her room. The moment any of the volunteers started a conversation with her, she would share only her woes. She would justify her confinement in her room. Ashraya's main objective was to involve the residents in various activities and to ensure that residents spend least amount of time in their rooms. With Smt. Shirali, it was always a losing battle.

One day, when some volunteers visited her in her room, she started her usual story narrating her health problems. Upon enquiring why she was in the room when all others were having some fun and were busy in some activities in the common area, she, as usual, complained of her inability to walk. Then she was asked about whether she had paid a visit to various facilities that were specially offered to the residents. To this she again told them that she had not seen because she could not walk. Then somehow the volunteers were able to convince her to come out of the room with her walking stick and decided to take her on a guided tour of Ashraya. Reluctant, though, as she always was, she agreed to accompany them. They took her to the Temple room and she was pleased to have darshan of Lord Ganesh who happened to be her favourite Deity. Then they took her to the Gym area and she reacted by saying that she couldn't do all this because of her health problems. Thereafter she was taken to the library where she complained about not being able to sit for long. Then lastly they took her to the recreation area and the moment she saw the carom board her joy knew no bounds. When asked about her liking for the game, she immediately said that she was a champion in her school days. The volunteers set the carom table and asked her to play with them. It was a scene to be saved, the way she was engrossed in playing like a real school kid. She would aim at the Queen and advise every one where the striker should be and how the shot should be hit.

After an hour, Smt. Shirali who appeared hungry told the volunteers that it was time to have lunch but told them not to disturb the coins as she wanted the game to

continue. She then just got up and started walking straight to the stairs without her walking stick. When she was nearing the lift, the volunteers asked her whether she wanted her walking stick. Immediately she pounced on her stick and said that she just could not walk without the stick. She had already walked the entire lobby by then.

Knowing her weakness for the carom board, the volunteers spent a lot of time in games that interested her. Smt. Shirali, by the end of two months, was a different lady altogether. She had completely stopped complaining about her health. She had hardly used the oxygen cylinder and went to her room only for her afternoon siesta.

On completion of the three months stay, she had to return because her only son and daughter-in-law returned from their assignment abroad and wanted to take her back to their home. She very reluctantly parted with Ashraya.

After a few months, the daughter-in-law called our warden and gave the shocking news of Smt. Shirali's sad demise. She wanted to come to Ashraya and fulfill her Mother-in-law's last wish of having a get-together with all residents and staff members. She booked a banquet hall and organized a prayer meeting followed by lunch to everyone. During the prayer meeting, the daughter-in-law revealed that after her Mother-in-law's return from Ashraya, she was such a changed person that she had not seen her so cheerful and lively since she was married to this family. Every day she would talk about Ashraya. She wanted to host lunch to all the residents and the staff one day but her end came all too sudden. The family fulfilled Smt. Shirali's last wish.

Another incident needs a mention here. One 84 year old resident, would always have only curd rice for her meal. The volunteers persuaded her to have other diet food that was served. The volunteers adopted a "make them feel wanted" attitude towards her. Slowly she started on other food and the change was so drastic that after a while, this 84 year old resident would cook the entire meal for all the residents on every Wednesday.

There are many such wonderful stories of about transformation and it is a matter of pride for us that residents of Ashraya are living like one happy family.

Ashraya has many activities for the residents and volunteers. One of them is the Toastmasters club. The participants are given a topic the previous day and the next day, they are asked to speak on that topic. It is yet another event worth watching to how well each one is prepared. There is absolutely no inhibition when they talk and no holds barred.

The annual extravaganza is one other event worth mentioning. Every year the 'The World Senior Citizen's Day' is celebrated on 1st October. The residents take part in fancy dress competition and other events. Smt. Ratna Acharya, a patron member of the BSKB Association has instituted a coveted Trophy that would be given every year to the best Senior Citizen Resident of Ashraya who excels in participation, involvement and creativity throughout the year. For every participation in the events conducted, each participant is judged and a star is awarded. The resident who gets maximum number of stars is declared the winner of the Year's Trophy. In the year 2012, there was a 'fashion show' by the residents. Each one walked the ramp in one of the finest shows of the year. The enthusiasm among the elders in preparing for such events and their willingness to participate is worthy of praise. Similarly in the year 2013 and 2014, the Senior Citizens participated in various events and year after year their performance have been commendable. In 2014, Honorable Justice Srikrishna, a retired Supreme Court Judge, was a Chief Guest for the annual function. He not only appreciated the facilities but shared the enthusiasm of the residents by fully participating in the function as one of them and donated ₹ 1 lac as a kind gesture. Indeed having a place like Ashraya is a great blessing in today's time and certainly a most needed institution. Many social organizations have come forward to initiate such events. One of them that needs a mention is the Lioness Club of Vasant Vihar, Chembur who have relentlessly, year after year, sponsored and conducted events for the benefit of the senior citizens. A special mention of our member Smt. Chitra Melmane, who has been instrumental in bringing the Lioness Club of Vasant Vihar to Ashraya is in order.

ASHRAYA: TODAY and TOMORROW

A deep belief in serving humanity is the fundamental idea behind Ashraya. From our humble beginnings to our present reality, we have always relied on the adage that the more you give the more you get. As we move forward, we shall continue to

act as agents of change to improve conditions of living for the senior citizens. While marching towards a brighter tomorrow, we will be guided by the founding principles of celebrating individuality, providing low cost affordable services while maintaining the highest standards. Above all, it would be our constant endeavor to ensure that our senior citizens live in and with dignity.

APPEAL.....

Having come a long way since inception, the Ashraya has been in great demand. The rooms are full and we have no vacancy to admit more who are in need of such a facility. Today, there is a compelling need for such 'Homes' and moreover there is a shortage of well administered and state of the art 'Homes'. Ashraya has earned a great name and recognition among such 'Homes'. There is already a long list of senior citizens who have registered their names in the waitlist. The list has crossed 40 names and so it is evidently high time for Gokul/BSKB Association committee to seriously contemplate on possibilities of raising one more floor to the present structure. This can add on another 20 rooms and help at least 40 deserving members.

Keeping this in mind the association is now contemplating on increasing the capacity of the rooms by adding an additional floor on the terrace. The architects and engineers are working to make this possible. The total cost of raising one floor and thereby adding additional 20 rooms is about ₹ 3 Crores. This can be made possible only if members donate generously and participate in making this happen.

The association, today, can be justifiably proud of creating one of the finest institutions of modern times, after our forefathers created the Gokul, almost six decades ago. In the journey of the B.S.K.B. Association, from the time of its inception to the present day, the creation of Ashraya will be remembered and viewed as one of the most significant milestones.

We appeal to you to strengthen this institution and make it even more significant and valuable to the society by making financial contribution towards its development project.

Managing Committee,
BSKB Association