

“Persevere, Preserve, And Promote”: Volunteerism Is The Focus Of Shishu Bharati’s Graduation Event

“Persevere, preserve, and promote.” Despite its small beginnings, Shishu Bharati has lived and thrived by this mantra, growing over the decades to teach over a thousand children about their Indian heritages. And on Sunday, June 21st, 2015, in celebration of adding yet more young Indian Americans to this group of educated individuals, the vast Shishu Bharati community - students, volunteers, alumni, parents, and faculty - gathered together at Lexington High School to celebrate the graduation of its class of 2015, the largest class ever to graduate from the institution.

Display boards, jeopardy games, cookbooks, picture books and memory games were among the sixty or so projects that decorated the Shishu Bharati Assembly Hall at Lexington High School on June 21st (Sunday) morning at nine as a part of the graduation ceremony. Regardless of the form of the presentation itself, each student clearly demonstrated the knowledge and understanding he/she had acquired regarding his/her chosen language throughout his/her years of study at Shishu Bharati. Some of the projects included Racko, a card game, in Hindi, Hindi monopoly, or ‘vyapar,’ as it was called, and even a cookbook in Tamil. In particular, one project that stood out was a tri-fold board entitled “Hindi thru the years,” a presentation that reflected upon an astounding amount of information that had been acquired regarding the Hindi language by highlighting a specific lesson learned each year. This was unique, seeing as it placed importance upon the steps required to learn an entire language, as opposed to simply presenting the final product. Overall, the projects exemplified the students’ understanding of the major Indian languages, including Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Marathi, Tamil and Telugu. After a brief period of glancing at and listening to presentations, friends and family were directed to the auditorium, officially signaling the start of the graduation ceremony.

The ceremony began with a performance by the Shishu Bharati alumni band. The Band members first performed “The Star-Spangled Banner,” honoring the American heritages of the graduates, and then the Indian national anthem “Jana Gana Mana,” honoring their Indian heritages as well. Dr. Seshi Sompuram, the president of the organization, then addressed the graduating class, wishing the graduates good luck in their futures, and honored the parents, volunteers, and teachers who had tirelessly dedicated themselves to persevering, preserving, and promoting the Shishu Bharati cause. The principal of the Nashua Shishu Bharati branch then took the podium to highlight key members who had

been instrumental in educating the graduates. He thanked both Dr. Sompuram, for the guidance he had provided as president of the organization, and the faculty of Shishu Bharati as well, for teaching and helping the students.

Master of the Ceremonies, Ms. Aurohi Shah, then invited Ms. Gita Ramamurthi, a Shishu Bharati alumna of 2003 and a volunteer of the WorldTeach program, to give a speech reflecting on her own experiences as a Shishu Bharati graduate. One point she repeatedly emphasized was how Shishu Bharati had radically influenced her mentality and perception of the world. She explained that Shishu Bharati had expanded her thinking, allowing her to view and perceive other countries with the same open-minded, intellectual curiosity she had been taught to view India—a lesson that came handy, when she later volunteered in various countries including in Africa. Furthermore, she told the graduating class that Shishu Bharati had taught her the importance of volunteerism, and advised the soon-to-be graduates to similarly attempt to selflessly contribute to the world.

The event's keynote speaker, Dr. Vijaykumar Vemulapalli, gave advice to the graduating class of a similar note. Dr. Vemulapalli first explained his own background to the students: he was a volunteer with Vibha, an organization whose goal was to empower impoverished children in both India and the United States. In addition to drawing on his own experience as a volunteer, he also offered the class the example of the volunteerism the teachers at Shishu Bharati had practiced throughout the students' entire education: how their selfless efforts had laid the ethical and moral foundations that had allowed the students to mature as individuals. He urged both the students and their parents to similarly make volunteerism a part of their daily schedules, and attempt to contribute to the world in a larger way through simple activities like volunteering in a nearby soup kitchen. He also offered an insightful bit of advice by encouraging adults and kids alike to do everything with a set goal in mind and live with purpose.

Dr. Krishna Gazula, teacher of the eighth grade culture class and a director of the Shishu Bharati organization, then conducted the awarding of the diplomas to the soon-to-be graduates. As the students were called up to take their diplomas, they were handed a diploma by a teacher they had previously chosen and a plaque by their school principal. The Lexington Shishu Bharati principal and 2014 recipient of the India New England News Life Time Achievement Award, Ms. Sipra Shah, then took the podium to congratulate the graduating class; she instructed them not only to follow their passions and their dreams, but to also serve the community. "Happiness," she told them, "is the fruit of volunteering."

Dr. Vinay Ingle then proceeded to give the vote of thanks. Highlighting once again the behind-the-scenes work the Shishu Bharati teachers did during the school year, he thanked the faculty for their hard work and dedication to their students. He then thanked both the parents for instilling in their children the desire to learn about their heritages and the graduating students themselves for their dedication to learning about Indian culture and languages through the years. Then, concluding the graduation event, Dr. Ingle called on the theme of volunteerism that had repeatedly been underscored throughout the morning and told the students that he hoped to see them give back to the community and volunteer at Shishu Bharati in the near future.

Following the graduation ceremony, all attendees were served a delicious South Indian lunch. Big thanks to all the individuals who made this day possible and congratulations to the 27th graduating class of Shishu Bharati.