



A Day with Parvatham Paatti

Field notes of a young INDIAN intern, 2023



Parvatham Paatti cuts a short, wiry figure at first glance. Her wizened grey hair and figure contradicts her relatively young age of 52 and her bustling nature. Like many at the Ashram, I have affectionately come to call her Patti too. The first time I met her, was when she came in with her five-year-old granddaughter, Sara and politely asked for the groceries that were assured to her from Shanti Ashram's Food Bank. I didn't think much of it until I learned that they were indirect victims of the COVID-19 pandemic – yes, the same COVID 19 pandemic that affected us all!

The COVID-19 Pandemic resulted in the breakdown of multiple marriages marred by socio-economic pressure, unemployment, domestic violence and a growing list of causes I came to discover. The marriage of Sara's parents was no different. They both abandoned Sara without getting a divorce and eventually settled in different cities. Paatti was suddenly saddled with taking care of her son's daughter. Paatti took on this difficult endeavour with an open heart.

When I asked Paatti if she found it hard taking care of Sara, she responded with a firm NO! She says seeing Sara grow up day by day fills her with joy and she thinks getting to take care of Sara is the best thing that has happened to her. She talks with fondness about their daily bickering which immediately comes to a stop once their favourite show 'Iniya' is broadcast.

Parvatham Patti talks of her hopes and aspirations saying she wishes that she can provide for Sara's education and help her go to college and have a stable life where she can rely on herself. Both grandmother and granddaughter eagerly chatter about Christmas and their plans to celebrate by going to Church and having fun with fellow Parish members. Sara eagerly pipes in and hints at her wish to get her Paatti Special Biryani.

Parvatham Paatti paints a very strong, no nonsensical picture. She puts herself out in society and does whatever she can for Sara. With her husband's earnings as an electrician, rations and a monthly stipend from the government, and some additional groceries from Shanti Ashram's food bank, barely manages to make ends- The family however has some troubles which Paatti is quite open about.

One big issue is Sara's lack of an Aadhar card which is essential for her enrolment into elementary school next year along with access to multiple other essential government benefits. The Registry officials insist on Sara's parents coming since her parents are still married and live with Sara on paper, because of which Paatti and her husband don't get recognized as the official guardians. This however has not deterred Paatti. She ran pillar-to-post to figure out how she could get recognized as Sara's guardian. As a result of her efforts, Sara has now been enrolled in her grandparents' family card which officially recognizes her as the immediate family of Paatti. This enrolment is said to improve her chances of getting Sara an Aadhar card. This is one of the many incidents which showcase Paatti's never-say-die attitude.

One important pillar of support for this strong woman is her husband. While Rajan makes very less as an electrician cum carpenter, he does his best at earning to take care of his family and also helps out in the house. The day I met him, Rajan was in the midst of laundry, washing Sara's favourite gown with care so that she could wear it for Christmas celebrations. This gentle and caring person is one of the self-proclaimed reasons for Paatti's courage and ability to take care of the family. Together, the couple work earnestly to take care of a growing Sara and do their best to ensure Sara doesn't ever feel like she lacks something- especially the absence of her parents. This is reflected in their inability to say no to anything Sara asks for. They are also extremely protective of Sara and don't let her out unless it's for school or a visit to the Church or the shops. **Striking the balance between indulgent grandparents and strict caregivers is something that the couple is still working on.** *Parvatham Paatti's story is one of resilience and something that I will not forget easily.*



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18 year old Suha K is pursuing her first year BA LLB Hons (First Year) at the Gujarat National Law University, Gandhinagar. She successfully completed a 4 week internship at Shanti Ashram's Youth Leadership Programme in December 2023. At her final presentation, she said this real-life immersion in development outreach particularly with vulnerable children helped her see the meaningful link between policy & practice, individual development and collective progress.

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