

Maanaw Seva Association

Making difference in Edmonton, Canada, and India.

By Allan Sheppard - December 2012

When Jivan Kayande arrived in Edmonton in 1967, his plan was to take a degree in engineering and return to India. After graduating, he decided to stay for a few years to earn money to pay back a family member who had helped finance his studies and to save enough to return home “a rich man.” Forty-five years later, he is still here, firmly and happily settled as a proud Canadian and enjoying a busy retirement.

Putting down new roots in Alberta did not mean Kayande had to sever his ties to family and friends in India. Like others who followed a similar path, he took advantage of inexpensive travel opportunities to maintain relationships.

In 1991 Dr. Jagannath Wani and few friends, including Kayande, Ramesh Aggarawal, Ashok Bhasin, and Harendra Upadhyaya set up the Maanaw Seva Association (MSA) to help communities in Edmonton, now their home, and India, their homeland.

Maanaw Seva’s current objectives include education, health, and social service projects for poor and needy communities and projects to foster Canadian awareness and understanding of the cultural backgrounds of Canadians with roots in India.

Often in partnership with other organizations, MSA works locally, in the Edmonton area, and internationally. Its international projects have so far been only in India, but Kayande says MSA is open to proposals that meet its objectives in any part of the world.

Locally, MSA supports programs for youth who face issues and problems of dealing with two cultures. It also helps seniors adapt to cultural, health, financial, and housing challenges. It has sponsored one-day seminars, A Matter of Heart and A Matter of Cancer, to make its community aware of major health issues. MSA supports inner city schools selected by the Edmonton Public School Board with money for equipment and lunches.

Under its cultural awareness objective, Maanaw Seva publishes books and produces video documentaries that share the stories, achievements, visions, and contributions of prominent indo-Canadian leaders. So far, MSA has published one book: **Among Friends—Robinson Koilpillai: Teacher, Citizen of Canada, Advocate for Common Humanity.**

MSA has produced one documentary and supported another.

Pandit (that is, scholar and teacher) Shiv Shankar Dwivedi, affectionately referred to by his Hindu Society of Alberta temple members as “Panditji,” is the first subject of a projected Heritage Series of documentaries. **The Three Lives of Panditji** follows Dwivedi’s journey from his home village of Atsalia, in Uttar Pradesh, India to Edmonton,

emphasizing his efforts to build bridges of support from Edmonton to his village and of spiritual community among his congregation in Edmonton.

MSA supported production of **Gurukulam**, an independent feature-length documentary that explores Advaita Vedanta, a Hindu wisdom tradition.

Kayande says the books and documentaries are important for MSA's future. "They inspire youths and others in the community to do good things in their lives. We want to motivate them to support and join Maanaw Seva and other organizations."

Internationally, MSA works to help needy communities, especially in poor villages, through projects related to education, health and hygiene, and basic needs—such as water.

One of the first such projects was inspired by Panditji Shiv Shankar Dwivedi. Shortly after he arrived in Edmonton, Dwivedi began work on a dream to build the first school in his home village of Atsalia, Utter Pradesh. With the help of few people of his mandir (temple), Dwivedi started the school in 1992, making it free and equally available to boys and girls.

When in 1996 the MSA executives became aware of Dwivedi and the school, they organized an annual walkathon, now known as Walk for Children's Future, to make people in and near Edmonton aware of the school and raise money for it. Their timing was good. "In the 1990s money became available in matching grants from the Government of Alberta, to a maximum of \$25,000. If we raised \$25,000 for an approved project, the government would match it," Kayande recalls. "The grants have been reduced since then, but we can still get government support for projects overseas."

Other international education projects supported by MSA include scholarships for women students at Community College of Engineering in Nagpur and funding for a tribal girls' hostel in Gujarat. MSA has purchased a vehicle for an addiction relief society in Maharashtra, helped fund a leprosy colony in Tamil Nadu, and helped fund orphanages, among many projects. Since its formation, MSA has sent more than \$1 million to India for operating and capital projects.

"Maanaw Seva Association is a small society, but very flexible in helping where it is required" says Kayande, the current President. "We want to keep things simple and focus on helping needy communities and people. We have always been supported generously by volunteers, who help with fund-raising and keep us in touch with our community."

Maanaw Seva is a registered charitable society that raises funds through personal and business donations, fund-raising, casinos, and grants from the Community Initiatives Program of the Alberta government.

Information on MSA, publications, activities, and projects is available on its web site, www.mseva.org, and by calling Rohit Desai at 780 431-0377.