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Immersed in mother's work

By BRIGITTE ROZARIO

### Miliee Kassim feels blessed to have met Amma and to be a trustee of her charity foundation.

With her only concern in alleviating her mother's pain, Miliee Kassim decided to go see Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, the hugging lady affectionately known as "Amma" (or Mother), just to "try" and see if she could help.



Joy in giving: Miliee Kassim finds charity work extremely fulfilling. – Photo by GLENN GUAN / The Star

After one visit, her mother said she no longer wanted the painkillers.

"We went to see the doctor and took an X-ray to see what actually happened. Her fractured arm had actually mended so she was not in pain anymore. She was not fully healed but she could move. That was all we were asking for – for her not to be in pain," recalls Miliee.

Whether it was actually Amma's work or if her mother's arm healed by itself or even whether it was all in her mother's mind, nobody

will ever know.

Miliee's mother passed away one year after meeting Amma.

Today, Miliee says she feels as if she has gained another mother through Amma whom she has become better acquainted with since.

In fact, Amma wanted to set up her charity foundation here in Malaysia and asked Miliee if she would agree to be one of the trustees.

"I think asking me to be a trustee is her way of telling people that she is beyond religion and race. I hope she also saw something in me but I know I am blessed to be asked to do such wonderful work.

"When she first asked me to be a trustee, I cried. All over the world, her charity work is such a huge success. Here in

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Malaysia it was going to take off and this (responsibility) was resting on my shoulders.

"I wondered if I could handle it. After all, I didn't have social work in my background. I come from a background in business.

"Would I be able to handle it? I knew my friends would be ever willing to help, but would I be able to actually roll up my sleeves and do the work? That was something I didn't know. But, Amma told me to take it one step at a time," says Miliee.

Although she has her own business – a souvenir shop concentrating on corporate sales – Miliee says it is on the back burner now as she finds her work as trustee with the Amriteswari Foundation of Malaysia more fulfilling.

"Actually doing the foundation's work makes me much more grateful to God and much more appreciative of what I have because I see the number of people who don't have a fraction of what I have and to be able to assist them is fantastic," says Miliee.

She is at the foundation's support centre for single mothers in Bandar Kinrara, Puchong, every week to check if everything is okay and to see if anything is needed.



"Some of the families have no income, or if the single mother goes to work, there is no one to take care of the children. What we saw was children as young as 12 taking care of the younger siblings. So they were not going to school," informs Miliee.

With love for all: 'Hugging Mother' Amma is an inspiration to Miliee Kassim. – Photo by RICKY LAI / The Star

The Amriteswari Foundation has rented a place at Bandar Kinrara which acts as a support centre. It offers baking lessons and sewing lessons for the single mothers as well as tuition classes for the children.

"We find that some children go for tuition on empty stomachs so we also have a pantry and we make sure it's stocked up with dry foods. When they go for tuition, if they're hungry they say so and we make sure they have something in their stomach.

"Every Saturday, we have singing classes for the children and then we cook dinner so that at least once a week they eat well even if they haven't eaten well the whole week," says Miliee.

In addition, the foundation also hopes to start a free clinic in Old Klang Road soon. The foundation is now looking for a doctor to man the clinic.

"This is for those who are sick and cannot afford to go to other clinics or even for those who can afford but don't mind coming to see the doctor by way of donation. If you

come in and you don't have money, it's okay. We will take care of the basic medication for you. But if you want, you can also give back something. Give whatever you can afford.

"We are not giving out any medical certificates because we don't want the clinic to be abused," explains Miliee.

The foundation, she informs, also hopes to build a three-storey building which will serve as a vocational training centre and tuition centre.

The vocational training centre will help teenagers who find they are unable to study and leave school after Form Three. It will arm them with mechanical or electrical training so that they can work and be independent.

Miliee, who is not involved in any other social work, says she gets great satisfaction from working with the foundation.

"It's extremely fulfilling and, yes, I have a very understanding husband who allows me to do what I am doing now and in fact, he encourages it. He says we have a very blessed life, God has been very kind to us, our children are healthy, we are all healthy, we can still do a lot of things and this (foundation work) is a way of saying thank you to God for blessing us with so much," says Miliee.

Her husband is Mohd Kassim Sulong, founder of Kassim Chan & Co.

Is she at all concerned that people will talk because she is a Muslim while Amma is very much seen as a Hindu and some might even think Amma's work is religious in nature?

In fact, Miliee says that in Cochin, Amma has built a lot of free housing for the Muslim single mothers. So she doesn't only help those of a particular race or religion.

"I don't think one should fear (that people will talk). If your intention is right – which is to help the poor and the suffering – then whatever people say doesn't matter.

"But Amma is just love. She just gives love; love and compassion, that's all it is. So, if people want to put her in a box, there's nothing much anybody can do about it. What I would say is try to understand what Amma does. It is basically just giving love.

"I remember Amma said to me that when I take on this task, to have no expectations that people will praise me or say nice things to me. In fact, she told me to expect that people will throw rotten eggs at me and criticise me. She said, when you have those expectations then you will never be disappointed," recalls Miliee.

The comments she has received have actually been quite good as she gets a lot of gratitude and appreciation from the single mothers and the children that the foundation helps.

Miliee, whose former life included high-tea and shopping, says she would not have imagined in a million years that she would be doing what she is doing now.

"I would have thought why not buy a new car, go for a

holiday or buy new clothes? What surprises me about Amma is that she sits there day in and day out hugging people.

"She's the most hardworking person you can ever find in the world. She's always surrounded by people. She's always there to wipe away people's tears and to listen to their sorrows. All sorts of people come to see her. I've seen her doing that day in and day out. She has so much to give.

"I think if I can just give one tiny fraction of what she gives, that's good enough for me. I'll take it one step at a time. I find that the more I give, the more my capacity to do a lot more things," says Miliee.

The mother of three says she now views things differently as her perspective on life has changed.

"I find that we take things for granted. We always want to acquire more things. But if you can, make your life simpler. You can live without all these wants. The more simple your life, the more peaceful you become because you get away from wanting to keep up with the Joneses and you become comfortable with what you are and what you have," she adds.

Miliee can be contacted at 012-310 6398.

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