Puchong's Sanctuary for Homeless Kids
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World War II left Malaysia - and most of South Asia - thinking they had been more damned than saved. Victory was printed on all the headlines but loss was printed on everything else. Families were left in rubble heaps like crushed buildings. Widows and orphans wandered homeless. The sight of the children especially unnerved Swami Satyananda, then a monk of the Ramakrishna Order and already serving in its social service wing. He felt helpless. He wanted to help more, much more, but his vows strictly forbade it. Anguished, he left the order and in 1952 established a home for destitute children in Puchong, a short distance from Kuala Lumpur. It was an ideal spot, brimming with new growth and vitality. For swami it was the haven he had been waiting for. Well-versed in Taoist, Buddhist, Muslim and Christian teachings, he lectured frequently, building much-needed bridges between Malaysia's mixed religious and ethnic groups.

Though Hindu culture inescapably colors the orphanage today, the swami predictably instituted a Ramakrishna-like universality for its religious basis. Its crest reads, One God, One World, One Race. Every child here is allowed to follow his or her own religion," explains Mrs. Mangalam who heads the home since the Swami's passing. "This is what swami Satyananda propagated. We have Hindu, Christian and Buddhist children here and every Tuesday, Fridays and Sundays we hold prayer sessions.

Today the home bubbles with the laughter of 150 children. Education of every kind is lovingly given - Bharata Natyam, Carnatic singing and drumming, besides standard school subjects. "It has been tough going, but our prayers have always been heard," Mother Mangalam shared with HINDUISM TODAY. "I always tell the children if you pray hard and sincerely. God listens in and He has not let us down," she testifies. "It wasn't easy. No one thought that we could pull this off. Even Swamiji himself had reservations in the beginning but there was just too much

heartache and pain in our midst. For a while we were placing children in foster homes. Every week I would follow swamiji to visit these children who were often treated like servants. He felt strongly they be given more love and comfort. Then one day, after praying, he called and said we would be setting up a home. We had no money or place then," she vividly recalls. Mrs. Parasivam, orphaned at age 10, grew up at the home. Now their dance teacher, she reminisces, "When my parents died, I felt that my world had collapsed from under me. I had nowhere to go and ended up here. I remember going through the usual adjustments, hating the regimentation etc. We were all from different religions and were taught dharma and love for your fellow human." It was in this situation she says learned the truest meaning of real friendship.

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