

A home for Gujarati elders AWAY FROM HOME

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Matru Devo Bhava; Pitru Devo Bhava.

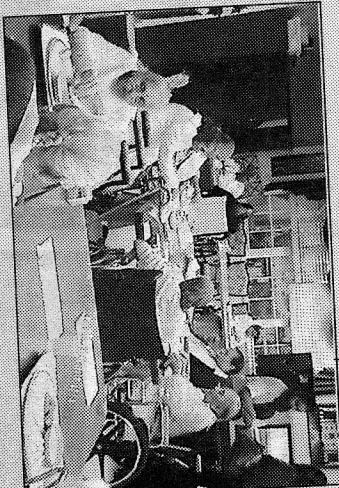
This is the mission de accompli of an Indian doctor couple—Dr Mukund Thaker and his wife Ramaben—serving selflessly at the Indian programme at Alameda Centre for Rehabilitation and Care. It is a humane service par excellence as people who have come here do not want to go back to their home.

The Indian programme at the centre is like a home away from the home for the old and infirm, for those who need round-the-clock help and are in wheel chairs. Not only is it a home-like environment but even the settings are like any traditional Gujarati home equipped with a small temple, a huge 52 inch television set, music system, Gujarati food like rotli, vegetables, pulses and even sweets like jalebi and adadiya being served to the people.

The feather in the cap is that the occupants are served traditional masala tea both in the morning and evening with snacks like papdi, ganthiya

and even khakhara. The centre has ensured that it has a complete Indian setting with Indian doctors and staff, Indian religious and cultural services, Indian food and Indian music. Even the ambulance driver is an Indian. The occupants are shown television series like Ramanayan, Krishna and Lu-V-Kush. And almost all Indian festivals are celebrated at the centre.

According to Mukundbhai, who looks after the Indian programme: "Currently we have 37 occupants at the centre was opened in July last year. I was a doctor in Ahmedabad from 1977 to 1988 and came



Dr Mukund Thaker and his wife Rama. (Left) Elderly people enjoying a meal at their 'home'



to the USA in 1989 and have been found out that our Gujarati people with old age feel terribly depressed living a lonely life in this country." "It was then that I approached Michael

Neiman, the administrator of the centre and said that I would like to have my "parents" shifted here. Michael agreed readily and even offered to vacate one room for my "parents". I then said it is not just a question of one room but I have 50 such parents who need accommodation. He offered me the third floor at the centre which now houses the Indian Centre", said Mukundbhai with a sense of pride.

"The situation is such that today we have a wait list of 124 people who would like to come to our centre" said Mukundbhai. "We do not charge anything from the patients who stay with us. Everything is taken care of by the medical aid and insurance". Asked how he manages the show, Mukundbhai points his finger at the various images of Gods and Goddess that hang around in his small room. Neiman, who was all praise for India, said, "I am terribly pleased when I see a smile on these sick and infirm".

Talk to one of the inmates, Jagannath Trivedi, who is 101 years old and he is full of life. A former resident of Gulbai Tekra in Ahmedabad, Jagannath is in the US for eight years and at the centre for two months. His son lives in Tennessee and is unable to come every week to meet him but he has no regrets staying here.

For Kantaben Megambhai, 83, the only complaint is that she cannot get up but enjoys staying at the centre. Manubhai Bhandari, 89, speaks fluent English and Gujarati and is from Deygar Baria. "I am in the US for five years and I like staying here", he said.