

Fakira Sheikh's Journey by Mr. Ivan Rodrigues

30 June 1984

It was just another day for most Mumbaikars. People woke up and went about their daily routine; some rushing off to work, mothers packing off their children to school... It was also raining quite heavily. The rain however could not dampen the spirits of the proud parents of the little boy that was born on that day. As it would be for every mother and father, it was the happiest day in their lives. The boy was named Fakira Sheikh. 2 years later, they gave birth to their second son, Noor Sheikh.

13 March 2006

Today, Fakira Sheikh, is close to being 22 years old. He wakes up at 4.30 in the morning. He shares a single room with his brother Noor in Mankhurd. His breakfast is a cup of tea. And then he is off to work. He takes the 5.28 a.m. local from Mankhurd which reaches Panvel at 6 a.m. He then takes the State Transport bus from Panvel and reaches Road Pali Naka Kalamboli at 6.30 a.m. From there he walks for around 5 minutes and reaches the Foodland Kalamboli Food Park. He is ready for work. He works with Unisol in the Housekeeping department. His shift timings are from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. He has been working at Kalamboli since 23 August 2005. After work, he goes back to his one room home in Mankhurd. Of course, the usual chores of washing clothes, filling water, cleaning the room, etc. have to be done. At around 6.30 p.m., he starts to cook dinner for his brother and for himself. His monthly take home salary is around Rs.2,500/-

And now on to his brother Noor Sheikh. Noor, a twenty year old boy has a cup of tea for his breakfast. And maybe a vada pav, if he is lucky. That's because, he works in a vada pav stall in Mankhurd from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. His lunch comprises some rice and dal provided by the owner of the vada pav stall. But what he waits for eagerly is to rush back home to his brother and share dinner with him. He earns about fifty rupees a day. He works every day. The day he is unwell and cannot make it, he gets nothing. So you see, he has no option but to make it to work everyday. After catching up and sharing a few laughs, they retire for the night at 11.00 p.m.

Going Back.....

By 1997, Fakira and Noor Sheikh had lost both their father and mother. A social worker took them from their one room home in Mankhurd to the Chembur Children's Home (CCH) at Mankhurd where they lived until 2002. Once Fakira became 18 years old, he had to leave CCH. While at CCH he had met and interacted with volunteers from Vinimay Trust who used to visit the CCH for voluntary social work. He also knew about Coomiben Babubhai Shah Tarun Sadan, a Transition Hostel run by the Vinimay Trust that houses and helps young men like him to stand

on their own feet. He applied and joined Tarun Sadan in Kopar Khairne's Sector 23 in 2002. and stayed there until 2005.

Unisol regularly recruits from orphanages and that is how Fakira is working with us. During his stay at Tarun Sadan, he and Vinimay volunteers visited his old home. Here they met Mr. Mohammed Ayub, one of his father's old neighbours who has zealously safeguarded Fakira's house until Fakira's return. He now has gone back to his one room home in Mankhurd where he used to live with his parents. In the monsoon that ravaged Mumbai last year, Fakira's one room home was flooded. Everything was destroyed. He had to rebuild his home from whatever savings he had. Mr. Ayub is still his guardian angel. You almost hope that we had more Mr. Ayubs in this world.

The Future

Fakira does not really know. He knows that he has to work hard. He knows that he has to take care of his younger brother. And he knows there is no turning back. Above all, he is content and happy. He takes one day at a time. And he is confident and optimistic about the future. He told me with pride that he has a savings account in Vijaya Bank where he tries to save whatever he can.

Why am I writing to You on Fakira?

This narration is not intended to evoke sympathy for Fakira Sheikh (he would hate it). Neither is it meant to be a magnanimous statement bordering on self-indulgence. All of us lead our lives in a particular manner. And in this journey there are several incidents and defining moments that impact us; positively and/or negatively. We all want success and sometimes get lost in the "metrics" that define success – career, money, cars, fashion, living up to the Joneses, etc..... Seldom are we "aware" of our surroundings. I am sharing this with you because this morning, I was quite harshly sensitized to a deeper sense of self-awareness. And I am grateful to the 22 year old for this.

Thank you Fakira Sheikh.

Editor's Note

Vinimay Trust would like to thank Mr. Ivan Rodrigues, General Manager Marketing at Radhakrishna Foodland Private Ltd. for agreeing to share the contents of an email written by him to his colleagues, based on which this article has been written.
