

Free saris for domestic workers

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Hundreds of foreign domestic workers flocked to the Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple last Sunday morning to grab free saris offered by the Hindu Centre.

The independent, non-governmental organisation, dedicated to the spiritual progress of Hindus in Singapore through education, devotion and service, decided to give out the preloved but in good condition saris, after a collection drive in April proved successful.

Members of the public could also buy the saris at prices ranging from \$5 to \$30. The sales proceeds went to the Hindu Centre.

The sari giveaway was initiated by National University of Singapore instructor Uma Jayaraman, who has been volunteering with Hindu Centre for more than 20 years. She wanted to give back to the foreign domestic workers in Singapore and a new sari is something they might not afford but would like to have.

“The sari is usually kept in the wardrobe after it is worn a few times,” said Hindu Centre president N. Varaprasad.

“Women crave saris but soon get bored with the design. We felt that instead of discarding the sari, they should be given away as a form of charity.”

Following an announcement on social media by the Hindu Centre, about 6,000 saris were collected through public donations over three weeks. The saris were then sorted by their designs and transported to the venue by Hindu Centre volunteers.

Although the giveaway was supposed to go on till 8pm, most of the saris were gone by 11.30am.

Ms Kannaiyan Meenatchi, a domestic helper from Kumbakonam in Tamil



The foreign domestic workers helping themselves to the free saris. PHOTO: P. KARTHIKEYAN

Nadu, who has been in Singapore for 15 years, said it was her first time at such an event.

“I don’t usually wear saris in Singapore because of my work conditions,” she said.

“I wear them only on special occasions. I plan to give my mother and relatives the sari I picked up. This event is a blessing to me because usually I cannot afford to buy more than one sari, which costs a fortune.”

Ms Indira, a domestic worker from Darjeeling in north-east India, was at the giveaway with two friends. She said:

“Events like this should be organised more often so that the helpers can feel connected to the larger community.”

Hindu Centre volunteer and financial journalist S. Anuradha pointed out that “organising the event was important because it means we are also practising the three Rs of recycling (reduce, reuse, recycle).”

“People have to realise that the clothes or products that they buy will go to waste if they are not used for a long time. Giving it away to people in need is always a better idea.”

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– Hindu Centre president N. Varaprasad