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Time to celebrate: Paramaswari (second left) and her husband Ilangko receiving loving kisses from their children Pavithran (right) and Mritickah (left).

PhD for working mum, dad after the sacrifice and guilt

USUALLY, it's the parents who beam proudly during their children's convocation but for siblings I. Pavithran and I. Mritickah, it was the opposite.

The children were grinning widely when their parents S. Ilangko and J. Paramaswari, both 45, were conferred the Doctor of Philosophy degrees at the first session of the convocation ceremony yesterday.

"We are very happy and proud. At home my sister and I try not to disturb them when they are studying, otherwise, they will take a very long time to finish," eight-year-old Pavithran said.

His sister Mritickah, 10, said they would sometimes ask about their parents' studies.

"I want to do my PhD too but I wish to study abroad," said Mritickah who speaks Mandarin.

Ilangko, who is a senior assistant (administration) at St George's Girls School and Paramaswari, who teaches at Convent Datuk Keramat, obtained both their bachelor and master's degrees from USM.

"I am from Selangor and my wife is from Kuala Lumpur. Since our undergraduate days

in USM, we already decided to complete our postgraduate studies together in the same university.

"We received our master's degrees in 2000," Ilangko said.

Ilangko, who received a scholarship from the Education Ministry, did his research on co-curricular activities while his wife focused on the local community's participation in helping those with HIV and AIDS.

"We dedicate this achievement to our children because our studies have taken so much of our time away from them. There are moments when I feel a little guilty and have even thought of giving up," he said.

Describing the doctorate degree as a "very lonely journey", Paramaswari said she was fortunate to be able to share the experience with her husband.

She said despite the different topics, the couple were able to discuss their work.

"Being a working mother, it was such a challenge. I had to take six months unpaid leave for my field work.

Asked about their future plans, Paramaswari said the family was planning a holiday.