



# DEEPALAYA

## FRUITFUL FORTY

EDITED BY CHETNA KEER



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Foreword by A.J. Philip

*Edited by*  
**Chetna Keer**

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PUBLISHED BY  
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46, Institutional Area, D Block  
Janakpuri, New Delhi – 110 058  
Tel : +91 11 2852 4348 / 2852 2263  
Email : support@deepalaya.org  
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DESIGN  
Ravi Pahuja  
Digital Marketing Officer

SPONSOR  
Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC)

COVER PHOTO  
Col. Manoj Rawat

PRINTED AT  
Jyoti Printers, C-12, Sector-8, Noida, UP 201 301  
Phone : 0120-2424113/4/5



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# President's Message



~ Y. Chackochan

In July 1979, the Deepalaya Education Society was registered and came into being as a Delhi-based NGO riding the motto, 'Lighted to Enlighten'. This was the result of a group of people who had compassion, goodness and a drive to do something for society.

The registered office from where it took its first baby steps was the house of the founding secretary, Mr T.K. Mathew. When the work was started, with education as a core concern, there was a realisation among the founder members that it could work also for social development and different kinds of welfare activities.

Therefore, it was decided to condense the name to just 'Deepalaya' (abode of light) and prepare a working style in accordance with the changed nomenclature and in sync with the requirements of the many funding organisations and corporates that support Deepalaya, like ICCO, Plan International, Save the Children Fund, CRY, etc.

There were many crises, but they were eventually overcome with the support of one and all. The sense of dedication, incorruptibility and sincerity of the members have always been exemplary.

I had a desire right from my early life to do something for the good

of society and thereby set an example. I hope I have been able to achieve a bit of this in my role as the founding treasurer and now as the president of Deepalaya.

### **From a drawing room to beyond borders**

Deepalaya, which was started with five children and limited facilities in 1979 in the drawing room of my house, has today become a large NGO with programmes in various states like Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Maharashtra, Telangana and Punjab. The principal of the school was one of the founding members, Mrs. Grace Thomas. Her contributions are recalled with gratitude. Her dedication, personality and sense of purpose were indeed praiseworthy. Today, Deepalaya has become Delhi's largest operating NGO. This was possible only because of the great efforts put in and also the kind of support it received from the society. Let it be said in all honesty that every brick in Deepalaya was contributed by a philanthropic-minded person or organisation.

When we look back on the 40 years of Deepalaya, I recall many experiences of failures, successes, isolations, oppositions and assistance. Yet, Deepalaya has been growing because of the unity, sincerity and tireless dedication of its workers.

The failures have not discouraged Deepalaya from bringing light to the world. Deepalaya's vision is that every one of its students should not only be good in studies but also acquire the essence of citizenship and social commitment.

It is a matter of immense pride that the students who graduated from Deepalaya school have been known for their conduct as much as knowledge, thereby becoming good citizens of the country. The dedicated service that the teachers have been giving is indeed commendable.

Deepalaya cannot rest on its laurels. Yesterdays are just memories. Today is the reality. There are many dreams for tomorrow. I conclude this with a prayer on my lips: May Deepalaya's dreams come true.

*The writer is a founding member and president of Deepalaya*

“

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# Foreword

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~ A.J. Philip

The office of the President of India refused to send us a message because it did not accept 40 years as a milestone. We will have to wait for 10 years when we celebrate the Golden Jubilee to receive a message from Rashtrapati Bhavan. Since we had decided to celebrate the event and gone ahead with the preparations, a rethink was not possible.

For the Semitic or Abrahamic religions, forty is a number of great significance. The Bible is replete with references to 40. One of the most popular Hindu scriptures, scripted by Tulsidas, is Hanuman Chalisa which, as the name implies, has 40 verses. In China, a woman takes 40 days of rest after delivery, a practice followed in many parts of India.

It was against this backdrop that we decided to celebrate the 40th Founders' Day of Deepalaya on July 16, 2019. Nearly eight months ago, when we organised a meeting to discuss the various programmes to commemorate the event, one suggestion that came up was to bring out a book on Deepalaya, written by 40 distinguished persons each of whom had played a role in the growth of the organisation.

I am never tired of saying that Deepalaya owes itself to the Almighty, who guided it in all its activities. Every brick that went



into the building of Deepalaya and every paise spent on it came from the munificence of our well-wishers, patrons, donors, corporates and sundry benefactors. What gives us great satisfaction is that we have formally educated more than 3.5 lakh persons, many of whom might not have, otherwise, seen the inside of a school.

They can be seen in all walks of life. There are over 16,000 women who are members of our self-help groups. Taken together, Deepalaya has impacted the lives of millions of people in Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Maharashtra, Kerala, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab. It was easy to decide that we should contact only 40 persons to contribute to this anthology, but shortlisting 40 from hundreds of potential contributors was a tough job.

It must be said with a great sense of satisfaction that except for one or two, everyone whom we contacted readily agreed to write and send their piece before the deadline. Many of the contributors were not professional writers. Some of the write-ups had to be translated into English. They also needed a bit of editing. Well-known columnist and great sub, Chetna Keer, agreed to go through the pieces and make them as crisp as possible.

Omchery N.N. Pillai and wife Leela Omchery have been associated with Deepalaya for as long as it has been in existence. He has an excellent command of Malayalam, English, and Sanskrit, as borne out by his article. Jyoti Sagar is an epitome of philanthropy and it was he who introduced Deepalaya to Reva Nayyar, who in their contributions narrate how they have been supporting Deepalaya in ways no one can emulate.

On four days a week, hundreds of eye patients visit the Deepalaya Vision Centres at four locations. The person behind it is Dr Praveen Vashisht of AIIMS, who has a long story to narrate about his involvement with Deepalaya. P.C. Abraham describes the

corporate and NGO objectives to say that happiness of the stakeholders is their common aim. In the case of Deepalaya, the stakeholders are its staff and beneficiaries. Silvi Chacko was the first student to enroll 40 years ago and that makes her story riveting indeed.

Achamma Thomas, wife of founder member P.J. Thomas, recalls how Y. Chackochan's wife and she played a silent but effective role in the initial planning that went into the formation of Deepalaya. Dr. Annie Mathew tells us how it had been a hop off-hop on for her, but only to stay put with Deepalaya. Veteran editor and ex-MP H.K. Dua does not mention how he sanctioned a big amount for Deepalaya from his MPLADS Fund while giving Deepalaya a pat on its back. For Daniella Brink, Deepalaya is like a home away from home, as her article brings out. Dr Joy Vazhayil's association with Deepalaya has been brief but few know how deeply involved he is in today's programme. Deepalaya has spawned many organisations like the one K.C. Pant heads now. Komal is one of Deepalaya's stars and her account is as much touching as it is revelatory.

Reading between the lines, Dr Manoj Kumar narrates how difficult it is to bring education to a community that seldom values it. Sponsorship was an alien word for Deepalaya when Mary Mathew introduced the concept and made it a strong arm of its fund-raising endeavour. M.O. Peter, the quintessential consultant, has many a story of success to tell us. Mohan Sivanand, who edited the Reader's Digest for many years, was the one who came to the rescue of a nursing student who sought funds to study. He tells us that every one of us can be a philanthropist.

Mridula Koshy, who has become a byword for community library, recalls her association with Deepalaya and how it gave rise to a whole library movement. Architect Ranjit John explains how and why Deepalaya buildings stand out for their architectural brilliance. One great success story of Deepalaya is Ravi Pahuja, who learnt

the alphabets at Deepalaya and is today head of Deepalaya's digital wing. He pays a tribute to the organisation which made a world of difference to his life.

Col Ripu Daman Singh tells us how, by chance, he became a part of Deepalaya. Shikha Pal and Sudha Parthasarathy are two former stalwarts of Deepalaya, who are looked upon by many Deepalayans as their source of strength, as their articles reveal. Cartoonist Sudheernath narrates how he brought Deepalaya and the flood-ravaged schools at Chendamangalam in Kerala together. Who better to write about Deepalaya's early days than Dik Verboom of Edukans? Pradeep Kumar writes about how he became an all-rounder in Deepalaya. Amita Joseph, who is well-known in NGO circles, writes about the time she served Deepalaya in various capacities. For Rajwinder Kaur, Deepalaya is what shaped her career. Today, she helps thousands of cancer patients.

C.G. Daniel is now settled in the US, where he heads the Deepalaya Foundation. He recalls how he came in contact with Deepalaya. Ms Sharon Lowen is from the US. A classical dancer, she writes about how she became an interface between Deepalaya School and schools like the American and the British. Mathew Jose tells us about how the agricultural land at Gusbethi became an institutional land. The relationship between Shanti Sahayog and Deepalaya has been pretty old, as Suman Khanna Aggarwal reminds us. Young Noel Sakhi and Joel Sakhi highlight in their jointly-written article what prompted them to be fund-raisers of Deepalaya.

There was a time when Varsha Narain was the public face of Deepalaya. She tells us about how she was able to play a role in the growth of Deepalaya. Rajshree Thakur has many an anecdote, some quite hilarious, to share in her article. Dhan Bahadur's story is as much the story of Deepalaya. Abraham George reminds us of how liaising is as important as fund-raising. Gitanjali Krishnan and Anjali Ghate narrate how a collaboration between a society and a

Trust has stood the test of time. Jaswant Kaur, who shoulders most of my responsibilities, leaving me free to dabble in everything from Facebooking to lecturing to travelling, tells us how the little girl from Chandigarh has made it big in the metropolis as an exemplar of Deepalaya.

This book would not have been possible but for Ravi Pahuja's labour of love. He took upon his shoulders the responsibility of designing the whole book, including the making-up of the pages. That it was his first book made it all the more challenging. Roshan Thakur, who serves as system administrator, played a major role in tracing and identifying the right photographs for inclusion in the book.

My secretary Shalini Rohtagi played a no less important role in contacting all the contributors and pressurising them in her own genteel manner to deliver in time. There are many others who contributed to the publishing of this book. Last but not least, Jyoti Printers took up the challenge of accepting the manuscript long after the deadline was over and delivering the book at the eleventh hour. I am grateful to all of them.

It is my fervent hope that all those who are interested in Deepalaya will find the 40 stories an inspiring read.

A. J. Philip  
Secretary and Chief Executive (Hon.)  
Deepalaya

# Of Karmayogis and keepers of the cause



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~ Omchery NN Pillai

As Deepalaya maps its milestone 40th year, I feel privileged to have been associated with Deepalaya from its very beginning. Deepalaya means the abode of light. A meaningful name which is so comprehensive – encompassing the multi-faceted activities of this charitable organisation. It has been the light and path of thousands of people during the past 40 years of its useful existence.

My association started thanks to its ever-smiling founder, Mr T.K. Mathew, who happens to be a very close friend. Better, I shall describe myself as one of his admirers. I knew both Mr Mathew and his brother, Dr T.K. Oommen, professor at JNU, as both of them used to participate actively in Malayali programmes. Prof. Oommen is a good speaker in both Malayalam and English.

Deepalaya is an asylum for the forlorn. My wife, Dr. Leela Omchery, served Deepalaya in various capacities, including as a member of the managing committee of the Deepalaya School at Kalkaji Extension.

Deepalaya picked up the stranded and the destitute from roadsides and hospitals. They included children who were deserted by their own relatives. Inmates went on increasing. Such an organisation needed support, both material and moral. This was just one of the

aspects of Deepalaya's functioning. It had broken new paths in education, women empowerment and public health in this part of the country.

Transparency and dedication were the greatest assets of Deepalaya which drew up support from people of all levels, belonging to all religions and regions. It has always been truly secular. The children were provided facility for education and all-round development. Hundreds of young people, who graduated from Deepalaya, occupy high positions of responsibility in several organisations.

After having laid a solid foundation and provided the scope for growth in different directions, 'Karmayogi' T.K. Mathew withdrew from the stage. "Karmaayaea adhikaraste maa pheleshu kadachana." (You should do your duty, not expect any return). The ideal Karmayogi is one who does his duty without expecting any selfish return. A step higher is the one who does his duty and declines to receive the returns- Karmaphala Tyagi. The latter is a higher sacrifice, declining the reward when it has become available.

Mr Mathew voluntarily relinquished his post when Deepalaya had reached its heights, leaving the successor to continue. It was a leap into the dark. Fortunately for the organisation, it fell into the hands of a person who could not only continue but also expand Deepalaya – the hands of Mr A.J. Philip, a distinguished journalist who has great vision and also business sense.

Journalism and business sense do not usually go together. Philip is an exception. Maybe, it is an in-born gift. As the CEO, he carries the mantle of the organisation beyond the conventional limits. He has inaugurated the new era with great promise.

Friends of Deepalaya look forward with hope and prayers.

*The writer's autobiography titled 'Aakasmikam' was translated into English as It So Happened by AJ Philip*

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# Making it all Sambhav



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~ Jyoti Sagar

My relationship with Deepalaya now spans almost three decades. It was in late 1991 that I was introduced to Deepalaya by Major-General Sahai (retd). I started with a rather small monthly contribution and then sponsored the education of a few children. The relationship became stronger when the Kalkaji Extension Senior Secondary School project started. I had the privilege of supporting that effort – which included raising some funds from friends and well-wishers.

The next phase (which continues till date) was sponsorship of post-school education -- vocational training of Deepalaya alumni from Kalkaji Extension Secondary School. This has involved supporting children through their post-higher secondary education and vocational training programmes. At any point of time, eight to 10 students are in this programme which has been running for the past almost 10 years. Deepalaya has helped me to remain in touch with many of these students who have become IT professionals, nurses, entrepreneurs, taxi owners and teachers. Some of them are now holding senior positions in Deepalaya. I consider this a great achievement, for it would motivate children placed in similar conditions to work hard and achieve success in life.

In 2010-11, with the support of partners of my law firms – J Sagar Associates and K&S Partners, electronic white board classrooms were set up in two of the schools (now learning centres). These have added great value to the learning experience of children.



More substantively, I got interested in the unit for differently abled children that has been operating from Sanjay Colony, Okhla Phase III, for the past many years. We undertook a project to upgrade the physical infrastructure of that unit – with the installation of new furniture, play station, repairs and renewals of the building, and construction of a new toilet suitable for the differently abled. This project has held a special place in my heart. Differently abled children from the slums are one of the most neglected class. Typically, both parents work, and they do not have the ability of taking care of these children – apart from locking them up in the house for the day!

### **Support for those with special needs**

It had been the desire of my late parents that their estate funds should be exclusively used for charitable purposes. In 2014, my sisters and I formed the Laj Jagdish Foundation (LJF). It was in August 2014, that the LJF and Deepalaya signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), under which the LJF agreed to contribute a major part of annual operating expenses for the centre for the differently abled children, embedded in the premises of the Deepalaya learning centre at Sanjay Colony. The project has been named as "Sambhav". Its objective is to provide day-care and education facilities to differently abled children.

We chose to work with Deepalaya – given its sterling reputation as a dedicated and trusted NGO with great credentials over the decades. So, instead of trying to reinvent the wheel by setting up an institution, we decided that it would be much better to collaborate with Deepalaya. The NGO had a place of its own at Sanjay Colony, where the school was functioning well. It had staff members who had a very good relationship with the local community.

At Sambhav, the children are kept for at least six hours. Providing day-care and education to these children requires specific

resources, like special educators and attendants, and special infrastructure. For instance, the visually challenged students could not be taught to read without the aid of the braille system. The hearing impaired needed to be provided with hearing aids and a sound-proof speech therapy room. Children suffering from dyslexia, autism etc. needed specially qualified teachers who could understand their needs, have the patience and spend time with them. Additionally, these children could not come to Sambhav on their own – so transportation facilities had to be provided. All this involved logistical capacity and hard work.

With support from the LJF, Deepalaya has provided the best resources for Sambhav. We constantly work together to improve the facilities and the experience of those attending the centre.

The next frontier at Sambhav is to provide vocational training and other assistance for enabling these children to access employment opportunities. Children are being given training in diverse areas, such as making small objects like dolls, jewellery made of paper, greeting cards, candle making etc. Many of these children have gained mainstream higher education and are now employed in good organizations but we must work harder for creating more opportunities for them.

I am delighted with the very productive and trusting relationship that exists between Deepalaya and the LJF and I do hope that it will continue to grow.

Forty years in the life of a person is a long period, but in the life of an organization it is not. I wish Deepalaya the best in the years to come. May it become a beacon of hope for the marginalized, the poor and the underprivileged. For me, it has been a very special relationship – and I do hope and pray that the LJF remain a part of Deepalaya's journey as it crosses more milestones.

*The writer is a philanthropist who heads a large legal firm*

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# Call of the choir

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~ Reva Nayyar

I still remember my first meeting with Mr. TK Mathew, former chief executive of Deepalaya. Short-statured, Mr. Mathew was very passionate about the organisation and the work that Deepalaya did for the community. The way he communicated left a very positive impression about the organisation. He was introduced to me by one of our family friends and a great philanthropists, Mr. Jyoti Sagar.

Mr. Sagar had already briefed me about the organisation, which had already aroused my curiosity. After meeting Mr. Mathew, I had the strong urge of supporting the organisation. The relationship began way back in 2010 with Deepalaya's Children's Home.

The way a programme meant for the rehabilitation of orphans, street children or those found on railway platforms took the shape of Deepalaya Children's Home was really exciting. Sudha Parthasarathy, who was with Deepalaya at that time, used to tell me a lot about the kids, whom she herself found on the railway platform and enrolled in the project – known as Swagat Kendra, at that time.

Soon, the organisation expanded its reach to Mewat and established a children's home. The kids found a family in Deepalaya, who took care of their each and every need. I found resonance in the project as we have a similar programme for orphans. The bond grew stronger and stronger.

The exciting conversations I had with Mr. Mathew and Ms. Parthasarathy, former executive director, increased my interest and I started sponsoring the education of 100 children studying at Deepalaya School, Kalkaji Extension. The school was not recognised at that time. But the kind of education they provided for slum children was par excellence.

I had attended several functions the school organised. From the way, the school auditorium was decorated to the way children presented themselves on stage, always left a long-lasting impression on my mind. What I liked the most in Deepalaya was its approach towards children. It not only focused on the growth of kids but also on the overall development of the community.

### **Music to the ears**

What was strikingly different in Deepalaya programmes was its choir. The choir had around 300 children from different schools and centres of Deepalaya. All were trained to sing in harmony. Mr. Mathew always took pride in possessing India's largest choral group. The children of the group could transport the listeners to an entirely different world.

It also conveyed one unique message – however disturbed these children may be in their personal life, and whatever struggle they faced, music had the power to elevate them to a new pedestal. And they had acquired the capability of spreading joy amongst the audience through music and their singing. This was one way of promoting “the art of giving back” through music.

The school focused on promoting value education, life skills and developing the overall personality of children. It had different clubs meant to inculcate leadership skills amongst children and help them understand their responsibility towards the environment and fellow human beings. This is how Deepalaya gives shape to children, so that they become contributing citizens of the country.

It makes me feel proud that some of the kids, who were groomed in this kind of an environment, have actually set up their own NGOs and started giving back to society. Some have joined big corporates, multinational companies and they have started contributing to Deepalaya in their own way. Some donate their time and volunteer for the organisational activities.

Gradually, the school got recognition and I was informed about another project in four locations of North-West Delhi. The project is focused at the identification of out-of-school children, equipping them with basic learning levels and mainstreaming them into government schools. The kids are being given remedial education, too, after they come back from school.

### **Food for thought**

My own project monitoring team praised the efforts made by Deepalaya staff in educating these children. But one fact that really moved me was that these kids came hungry to the centres. I personally introduced a component of nutrition in the food, without caring that the budget got exceeded.

The Deepalaya team took it very positively. Not only did they introduce khichri and dahi but also other nutritious snacks like vegetable upma or vegetable dalia. Over the years, Mr. Mathew took retirement and Deepalaya continues to flourish under the leadership of Mr A.J. Philip, secretary and chief executive (honorary).

The students of Deepalaya continue to promote the art of giving back to the society and so has donors and supporters like us. I wish Deepalaya a huge success on its onward journey. I pray that the organisation continues to serve the poor and enlighten their lives.

*The writer, a former Secretary to the Government of India, has been a great benefactor of Deepalaya*

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However disturbed these children may be in their personal life, and whatever struggle they faced, music had the power to elevate them to a new pedestal.



# Vision and visionaries



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~ Dr. Praveen Vashisht

I would like to congratulate Deepalaya for completing 40 years of appreciable services for the poor and needy in the New Capital Region in the areas of education, healthcare, empowerment and financial sustainability.

The Dr. Rajendra Prasad Centre, AIIMS, has a symbiotic relationship with Deepalaya since the establishment of the community ophthalmology section in 1992. At that time, the RP Centre desired to start community outreach eye care services for the urban slum population of Delhi and Deepalaya was the first partner NGO for providing compressive eye care services in the Sanjay Colony slum clusters.

It was decided to provide services mainly for cataract and refractive errors, the two most common causes of blindness and visual impairment in our country. The services included provision of spectacles at the clinic and referral for free cataract surgery at the RP Centre.

Deepalaya took the lead by arranging support to the RP Centre for infrastructure and community mobilisation. Deepalaya's positive support and strong hold in community participation resulted in newer primary eye care centres in other slum clusters of Gole Kuan, Gandhi Basti, Madanpur Khadar, and Lal Kuan, where



Deepalaya was already involved in other educational and vocational training services.

### **Seeing eye to eye**

In addition to the primary eye care clinic, the RP Centre and Deepalaya have also been working closely in organising various eye camps in the NCR for the past 20 years.

I also wish to appreciate the initiatives taken by Mr. A.J. Philip and Ms. Jaswant Kaur for the recent rejuvenation of partnership with the RP Centre in various urban slum clusters as well as in the rural belt of Haryana. Deepalaya and the RP Centre collaborated to deliver advanced eye care through the Vision Centres at Tauru and three resettlement colonies and slum clusters of Delhi.

Deepalaya volunteers have been trained in primary eye care and they help the RP Centre team in activities of the vision centre. Deepalaya provides free transport facility for all referred patients from the vision centre to the RP Centre.

In the past one year, with the support of Deepalaya, the RP Centre was able to serve nearly 10,000 patients in vision centres and eye camps.

### **Towards a better future**

Refractive error is the major cause of ocular morbidity among school-going children in India and specifically myopia is the most common cause of visual impairment among them. It remains undetected as children usually don't complain of defective vision especially if only one eye is involved. The parents and children are not even aware of these problems.

Children usually adjust to sub-normal vision by sitting near the blackboard, copying from the neighbouring child. Often, the

inability to see distant objects clearly retards their learning ability and it is reflected in their school performance. It has been reported as an important cause of school dropouts.

In order to provide services for refractive errors, Deepalaya and RPC together involved in school vision screening program for timely detection of these problems and their correction by provision of low-cost spectacles. Under the school vision screening programme, Deepalaya school teachers are trained to screen the children for subnormal visions.

These children are provided with refraction and free spectacles. In the past one year, more than 400 children were identified with sub-normal vision and spectacles were dispensed free of cost to them with the support of Deepalaya. Besides service-based programmes, Deepalaya has been supporting the RP Centre in their community-based surveys and research activities.

Deepalaya has always been a frontrunner in supporting RP Centre, AIIMS in their school-based research activities that include “Incidence and progression of myopia among schoolchildren of Delhi”.

Recently, in the Sanjay Colony area, the RP Centre started research on glaucoma and Deepalaya has been supporting the RP Centre by providing infrastructure and some equipment for the study.

To summarise, the Community Ophthalmology Section of the RP Centre and Deepalaya have been in partnership for nearly three decades. It is because of Deepalaya's support that we are able to extend our eye care services to the most vulnerable population in the urban slums of Delhi as well as remote under-served rural population in Haryana.

*The writer is Professor and Head, Community Ophthalmology, RP Eye Centre, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi*

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It is because of Deepalaya's support that we are able to extend our eye care services to the most vulnerable population in the urban slums of Delhi as well as remote under-served rural population in Haryana.



# Overview over the years



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~ P.C. Abraham

From a small beginning four decades ago, Deepalaya has grown to a leading NGO in the NCR in the field of education for the underprivileged. Here's an attempt to overview its functioning, in comparison with that of a typical corporate, specially at the board level.

Deepalaya is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation (NGO) working for the overall betterment of the society. The founding members of Deepalaya, who migrated to Delhi, were challenged by the sight of children loitering on the streets or doing mean jobs at construction sites. Their compassion and determination sowed the seeds for Deepalaya.

## **Deepalaya and its vision**

The vision statement of Deepalaya is to achieve “A society based on legitimate rights, equity, justice, honesty, social sensitivity and a culture of service in which all are self-reliant”.

Deepalaya chose to give emphasis on child education, specially the girl child, and made it the soul of its existence.

Over the years, Deepalaya established several projects in the areas of education (formal/non-formal/remedial), women's

empowerment (reproductive health, SHG, micro-finance), institutional care, community health, vocational training etc, spread in the states of Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. More than 350,000 such children through education, 15,000 women and thereby their families through the women's empowerment programmes and many others benefitted from various projects of the society.

### **Deepalaya executive committee**

The members of the society are successful professionals, such as doctors, professors, journalists, engineers, senior executive etc., government and private men and women, working and retired people who earnestly feel for and share the vision of Deepalaya. The executive committee members are appointed by the general body. Neither the committee nor the other members draw any compensation, monetary or in kind. The common thread that binds them together is their compassion, belief and urge to give back to the society.

It normally meets quarterly and reviews implementation of the previous decisions and progress of various projects. New projects are taken up considering how much it would benefit those at the bottom of the pyramid. Periodically, meetings are held at project sites in villages, away from Delhi, and interactions with the innocent children and their unassuming parents are a de-stressing experience.

The projects are funded by friends and patrons. Apart from statutory compliance, we ensure financial accountability and transparency to all stakeholders and what better testimony to this than the fact that Deepalaya has been regularly getting awards for transparency and accountability.

The board of directors (executive committee members) of both Deepalaya and any business organisation represents the shareholders and stakeholders. They have a responsibility to formulate its vision, steer towards the goal and ensure its prosperity. They also have to meet all statutory compliance and accountability to the stakeholders.

### **Business venture vs non-profit**

The distinction between them is in their vision and mission and, accordingly, in their strategies and policies. Business organisations deal with the customers or consumers with a motive to increase their own profit and revenue. On the other hand, Deepalaya reaches out to the have-nots to improve their situation.

A business organisation works in a dynamic market environment and, therefore, risk mitigation and crisis management has to be a continuous process, unlike Deepalaya, which is driven mostly by community service.

Deepalaya has an active board fulfilling its responsibility. Probably what we would need is another impetus, with the founding fathers propelling it into a higher trajectory and to new frontiers.

*The writer, a former chief executive of a multinational company in India, is a member of the Executive Committee of Deepalaya*

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Business organisations deal with the customers or consumers with a motive to increase their own profit and revenue. On the other hand, Deepalaya reaches out to the have-nots to improve their situation.

# Through toddler eyes



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~ Silvi Chackochan

As one of the first students of Deepalaya, I am deeply humbled and honoured to see how much Deepalaya has grown and expanded over the past 40 years. It has evolved to educate and impart skills to the children, empower the women, and assist them in health needs..

As a daughter of one of the founding members, Mr Y. Chackochan, the days of its inception are very dear to my heart. My one precious memory of my toddler years is how every morning, my parents used to convert the living room (of F-1178, CR Park) to be actively used by our family as a classroom, with a small table, chairs and rugs. This helped to make the classroom ready for the day as children came in for lessons and activities.

Children used to join in our classroom from nearby areas of Kalkaji, arriving in a manually driven tin rickshaw. Our teacher used to be the ever-smiling Mrs Grace Thomas whom we used to call Gracey Ammachi. Her beautiful smile, charismatic personality, positive attitude and her teaching kept the classes invigorating. She taught us the alphabet, how to draw and to be on our best behavior. Her granddaughter Roshini and I were a part of the class-room and we were the best of friends. Our aayah, Shanti aunty, was always there to lend a helping hand and be with us during the day.

## **Small beginnings to big dreams**

The mission was to help the children from nearby slums in Kalkaji to be educated. Funds were meagre and space was sparse but the vision was deep and far-reaching; to be inclusive of the less fortunate into the mainstream humanity. To empower them with education and health as they walked into life to be independent men and women who would be able to support their family and society.

Our fundraisers were plain and simple, and the more support came from the community as we organized fetes' with food and games. All the members used to bring in larger amounts of home-cooked meals and savouries to raise funds. It was a feeling of oneness, as we all worked hard keeping in mind the far-reaching impact that the children and families would have. It was the vision and hard work of many whose names or toil cannot be forgotten.

## **Firm foundations and friendships**

Many a weekend afternoons were spent in brainstorming about what we can do better, where can we go from here to bigger things like empowering women and children and making them independent. As the school evolved and expanded, we moved from the one-room establishment to more rooms and spaces.

I fondly remember the time spent with families and friends of founding members and the everlasting friendships built that lasted for a life-time.

To be a part of Deepalaya family, I am truly privileged; I wish them well in the years to come as they touch many lives of children in our community, including Kalkaji and Gusbethi. May it grow to be a light to many and always live by its motto, "Lighted to Enlighten".

*The writer was the first to enroll as a student on July 16, 1979. She is now a scientist in the US*



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I fondly remember the time spent with families and friends of founding members and the everlasting friendships built that lasted for a life-time.



# Coffee conversations and charity



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~ Achamma Thomas

“A lot can happen over a coffee,” says the tagline of a famous advertisement. How true! And the best example embodying it, I can say, is Deepalaya.

The seed for today's Deepalaya was sown during one of the many evening conversations between the founder members in 1978. Over numerous cups of coffee, Mr Y. Chakochan and my husband, Mr. P. J Thomas, were brainstorming for an idea to use the skills of Gracy Kochamma fruitfully. As their spouses, we -- Rajamma and me -- were active participants in these sessions, apart from our duty of providing tea, coffee and snacks to fuel their body and mind.

At last, they hit upon the idea of starting a small school for children from the economically backward communities around us.

## **Every drop makes an ocean**

I still remember the effort we ladies, the wives of the founding members, took to enroll the first batch of children. Many parents were not willing to send their kids due to various reasons, but much persuasion later, we were able to canvass with a few parents to send their kids. That's how the school started with just five children, at a rented place at Chittaranjan Park.

It is with humility and great happiness that I remember my husband paying the initial deposit of Rs.17,000 for the place — quite a huge sum for a single-income middle class family back in the 1970s. Now looking back, the memories from 40 years back, suffuse us with a smile and sweet nostalgia. But back then, walking in the sweltering Delhi heat with my seven-year-old daughter crying due to toothache was not a very pleasant experience.

As we had to leave Delhi soon, due to my husband's transfer, we were not able to see the growth of the school from close quarters. But, we were always there to sponsor the kids in the initial years when finances were tough.

### **Acorns into awesome oaks**

“Tall Oaks from little acorns grow.” Today, to see this gigantic Oak called Deepalaya standing majestic, spreading its branches and providing shelter to many needy children and the society, makes me feel blessed and thankful to God for giving us the opportunity to plant that little acorn. I also take this opportunity to remember with gratitude all those who watered and took care of it at every stage of its growth.

However, as 1 Corinthians: 3.7 says: “So neither the one who plants, nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow”. I thus thank God with all my heart, for using us in this noble venture.

*The writer is the wife of one of the founding fathers, Mr P. J. Thomas*

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Many parents were not willing to send their kids due to various reasons, but much persuasion later, we were able to canvass with a few parents to send their kids.



# Twice lucky



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~ Dr. Annie Mathew

My association with Deepalaya dates back to the late 1990s, when I was inducted on to its board, little knowing then that this association would be short-lived. I had joined an international NGO, which had Deepalaya as one of its project partners. I was now on the other side of the fence. Since there was a clash of interest, I thought it prudent to quit Deepalaya.

The second association began about four years ago, when I was once again inducted on to the board. What I found endearing about Deepalaya was their commitment to their work and the timely execution of all activities by a competent team under a strong leadership. It's a pleasure to see various programmes undertaken by Deepalaya moving ahead rapidly, the bright and happy faces of schoolchildren, the enthusiasm with which children come to the community library, and the talent and potential identified in students through games and competitions.

The board members comprise a group of professionals, devoting their time and expertise to help Deepalaya reach its goals of educating the underprivileged children of the society and empowering young women and girls of the community.

I am extremely grateful and proud to be a part of Deepalaya. I wish Deepalaya all success in its future endeavours.

*The writer is a medical doctor and member of the Deepalaya Executive Committee*

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It's a pleasure to see various programmes undertaken by Deepalaya moving ahead rapidly, the bright and happy faces of school children, the enthusiasm with which children come to the community library, and the talent and potential identified in students through games and competitions.



# A nation can't be built on ignorance



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~ H K Dua

India has made considerable progress during the past 70 years since Independence. We are considered a rising power of the 21st century. We can send an Indian to the Moon, intercontinental ballistic missiles at least 5,000 km away and have the world's third largest army and sizeable industrial strength.

Alas, in two vital areas, we must accept, we have grossly failed to give the priority needed -- education and health.

In the 1960s, we had the D.C. Kothari Commission suggesting that the country should spend at least 6 per cent of its gross income on education if it is to make headway. However, not even in a single year, the Centre or any state, has spent enough funds or made any serious effort to promote education among all sections of society.

Even many small countries in Asia and Africa and Latin America have shown better results in education than India. The meagre money allotted for education has often been spent on paying secretarial salaries and running the state's administration.

How can the nation grow on the basis of ignorance in that vast landscape?

A few years ago, Parliament enacted a law for the Right to Education, but it remains on paper, particularly in the countryside and for marginalised people living in urban bastis and slums.

## **Tale of two Indias**

Two Indias have thus emerged in the field of education, leading to the emergence of an unequal society. While we have IIMs and IITs, some very good universities and institutions in some states, yet only limited effort has been made to meet the nation's need meant for those who need it most. This can lead to greater social and economic inequality on a vast scale, which, over a period of time, can trigger serious political unrest. The disparity has been the most acute at the grassroots.

Mahatma Gandhi, in his own way, tried to promote basic education which, he thought, could give hope to the vast numbers of people who are “lonely and the lost”. Much remains to be done for those living under sub-human levels of existence for no fault of theirs. They are being asked to break the hard and tough glass ceilings without the realisation that they don't have even a bit of floor space simply to live their lives.

Like in many other countries, the private sector and the social sector have now begun complementing government efforts to spread education. There are several civil society organisations which have made education their mission. One among them is Deepalaya, which during the last four decades has been making efforts to provide education to vast numbers of girls and boys in some of the most backward areas of the country.

Deepalaya has made a commendable effort by taking education to those sections of society which have been suffering pangs of neglect and the inequality it breeds. In 40 years, it has set up schools in Kalkaji Extension, Sanjay Colony, Gol Kuan and Panchsheel



Vihar in Delhi. It chose the Nuh district of Haryana – its most backward – for setting up a school that has become its intrinsic part.

### **Novel initiative at Nuh**

Some time ago, I happened to visit Deepalaya's school at Gusbethi in Nuh, located in the foothills of the Aravalis. Earlier, Nuh was one of the most backward tehsils in the district of Gurgaon in pre-split Punjab. After the split of Punjab state and the creation of Haryana, Gurgaon developed in a big way – into a shining cosmopolitan and corporate metropolis on the urbanscape. But Nuh, not far from Gurgaon, remains a backward area, clearly portraying India's skewed progress and developmental policies.

Deepalaya's school at Gusbethi provides a new hope to its students to get quality education, to prepare them to improve their lot, getting education and acquiring skills and a taste of India that is keen to move ahead. Teachers in Deepalaya schools are highly motivated, the students can see hope in their eyes for a better future. Deepalaya's schools are open to all sections of society without discrimination of caste, community, religion and region.

These schools actually represent an idea of India at the grassroots which has almost been left behind. Organisations like Deepalaya need a helping hand from the government, corporate sector and other social groups to carry forward their mission with vigour and to change the lives of the children so that they can look straight into the eyes of the world.

*The writer is a former editor, media advisor to prime minister, ambassador and member of Parliament*

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Deepalaya has made a commendable effort by taking education to those sections of society which have been suffering pangs of neglect and the inequality it breeds.



# Nudge from Netherlands



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~ Danielle Brink

In year 2000, I visited India for the first time. As impressed as I was with the country and its people, I also wanted to help with the development of poor and underprivileged children. A few months later, I came back with the idea to contact NGOs and see where I could support them. It was then that I met Mr T. K. Mathew from Deepalaya and told him that I would like to sponsor one class at the Ramditti Narang School.

## Girl child to Gusbethi

In the Netherlands, I had established the foundation named 'Children of Tomorrow'. After raising the first donations, the relationship with Deepalaya took off. I never had the illusion that I could solve the poverty problem, but by financing and stimulating the education for girls in particular, I hoped to do my little bit for enabling education. I can now say with pride that these girls have become mature young ladies with self-confidence and are able to take care of themselves. Deepalaya gets all the credit for their education and some of them even worked as nurses or teachers in either Deepalaya's Health Clinic in Gusbethi or at one of the Deepalaya schools. Over the years, we also sponsored vocational training classes at the Kalkaji School and a school bus for the physically challenged children at Sanjay Colony.

On one of my visits, Mr Mathew took me to Gusbethi, showed me around the school and the Children's Home. When we took a break to sit under the banana tree, he told me his dream about Gusbethi. It had to become a project for housing not only orphan children, but also elderly people who could take care of the youngsters, and a health clinic.

One year later, on a late Friday afternoon, my daughter laid the foundation stone for the health clinic at Gusbethi. Our foundation, Children of Tomorrow, together with the Shanti Foundation, was able to build the health clinic for Deepalaya. The clinic supports the twenty surrounding villages, with a delivery room and a cataract operation room. When I visited Gusbethi in December last, I was impressed by the enormous progress that the project had made and the large school building that is under construction now. Mr Mathew and his colleagues can be proud of it!

I have worked with many NGOs in India and I can tell you there is a lot of diversity in the way they are organised. My feeling about Deepalaya, from the first moment, has always been very positive. Honesty and transparency are always a hallmark of Deepalaya initiatives. The people working for them – teachers, caretakers and management – are all working with the motto: 'Every child deserves a chance'.

I was invited to be one of the guest speakers on Deepalaya's 25th anniversary and now I am honoured that I can congratulate Deepalaya, the management, all workers and children on their milestone 40th anniversary. Keep up the good spirit for the years to come so that lots of children can get the care they so desperately need.

*The writer is a Founder of Children of Tomorrow*

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When I visited Gusbethi in December last, I was impressed by the enormous progress that the project had made and the large school building that is under construction now.



# Lighting a thousand candles



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~ Dr Joy Vazhayil

**D**eepalaya literally means the abode of light. It is a place which translates this literal meaning into action and practice. It is an organisation which is built on the Gandhian wisdom, “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” I came to know about this wonderful organisation, which is one of the largest NGOs working in Delhi, through its Chief Executive and my friend, Mr A. J. Philip, when one day, he invited me to a function at the Deepalaya School, Kalkaji Extension

A senior secondary school affiliated to the CBSE catering to the educational needs of a large number of children from poor families, it provides quality education and has won several awards. It was amazing to see the cultural programmes, which displayed the wonderful talents of the children. The school has a set of wonderful teachers who make it one of the best in the area of education. The school is definitely a leading light guiding many deserving children to fulfil their aspirations.

## **Read alert!**

Education is only one of the multiple social service initiatives of Deepalaya, which is committed to working for the economically

and socially deprived, the physically and mentally challenged – starting with children. Deepalaya runs three schools and several learning centres. I had the good fortune to inaugurate another wonderful initiative of Deepalaya – a Community Library at Gole Kuan. It provides opportunities for reading and empowerment to the poor households in the area, especially women and children.

Deepalaya conducts vocational training, education for the differently abled, health and women empowerment programmes and many such projects. Started in 1979, Deepalaya has completed four decades of glorious service to the society. While every child comes with the message that God is not yet disappointed with man, Deepalaya comes with the message that God is not yet disappointed with society. The founders, caretakers and supporters of this institution indeed deserve credit for their abiding service to society.

Deepalaya has been in the forefront of extending its benevolent help far and wide whenever the opportunity arose. Last year, when unprecedented floods devastated Kerala, Deepalaya renovated two government schools at Chendamangalam in Ernakulam district and upgraded their facilities to make them model institutions in the area.

Buddha once said, “Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared.” Deepalaya is the place where happiness is multiplied as thousands of candles are lighted in the form of the smiles of children to make the world brighter and better.

*The writer is a senior additional secretary-rank LAS officer*

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Deepalaya is the place where happiness is multiplied as thousands of candles are lighted in the form of the smiles of children to make the world brighter and better.





# RASTA to roles and responsibilities



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~ K. C. PANT

I remember I had a long discussion with Ms Deepali Khanna and Ms Alka Pathak before joining Deepalaya at Plan International's Country Office in Kalkaji. I was a bit reluctant, as Deepalaya was not that well known at that time, but post their persuasion, I joined Deepalaya on December 1, 1986, after having worked with a mobile creche for over eight years.

Only 150 students were studying in Deepalaya School in South Delhi in a rented building at Chittaranjan Park and the Deepalaya plan project had just only started. Only five staff members were working on the project, when I joined as Field Supervisor-cum-Trainer and in the beginning, we used to work for about 10 to 12 hours daily.

Gradually, Deepalaya expanded and I was given the responsibility of selection, training and monitoring of all community-level workers. In this role, I got the opportunity to often meet Mr. T. K. Mathew in his office or elsewhere. I always used to get feedback from him, which was quite helpful in my further work. Later, we established a Training Center for Community Level Workers, where around 400 staff members used to get regular training. Deepalaya's plan field level programme was well established by 1991, which benefitted the community a lot. Several tools and techniques were developed in due course of time for need assessment of the people, for organizing them etc. Even a theatre

group was established to generate awareness among the people on various issues.

## **Embracing & envisioning**

By that time the south Delhi programme had taken shape. It spanned across three places. Project teams were about to be established at these places, but suddenly due to certain unavoidable developments, nine core team members resigned. I was transferred to south Delhi along with one old colleague to handle the situation in 1991.

I had joined Deepalaya in 1986 and had to oversee education sector and grassroots-level staff training in the western areas, and from 1992 in south and north Delhi and later Gusbethi. Deepalaya became the largest operational NGO in Delhi. Whenever Deepalaya entered a new area, I was asked to supervise the work there and, as such, I was instrumental and involved in the fast growth of Deepalaya.

I have no hesitation in saying that I learnt a lot from Deepalaya, especially from Mr. Mathew, about working at the grassroots as well as at the higher levels. Due to that learning, a few of my friends put me on the Board of RASTA, which was registered in 1994, and started one project in 2000. From 2000 to 2008, I was just guiding the team from outside for one or two projects, but was not involved in the operational work. After leaving Deepalaya, I joined RASTA full time and established it well. This year, we are celebrating our silver jubilee. Credit for all this goes to Deepalaya. Congratulations to Deepalaya for the wonderful journey of 40 years of success. I hope Deepalaya reaches new heights in the coming days.

*The writer is Chief Executive, RASTA*

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Whenever Deepalaya entered a new area, I was asked to supervise the work there and, as such, I was instrumental and involved in the fast growth of Deepalaya.



# My life is all about Deepalaya



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~ Komal Rathor

I have been working as a Computer Instructor at Deepalaya's Gole Kuan location for the last three years. I was also a student in Deepalaya till Class 10 before I moved on to a different school to complete Class 11 and 12. Post that, I joined a diploma course in Software Engineering plus worked as a part-time primary teacher in Deepalaya's Sanjay Colony location.

In 2012, Deepalaya helped me get a scholarship to study in the USA for a year under the CCI programme sponsored by the US Department of States, where I completed a certificate course in Web Designing/Development and Multimedia Applications. Upon returning, I had joined an E-commerce firm as a Web Designer but later when I got to know that Deepalaya had a job opening for Computer Instructor, I joined without thinking about my current job profile because I wanted to give back to society. Since then, I have been working in Deepalaya.

## Early life and education

My family consists of eight members and while growing up, my father was the only source of income. It goes without saying that we had hard time affording the basic needs of life. My sisters and I were in constant fear of dropping out of school as my relatives were not supportive of girls going to school, especially for pursuing higher studies, but Deepalaya helped me during such time. It was

with the support of Deepalaya that Mamta, my younger sister, also completed her higher studies. She has done a General Nursing and Midwifery course and is now working in Max Super Speciality Hospital, Saket, New Delhi as a nurse. She and I were good at studies but couldn't afford school fees, so Deepalaya stepped in and exempted our school fees since Class 3.

I even dropped out from school when I was in Class 3 but Ms. Sulekha Sharma, a teacher of Deepalaya, convinced my parents to let us continue with school. It gives me immense pleasure to say that I became the first person to complete higher education in my family and all credit goes to Deepalaya.

I have always been interested in Information & Technology and with the support of Deepalaya, I got admission to a Diploma Course (Advance Diploma in Software Engineering), which was sponsored by Mr. Jyoti Sagar. It was the learning curve I had been looking for and I am really grateful to Mr. Sagar and Deepalaya for helping me achieve that.

### **American avenues**

In 2011, I was approached by Deepalaya to apply for a scholarship to study in the USA for a programme called CCI (Community College Initiative Program), under which I went to Northern Virginia Community College in 2012 to study Web Designing and Web Development along with other multimedia-related application courses.

It was an enriching experience for me in particular, as it was an elaborate programme which also entailed 100 hours of community work along with 100 hours of internship. I volunteered in Food & Friends for packing food for people with HIV/AIDS on every weekend along with other volunteer work.

Currently, I am working as a Computer Instructor in Deepalaya's Gole Kuan Centre. Gole Kuan is a colony of economically poor families. Even in a world of technology, if it weren't for Deepalaya, computer education would not have been possible for the younger generation living in Gole Kuan.

### **Gole Kuan and giving**

At Gole Kuan, I teach computers to 120 students in multiple batches throughout the year. Since students don't have computers at their homes, so they utilize their time in the computer lab as much as possible. Often we go for community visits and encourage parents to let their children study. We do surveys to determine the state of education in the colony and also do life skills workshops for students such as Interview Preparatory Trainings, Communications Skill, Personality Development, etc. To improve their confidence, we ask students to give presentations on multiple subjects, Deserving students receive Awards of Excellence, too.

This has been a great learning experience for me. Not just that I get to work with students who are enthusiastic about computers, but also because each of them has a life story to tell. Thanks to Deepalaya, I became a part of the journey which is so incredible and joyful.

To sum it up, my life is all about Deepalaya. Thank you for everything. Deepalaya!

*The writer is a permanent faculty at Deepalaya Vocational Training Centre, Gole Kuan*

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It gives me immense pleasure to say that I became the first person to complete higher education in my family and all credit goes to Deepalaya.



# For the good of Gusbethi



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~ Dr. Manoj Kumar

India has been subscribing to the mission of 'Each One, Teach One', still education is inaccessible to abig part of its population. Deepalaya through its selfless efforts has been doing its bit for the cause of education, and it is these drops that make the ocean.

Today, in Gusbethi, this mission has lighted a spark in the life of hundreds of poor and underprivileged children. Most of the stakeholders of Deepalaya School, Gusbethi, have not completed their minimal educational qualifications and thus do not have much chance of having a good, well-paid job unless they are very lucky. Challenges and changes

The founders of Deepalaya must have witnessed issues related to poverty in the Gusbethi project and this must have been one of the most important inspirational drives to propel a mission of education and health for the underprivileged community of Mewat.

Deepalaya has been working in Gusbethi for the past 20 years and I am instrumental for these efforts for the past about two years. My experience with the parents of the beneficiaries is that they tend to follow the same paths and practices of their parents, and do not realize the importance of education through no fault of their own.



Deepalaya, through its presence, has changed this concept considerably. Improving girls' access to education has been on the mainstream development agenda of Deepalaya. Deepalaya is continuously enabling its stakeholders with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. High dropout rates among the students were one of the most worrisome issues at Gusbethi.

As with many Indians, the main reason for educational backwardness of Gusbethi is abject poverty, due to which children are forced to drop out after the first few classes.

For the past four decades, Deepalaya has been creating a spirit of excellence among its stakeholders and their lives have changed. Deepalaya has been instrumental in enabling stakeholders to be better human beings through its value-based services.

The stakeholders who have procured any benefits, either from the schools, vocational training centres or from the hospitals of Deepalaya, remain deeply indebted for the creation of an unimaginable environment where they experienced a selfless spirit of serving humankind beyond all limitations. I personally have had numerous encounters with people who, commenting about their association with Deepalaya, say that it makes them feel that humaneness still exists.

### **Service before self**

On many occasions, I have found it difficult to explain why Deepalaya is immeasurably service-oriented without any ulterior motives other than summumbonum - the highest good of the entire creation. The changes at the grassroots that Deepalaya has brought about through its meticulous services are a stark contrast to things in the outside world, full of corruption, selfishness, cruelty and pain. Some of the beneficiaries even confessed that

they will also help someone in need the way they have been supported to be self-reliant.

It is very encouraging to hear the success stories of beneficiaries of Deepalaya from all the streams and their affection for a kind of life they are being gifted to rewrite the script of their life.

Deepalaya should be jubilant for all the efforts it has taken during the past forty glorious years and for creating a community of people propelled by the belief that change is needed, is possible and is happening right now. The need of the hour is for such heroes who can stand up for the common good - no matter what the circumstances. I wish to congratulate everyone who has joined their hearts and hands towards this noble cause!

*The writer is Principal, Deepalaya School, Gusbethi, Nuh district, Haryana*



# Strength of sponsorships



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~ Mary Mathew

**D**eepalaya came into existence on July 16, 1979, with just five children. And on its 40th anniversary, it is indeed a privilege to write a piece on its resource mobilisation.

In the formative years of Deepalaya, the major objective was only child education. For almost 12 years, Deepalaya did not raise any resources systematically/professionally, on its own, except for the Annual Fete and Fair and the publishing of a souvenir, obtaining paid advertisements as also donations from well wishers.

During that time, Mr. T.K Mathew, a founding member and Honorary Secretary of Deepalaya, was employed with ASSEFA, a Gandhian Institution, as Chief Projects Coordinator. It was this connection which brought Deepalaya into sponsorship as a means of support for child education.

During year 1984, Ms. Minty Pande, of Save the Children Fund (SCF) from the UK, contacted Mr. Mathew, to establish a partnership in Delhi with ASSEFA. During the visit, Ms. Minty realised that ASSEFA is larger than she had imagined and it had only a rural base, whereas the SCF was looking for a partnership in an urban mode with a smaller setup. It is then that Mr. Mathew offered Deepalaya in partnership as the SCF wanted its urban window in Delhi for their sponsors. As a result, the SCF granted

Sponsorship had become one of the major income-raising ventures of Deepalaya, with 16201 sponsorships under various categories-- Individual, Institutional, Girl Child, Differently Abled, Perpetual, Corporate etc – making my role innovative and dynamic.

### **Fond memories**

Though there are fond memories of all our sponsors, the interaction with Daniele Brink from Holland resulted in a different mechanism other than individual sponsorships. Thanks to her, CLASS sponsorship was introduced as a new mechanism, in which the sponsor supports the entire class and, fortunately, Deepalaya had Ramditti Deepalaya school for poor children from neighbouring slums eligible for such support.

Then there is Movimento Sviluppo E Pace of Italy, who provided support for the first Traveller to transport children from slums to the school.

Special events like Maitree Shree, Abhinaya and Kala Arpan were organised to develop the relationship with sponsors and nurture their interest in the children they sponsor and continue their support to Deepalaya.

### **Corporate funding**

With the advent of Corporate Social Responsibility, the scenario of sponsorship changed. The corporates began funding education through sponsorships by supporting specific projects with special concerns. For example, ORIFLAME came in with Girl Child Education, which was offered to them as a special project. They had supported 1000 girl children at a time from formal schools and community school locations like Sanjay colony, Gole Kuan , Gandhi Busti etc. This continued for six years and now their

their first 50 sponsorships for funding children's education. Overtime, they sponsored 270 children from Deepalaya.

Similarly, in year 1985, Mr. Pierre Bernard Lebas of AIDE et Action (AEA), France, who were in partnership with ASSEFA in India, visited Delhi to see the activities of ASSEFA. Mr. Mathew took the opportunity to invite him to Deepalaya School. As he was impressed with the school, the AEA approved their first 50 sponsorships for the poor children studying in Deepalaya School and sponsored 600 children altogether.

PLAN International, which was in partnership with ASSEFA, came in, with Mr. Vijay Sardhana identifying Deepalaya as a potential source of partnership in child education. PLAN International sponsored 7506 children, creating Deepalaya PLAN as an independent set up, making the funding support broad enough to reach out to thousands of children belonging to the weaker sections living in the slums of west Delhi.

These partnerships with foreign organisations made Deepalaya think seriously about its own approach on self-reliance and overdependence on foreign funding. Deepalaya obtained training in sponsorships at the hands of the funding organisations and it made Deepalaya confident to launch its own Resource Mobilisation Program and a department of communication and marketing was created in 1991.

## **Resource mobilisation**

I was the first staff member appointed by Deepalaya to manage the day-to-day administration. A sponsorship division was established during 1990-91. Having gained experience of using sponsorship as a tool for resource mobilisation, I had the role of administering the sponsorship division as a well-oiled mechanism for fund raising.

partnership is in infra-structure development for education. We had Amway with 40, STITCHING DIDI'ISM with 1000, Abercrombie Kent (A&K) with 62, Mahindra Trust with 151, and Amex with 200 sponsorships under various categories. Mr. Jyoti Sagar came in with adopting the differently abled project at Sanjay colony in the loving memory of his beloved parents.

Thus, sponsorship in Deepalaya has been a success story through and through.

### **Sponsorship Team**

Headed by me as sponsorship officer, the team, to begin with, had Gracy and Abraham Chacko and Irudayam, when the office was functioning from 250A, my residence. Once we moved into a hired accommodation as the programme expanded, Thankamani, Varghese Antony, Chandrasekhar, etc joined the team. It is my pleasure to acknowledge the fact that the sponsorship team was the most popular and effective.

I was proud to be part of Deepalaya's success story and would like it to make larger strides in the development of weaker sections and for liberating them from the clutches of poverty, ignorance and deprivation, reinstating their rightful rights.

*The writer headed the sponsorship division of Deepalaya since its inception*

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Sponsorship had become one of the major income-raising ventures of Deepalaya, with 16201 sponsorships under various categories – Individual, Institutional, Girl Child, Differently Abled, Perpetual, Corporate etc – making my role innovative and dynamic.

# A role that happened by chance



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~ M.O. Peter

During one of the morning walks in the park in front of my flat in Rajouri Garden, where I was staying in October 2002, Mr T.K. Mathew, asked me – “Why don't you come and work with Deepalaya?”. He had heard that IFCOD, where I was working, had moved to Bangalore and I was 'unemployed'.

The compensation package he proposed was quite satisfying and I replied in the affirmative. Next day, I started working with Deepalaya as a Consultant. I worked in various roles, from Consultant to Director of Special Programmes to Executive Director till 2009.

As a Consultant during the first two years, I was in charge of preparing concept papers, project proposals and reports of progress in the implementation of projects. I remember with a pinch of pride that all the project proposals prepared and sent to funding agencies, during this time, were approved, except one. That was a proposal for financial support for meeting the administrative cost of a school.

One of the projects I was associated with was “Education on Wheels”, a novel project which envisaged education of children

wandering and working on streets and in vegetable markets. Edukan Foundation, which was supporting the project, decided to reduce their involvement in India, leading to discontinuance of support of partners, who were too long with them. Deepalaya was one such partner. Since financial support was not forthcoming from any other source, Deepalaya could not continue this project.

## **Destination DRIP**

In 2004, we submitted a proposal to REACH India of USAID, in response to their advertisement in NGO circles, to assess and empower NGOs to identify, educate and mainstream out-of-school children aged 6 to 14. The proposal was approved by REACH India. The programme was known as the Deepalaya Reach India Programme – DRIP.

Thanks to the co-operation of other departments, we assessed 11 NGOs in West Delhi and selected six of them for the project. Several Capacity Building Programmes on subjects like 'Goal Setting and Objective Formulation', 'Logical Framework Analysis', 'Monitoring implementation of Projects', 'Finance and Accounts Management', etc, were conducted by us for the personnel of the selected NGOs, with the help of inside and outside expertise.

The ultimate objective of the project was to educate non-school going children and the tasks involved identifying them, enrolling them in learning centres set up not very far from their residences, educating them till they acquire learning levels appropriate to their age, mainstreaming them (i.e. admitting them in formal schools) in age-appropriate classes and following them up, especially through remedial education, at least for a period of six months, so as to ensure their continued schooling.

The project was a great success in the sense that against the target



of mainstreaming 3000 out-of-school children, 5000 were mainstreamed. An informative and attractive document on the project, titled “Blossoms from the Dust”, was brought out and released at a well-attended function at the IIC, New Delhi.

Encouraged by the remarkable success of DRIP, the Axis Bank Foundation came forward to support a similar programme. Deepalaya followed the same process as in the case of DRIP. For the Deepalaya Axis Bank Foundation Programme (DABFP) also, an impressive document titled “Pearls from the Slums” was brought out.

Overseeing the planning and implementation of DRIP and DABFP, was a very fruitful and exciting experience for me, especially lessons learnt during field visits, the joy of interacting with children, sometimes smiling, sometimes naughty, and motivating their parents during our visits to the children's homes. Commitment and competence of my colleagues – Jivan Jyoti, Nishant Gupta and T.M. Mathew - and the guidance of Mr. T.K. Mathew were great assets. Our department, small though it was, discharged its duties efficiently and effectively.

The training programmes we conducted for the personnel of the participating NGOs were a rewarding experience for me. I still remember what Ms Mousami Chatterji, Programme Officer of URIDA, said after my sessions on LFA ('Logical Framework Analysis'): “Earlier, I did not know how to make LFA for a project proposal; now I find it quite interesting!”. Well, LFA is as logical and interesting as Mathematics.

## **Beyond being Consultant**

The role as Executive Director, from December 2007 to March 2009, was largely administrative, involving approval of expenditures, attending functions outside etc. There was not much time for project-related work. I had some pet ideas on promoting

education of the poor primarily by improving the functioning of government schools. I voluntarily resigned on March 31, 2009 but even after that I worked as Consultant with Deepalaya, off and on.

May I conclude with fond remembrances of all whom I interacted with in Deepalaya, especially some of the support staff - Irudayam, the man with a magical memory, and Kuldeep and Lakhan, ready to do anything, at any time, with a cheerful smile.

*The writer is the author of the book "His Journey"*

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One of the projects I was associated with was “Education on Wheels”, a novel project which envisaged education of children wandering and working on streets and in vegetable markets.



# Grandpa Fund and giving generously

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~ Mohan Sivanand

Living in Mumbai, I may not have heard of Deepalaya had it not been for a chance encounter that brought Mr A.J. Philip to me. A former magazine editor, I was attending a media meet in Kollam, Kerala, and staying at a hotel in the old, historic town when the tall, gentle Mr Philip walked into my room and introduced himself as another journalist.

Unlike me (I had moved to art after I retired), he was still actively writing but, more than that, was working for Deepalaya in Delhi as its honorary Chief Executive. By the next day, Mr Philip had, to my surprise, even written a long post on his Facebook page about meeting me!

Mr Philip and I being of the same age and the fact that both of us had spent four decades in journalism made it seem like we'd always known each other. During our three days in Kollam, I'd also learnt about Deepalaya and of how it was helping thousands of children get an education.

Later, back in Mumbai, I regularly read from Mr Philip's Facebook posts about Deepalaya's many activities. Mr Philip's childlike enthusiasm and pride in doing what he did was endearing — very

few journalists I know had ventured into charity, although nearly all of us could, given our understanding of our society.

## **Childhood and charity**

Mr Philip's charity work looked admirable, because in a smaller way I too had been doing so. And it had, like Deepalaya, something to do with school. But I'll have to go back to when I was only aged ten in 1961 and the shock my father gave me when I was home for the Christmas vacation. Dad, working for Kuwait's largest oil company, had given me a good life and I was at a fine boarding school. I wasn't studying well enough, which is why he told me of his own schooldays in our Kerala village of Mavelikara (incidentally, very close to Philip's own native place). Dad was often thrown out of class for not paying the fees.

Now fast-forward to 1992. I'm 41, a husband, father and deputy editor, living in my own flat in suburban Mumbai. The lift-man in our apartment building was a kind but hungry-looking fellow named Ferreira. I'd learnt that he once had a good factory job but lost it because he'd been alcoholic. One day, Ferreira had with him a little boy and a girl. "My children," Ferreira told me.

"Don't you have school today?" I asked them, just to make small talk. They had no answer. Ferreira explained to me later that they'd been taken out of school because he couldn't afford to pay their fees. I was shocked.

"How much are the fees?" I asked.

"Sixty rupees a month for each of them," he replied. Just that! I recalled my father's story. The kids were soon back in school and I must have paid the fees for about two years when Ferreira suddenly had some rift with our building's manager and lost his job again. I never saw Ferreira after that. Looking back, I should have located

him, found his home—which I think was not so near; he came daily on his bicycle. But I got on with my own busy life and never did that. That was cruel and uncaring, I now feel, and 25 years on, I still wonder what became of the children. I hope they got an education and good jobs. I hope my not seeking Ferreira out did not hurt them too much.

## **Taking stock of things**

Even so, looking back, it must have changed me. I started giving to others around me who needed help especially for studies, medical or housing needs. There was no point in having much more money than I required. I also happened to read Deepak Chopra's *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*. That bestselling little book has much to say about money: Hoarding wealth makes no sense, Chopra had written. You must be a giver if you really want to be wealthy and happy. And money should circulate in order to grow. Oh, I thought, isn't that what has been happening to me?

A few years before I retired, I had set aside certain stocks and other investments, even a new bank account, all managed on a separate sheet in my personal Excel accounts file. For fun, I named that sheet “Grandpa Fund,” in memory of my generous maternal grandpa, whom I adored. The nest egg I see grow on that sheet is for others.

I give away only a part of what it generates every year, and I don't consider it my family's money. It's no registered trust or anything meant for a tax-deduction. It's just for my own selfishness – I mean the joy it gives me and maybe a few others. I can't help the whole world. So, I help only those in my “circle,” as I imagine it – people connected to me. A college student whose mother couldn't pay her fees, for instance, about whom Philip once wrote on his lively Facebook page. I consider that student connected to me through Philip.

With my Grandpa Fund, what matters is that it has given me a freedom. Try doing that. I don't donate a rupee to religious causes or to those collecting for charity. I'd leave that to corporates, governments or the very rich. I prefer giving directly. I'm no Bill Gates, but for me my Grandpa Fund is as important as the world's wealthiest Foundation through which Gates does so much good.

Yet, I believe, such agencies may not reach simple people in our own little circles, for some basic needs like education. So, do the math: If every middle-class Indian family like mine – it's a gigantic number of families – just helped a few people in their own circles alone, wouldn't it add up to much more than the big foundations are giving away?

*The writer is a painter, cartoonist, nature lover and former editor, The Reader's Digest*

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So, I help only those in my “circle,” as I imagine it – people connected to me.

# Library that lights the way



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~ Mridula Koshy

Rakesh and Roshan wanted to know if we had any books about Black Holes in the library. We didn't, but I did show them how to use the index in our many volumes relating to space. They had questions to follow up the first question, which is inevitable in a library. So we talked about the impossibility of any human being ever entering a black hole. Roshan was triumphant because, of course, they had debated this earlier and Rakesh had taken the wrong position on the question.

The all-important question though was one for which they couldn't find an answer in any book: can a Black Hole act as an opening to another universe? This was a question worth pondering for days, which they did with the aid of indexes and books. Meanwhile, I was busy reaching out to Rishabh from Telescope Watch. He had taught children in the library their cosmic address in a series of Sunday workshops back in 2016, and it was time, I thought, for him to return.

So, here I am today explaining to the boys that there will indeed be 25 days of science workshops in the library this June. And here is Roshan almost crying as he tells me, 'ticket toh khareed chuke hai.' His parents are migrants and like so many migrant families in the neighbourhood of the community library housed inside the Ramditti J R Narang Deepalaya Learning Center, his family, too, is

making their annual excursion to the home village. He will not attend Rishabh Sir's workshop. I reassure him: the library will be here when he returns and another year we will have another science workshop for him.

I can be confident saying this. After all, I first came to this building and to Deepalaya as a volunteer 10 years ago, in 2009. As far as I am concerned, the building and the organisation has always been here and will always be here. In 2009, my partner, Michael Creighton, and I began reading to a few children in the building. With the support of the Principal, Ms Gitanjali, we eventually created a school library. After a training we did with the teachers, we were no longer the only ones in the building reading aloud to children. Then came the school closure in 2013, and the school library gathered dust as children scattered to government schools in the area. We continued our weekly 'read aloud' programme with a few former students, who spoke with longing about their happier school days in Deepalaya.

One winter evening in 2014, a child came rushing in to ask if we knew the whereabouts of her sister. They had both been in the reading club earlier and had sat and listened to stories, borrowed books, and we thought they had left together. There were no lights in the corridor outside the library. We searched for the child classroom by classroom, using our phones to light up dark interiors. We did not find the child. That night I couldn't sleep. How could we have been so foolish as to continue reading to children when we weren't in a position to keep track of their whereabouts and keep them safe? I insisted to my husband that we should close our project.

The next morning, I called the Learning Centre staff and to my relief found that the missing child had reached home safely. Immediately, we requested a meeting with Mr. TK Mathew, who was then head of Deepalaya. At our meeting, we asked him if we could turn the Reading Club into a proper community library, one



that would be free and open to all in the neighbourhood, one that would recruit volunteers to defray expenses, but one for which we hoped he would hire a librarian.

I proposed that I would be the librarian for the next two years. I had just completed my third book, a novel, which was slated for publishing. I knew I no longer wanted to write when there was so little by way of a reading public in India. I thought I would make my modest contribution to cultivating a reading public by helping run a small community library. Mr. Mathew's eyes practically twinkled as he said the word that would change my life. 'Why one library?' he asked, "start a library movement, instead."

### **Road to reading**

In January 2015, the Deepalaya Community Library opened its doors to the 40 or so children that were already attending our reading club. Soon there were 40 more and by the end of the year, another 600. And from opening once a week, we went to eventually being open all seven days a week. We went from one Deepalaya Community Library to a second one in the Sanjay Colony Learning Centre to a third one in the Gole Kuan Learning Centre.

The call to work with and within other organisations, to open-source our learning to others in the library movement, and to fundraise for libraries within and outside Deepalaya meant we eventually needed to create an organisation independent of Deepalaya, which we did with the enlightened approval of Deepalaya's Executive Committee. The Community Library project (TCLP) still operates the original library in collaboration with Deepalaya. It is staffed by a Deepalaya librarian and a TCLP librarian, working side by side with dozens of volunteers and a Student Council.

This year, the library has 2588 members, who in the last year alone

have issued over 21,000 books. The primary methodology is as it was years ago in the reading club – a warm welcome to an excellent read aloud. When children in the library experience the magic of a story read aloud to them, like children everywhere, they simply want to be able to do that for themselves and each other.

### **Books open up a universe**

Last year alone, there were 12,260 footfalls in the 'read aloud' programme run by staff, volunteers and student council members. This number does not account for the thousands more that we know are happening in homes in the community and amongst members seated together in the library's reading room. The Library's Honour Roll records that 1282 children have read at least 10 books. Many of them have read many more, and 131 of them have read over a 100 books.

The library's success is unlike anything in the country and the library has become a beacon for other library programmes and organisations interested in promoting the reading habit in India.

Roshan is teary today, but I'm smiling. I know that he has a library that will provide him with years of rich programming to meet the needs of his rich imagination. When Roshan returns he might enroll in the Drama Club. Or perhaps he will simply come for Art and Crafts held every Wednesday and Saturday. He might even join the Odissi Dance workshop. There is also the film club, and the book club. The Cyber Project will make available laptops so that he has digital access. Or we might encourage him to do two months of daily reading fluency classes so that through our intensive intervention we get him reading more words per minute and for longer periods, with greater enjoyment. And in this way, the TCLP and Deepalaya will continue opening the universe of reading for Roshan and thousands of others.

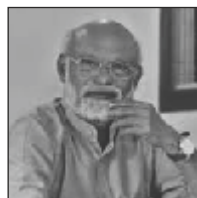
*The writer is the initiator of the library movement at Deepalaya*

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Mr. Mathew's eyes practically twinkled as he said the word that would change my life. 'Why one library?' he asked, “start a library movement, instead.”



# Building a better tomorrow



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~ Ranjit P John

**I**t has been a pleasure and honour working as the Architect for Deepalaya. I was first contacted by their founding members, because of the number of institutions we had done and our penchant for working with charitable institutions.

It has been a long and fruitful relationship of over 25 years and I feel privileged to have been able to give back to society in a small way, by working with Deepalaya. I have always been given a free hand in the design process which is what, I feel, led to the Kalkaji School, Human Resource Centre at Janakpuri, master planning of Deepalaya Gram along with individual buildings. Out of these projects, Kalkaji School needs special mention and the challenges faced for design and execution of the school.

This beautiful school building is designed on an irregular rocky site with level difference of 20 feet from the approach road to the extreme end. Planning has been done taking advantage of the site conditions in difference of level. The building is designed as a staggered or stepped design to reduce its massiveness, terraces were created at different levels to have a stepped effect. Staircases were projected above the terrace level, with structural glazing placed on one side to have transparency since it is a coeducational school.

Full or ribbon windows were provided to tap natural light to the maximum and to have panoramic view towards Tughlaqabad Fort. Instead of creating a normal basement, sunken courts were created and normal windows provided by taking advantage of level difference on site. The auditorium, which is placed in the basement, is given direct entry from the outside level to have easy evacuation in case of an emergency.

The overall planning is based on courtyard planning, which is the most suitable for Delhi climatic conditions. Out of these, the bigger courtyard is designed as an atrium with triple floor height which acts as a ventilation shaft, too. For external finish natural materials like brick tiles were selected since the same would fit for the site. Overall design concept was not to create a building which looks fresh but to create the feeling that the building had been in existence for ages and goes well with the surrounding topography. Similar challenges were faced while designing the Human Resources Development Centre and Deepalaya Gram. At Deepalaya Gram, the challenge was master planning, road layout and placement of buildings.

Finally, like any good building, the specifications were many and different for all the above three projects. The HRD building is the first high-rise building in Delhi to have used fly ash bricks, that too in exposed form. The execution of the projects through different contractors, and that too to our expectations was tough. But I am glad that we never relented and finally the end product delivered is excellent and stands out from other buildings. Planning, cooperation from executives of Deepalaya to have the best, and constant monitoring of construction, all led to an architectural ethos that is both conducive to functionality, adheres to the philosophy of less is more and is within the given budget.

*The writer is a well-known architect who has designed thousands of buildings, including schools, colleges, churches, temples and mosques*

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I am glad that we never relented and finally the end product delivered is excellent and stands out from other buildings.



# A second home



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~ Ravi Pahuja

Deepalaya is as much my present workplace as it is my Alma Mater. I completed my schooling from Deepalaya School, Kalkaji Extension, in 2008, after which I joined a three-year diploma course in animation and filmmaking. With the support of Deepalaya, I was able to visit the USA in 2011 under the CCI programme sponsored by its Department of States. There, I completed a certificate in digital filmmaking and broadcasting with 3.9 CGPA. After coming back, I joined Deepalaya as a web designer in 2012.

## Boyhood and beyond

I was six years' old and my sister was three when I lost my father. At that time, my sister and I were studying in private schools where the fees were very high. So, after passing Class 5, my mother and I started visiting other nearby schools for more affordable options. After a long struggle, my mother came to know about Deepalaya School, Kalkaji. But my mother was not aware of the school fee and people in the community had also been telling that this school was not recognised.

It was already end of July, I had no hope of getting admission. My mother took me with my report cards to Deepalaya School where she met the principal, Ms. Shikha Pal, and virtually begged for my admission as otherwise I would have lost one year. Shikha ma'am

asked me to read and explain a story from an English storybook lying on her table. She was impressed by me and gave me admission right away.

### **School life as a stepping stone**

For the first time in my life, I started learning computers at school and always got the highest marks in it so much so, I started teaching computers to my classmates and elders as well. The quality of education at Deepalaya was much better than the schools which charge a huge fee. Besides computers, I liked science and social sciences as well. Some of the teachers at Deepalaya made a huge impact on my life and Ms. Shikha Pal was one of them.

Deepalaya gave me a lot of opportunities and exposure to develop my latent talent and leadership qualities. It also enhanced my overall personality. I was the captain of Mother Teresa House for two years, President of the Interact Club and also the Head Boy of the school. Deepalaya also provided me the opportunity to meet former President APJ Abdul Kalam, sports minister and veteran actor Sunil Dutt, things that I had never imagined in my life.

After passing Class 10, I completed one-year course of computer software from Deepalaya Vocational Training Centre at Kalkaji. After Class 12, I got admission to an animation course from Picasso Animation College, which was sponsored by Mr. Jyoti Sagar. I am really grateful to Mr. Sagar and Deepalaya for helping me in completing this course. In this animation course, I learned so many tools and skills that I am now using in my job.

### **American avenues**

In 2011, I had completed my animation course and was looking for a job when I came to know about the CCI programme. After discussing with my mother and maternal aunt, I applied for the



exchange programme with filmmaking as my area of interest. After passing a series of interviews and clearing a written test in English, I got my visa for the U.S.

In August 2011, I flew to the Green Bay City, Wisconsin, USA, where I got admission in the Northeast Wisconsin Technical College to pursue a certificate course in Filmmaking and learnt web designing as well.

It was a great learning experience for me and it widened my horizons. I not only acquired new skills and leadership abilities but also became a much responsible citizen. I got a 3.9 GPA out of 4 in both semesters.

While studying, I got a chance to do an internship with a very famous photographer, Steve Ryan, an expert in aerial photography, who was my instructor in the college, too. During my internship, I got a chance to do image editing work for him.

### **Work life at Deepalaya**

After coming back from the USA, I got a job offer from Deepalaya in 2012 and was appointed as a web designer. Initially, I was asked to redesign the website. Apart from that, I was also designing different communication materials for the organisation. In a years' time, we were able to redesign all internal communication materials and the website, too. The redesigned website enabled an increase in the funds raised as it attracted more calls and queries from different organisations for donation and sponsorship.

Since then, I was given the additional responsibilities of website updation and video making. In the year 2015-16, I joined the digital marketing certificate course. This time, too, our all-weather friend, Mr. Jyoti Sagar, sponsored my course. I started working on social media, website analytics, email marketing, search engine

optimisation etc. so that we can improve our presence online by using these mediums. Currently, I am looking after all the designing needs of the organisation, digital marketing, website updations, video making, photography, and internal IT-related problems.

My journey with Deepalaya is full of lessons. My skills had improved and can easily relate to the vision and mission of the organisation. I am one of the 3,50,000 children, who benefitted from Deepalaya. I really feel blessed working with Deepalaya as I can see so many kids and women smiling their way to self-reliance. There are so many people in the organisation who are my inspiration and are role models for me. I have imbibed some very good leadership and mentorship qualities from my seniors and colleagues. For me, Deepalaya is a second home and a family.

*The writer is Digital Marketing Officer with Deepalaya*



# Cadets and call of charity



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~ Colonel Ripu Daman Singh

As roads turned into 'rivers', houses collapsed, and people got stranded, when floods swallowed many parts of rain-battered Kerala on August 18, 2018, I read a fervent appeal from Mr A. J. Philip on Facebook on September 13. He wrote, 'Deepalaya has undertaken the task of rebuilding the two government schools at Chendamanglam (Emakulam), badly damaged by floods. We are appealing for donations from citizens to help'.

The appeal touched me, being from a village government school myself. I immediately wrote to Jaswant Kaur of Deepalaya, who was also my FB friend, "Beta, I can only give Rs 3000 from my pension". She sweetly replied, "No amount is small, Sir. The heart with which one gives matters". The very same day, I transferred the money to the Deepalaya account, and Jaswant, thanking me, promptly sent me even the 80 G receipt.

## Starting with a small step

I felt nice. But I felt nicer when after a few days, Mr Philip put up a photograph of a water-motor (costing Rs 2500) which they had installed in the school, using my money, as my donation was the first one to reach for the project. I had never experienced the joy of a donation as deep as this.

Here is an institution which is so transparent, and values its donors by keeping them informed of the way their money has been utilised. And here is a man (Mr A. J. Philip) who makes small people like me feel big. What a joyous beginning of the association with Deepalaya!

The bond started getting stronger as I keenly kept following Mr Philip's posts. Mrs Betty Phillip also came on board as a kind and benevolent lady. It was December 18, and there was a fine initiative by Deepalaya to raise a NCC boys' unit in their school at Kalkaji Extension. Mr Philip invited me to be a guest of honour during its inauguration on December 14 by Maj Gen Ajay Seth, ADG NCC, Army HQ. As I was committed on that day, I offered myself to come on December 17 to motivate the young NCC cadets as also give a lecture on 'Communication Skills' for the students. Everything was tied up by the Principal, Mr C. P. Davis, before I arrived at the school. It was the first time I was meeting Mr Philip, though I have been reading his articles since my DAV college, Chandigarh, days in 1971-73. I found him very humble and straightforward. I learnt from him that Deepalaya School, Kalkaji Extension, is a co-educational, senior secondary school affiliated to the CBSE. Established in 2008, it provides value-based quality education to underprivileged children.

### **Soldiering on for a cause**

Now, it was time for the lecture-cum-interaction with the students and Mr Philip himself was present in the auditorium. About 500 boys and girls, neatly dressed and well behaved, attended. I spoke from the heart, and shared my experience of public speaking with them, right from the school days (Military School, Belgaum). I also narrated a debating incident from the Panjab University days in 1972, when we had defeated Sushma Sharma (now Sushma Swaraj) in a youth festival at Chandigarh. It was a big high as she was undefeated most of the time. I gave chocolates to the winners, and

enjoyed interacting with the bright young minds. Mr Philip made the concluding remarks and it was heart-warming to see him pay a tribute to the soldiers, reminding the students that we all enjoy a sound sleep because of the soldiers who guard our borders 24x7.

After the lecture, the NCC unit boys stayed back and I met them individually. We all took the NCC Pledge first.:

We the cadets of the national cadet corps, do solemnly pledge that we shall always uphold the unity of India. We resolve to be disciplined and responsible citizen of our nation. We shall undertake positive community service in the spirit of selflessness and concern for our fellow beings.

I told these 25 smart boys that they are now 'soldiers in uniform' and should always uphold its honour by being good scouts, and a model for others in discipline and character. The NCC unit has added value and ethos to the school. Ever since then, Deepalaya has been close to my heart. Even my family takes interest in it as I share its selfless work with them.

In Deepalaya's children I see my reflection, and am reminded of the hardships that I had seen in my village in Haryana. As a boy in the early sixties, I used to cycle 10 kms to reach my school, before I got selected for the King George's School Belgaum (now Military School) in 1964. That school ignited my potential and helped me to become an officer. Similarly, Deepalaya is igniting the minds and talents of these underprivileged children. Having served in uniform for 38 years, and now looking after the INTACH Ambala Chapter, what better joy for me than to be part of the Deepalaya family! I feel humbled, leading a life of purpose. May the country have more Deepalayas and more AJPs!

*The writer is a retired Army officer and social crusader*

# A class apart



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~ Shikha Pal

Working in Deepalaya from 1989 to 2018 has been a great journey and a wonderful learning experience. I cannot exactly say when I had the epiphany of wanting to work in the field of education. Deepalaya happened to be a neighborhood school in my colony. Armed with a lot of courage and hope I went to the school and met the principal. Little did I know at that point that it was a school for the economically underprivileged. The then principal offered me a job as a teacher immediately. I joined the very next day. My job was to teach first-generation learners in small rooms rented in a Transit Camp, Kalkaji (a resettlement colony). It was a life-changing experience for me.

It was my entry into the world of underserved children and communities living in the slums, struggling to survive. I was horrified at the life underprivileged children in India lead and the injustice they suffer every day. I plunged into my work wholeheartedly, teaching, guiding, infusing dreams and aspirations into the little hearts and minds, who were all so eager to soak in the knowledge and love I had to share.

Working with the communities, and convincing the parents to send their children regularly to school was very challenging. How does one urge a child to do homework and study for an hour every day when all the family belongings have been flooded in torrential rain,

or impress upon a child to attend school every day when his mother is in hospital after his drunk father severely injured her eye, which had to be removed? I enjoyed every minute spent in Deepalaya. The children gave uninhibited love and respect and were eager to learn and in spite of their difficult life at home, they always had a smiling face.

### **Strength to strength**

As the years passed, Deepalaya expanded and created opportunities for the underprivileged children. The Kalkaji Extension Deepalaya School came up with its state-of-the-art infrastructure – A public school with all the facilities for the underprivileged children. My heart swelled with pride for Deepalaya and its founding members.

The chance to be the team leader of the Kalkaji Extension School marked the beginning of an amazing experience for me. Like a difficult and awe-inspiring mountain climbing, it was challenging, scary and yet gratifying. For 11 years, I worked to build up the school from a strength of 100 students shifted from the Sanjay Colony School to a strength of 1100.

My team sought to infuse the children with the spirit of learning. We worked to see them as self-reliant, passionate and responsible citizens of a new world. My team and I introduced the children to other aspects of life apart from academics. Net ball was introduced. Our children went on to become national level players, they won the Gobar Times Green School Award instituted by the Centre for Science and Environment five times in a row.

### **Newer platforms**

They were part of the Pace (Hindustan Times) and Newspaper in Education (Times of India) programmes. The inter-Deepalaya

quiz competition was introduced and students competed with their heart and soul. The American Centre invited Deepalaya to participate in the community college scholarship programme. Twenty-six of Deepalaya students faced the stringent interview process and were able to study in colleges in the US. The Shinnyo En (Japan) scholarship programme helped our girls to become nurses. I grabbed every opportunity that came my way, so that the children could gain from it.

The work culture in Deepalaya is supportive and understanding. It allows you to grow. It is a great organisation. As my years in Deepalaya progressed, I had become one with our children, their struggles and their triumphs. The journey and the climb in Deepalaya have been exhilarating and the view breathtaking. I thank with all my heart all my seniors and mentors in Deepalaya for giving me the opportunity to work with them.

*The writer played a significant role in the growth of Deepalaya*





# The Home where I am Didi



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~ Sudha Parthasarathy

A photograph of March 2019, published alongside, brings a rush of memories of that part of my life at Deepalaya, which will always hold a special place in my heart – the Deepalaya Childrens' Home.

To the fine young men in the frame, I was and continue to be 'Sudha didi'. 'Didi', or elder sister, implies a relationship of affection, nurture, trust and guidance. And those were the very emotions fostered as they held my hand and walked away from the streets and railway stations of Delhi to the care of the Home located at Gusbethi in Haryana. Many, as young as five years, had slept off in my lap as we traversed the road from Delhi to Haryana.

## Home away from home

Later, we started receiving children from partner organisations in Delhi: their parents (very often single mothers) would hug me and cry as their children drove away to Gusbethi. The reasons for sending their child away were varied (HIV afflicted; commercial sex workers; extreme poverty and bad influences in the slum communities). Parents met their children once in six months or so. Many did not, for reasons best known to them. Deepalaya held regular review meetings: to update them about the children.

At one such meeting at the NGO Sahara, we (Deepalaya, Sahara staff and the parents) were all sitting around a table, discussing

various matters. I found this mother, sitting adjacent to me, constantly holding my hand and at times running her palm over it. I was very uncomfortable, pulled away my hand several times but she came around to holding it again. Finally, quite irritated, I rebuked her and told her to sit still. A pin-drop silence followed and then what she said filled my eyes with tears: in fact, everyone present went numb. “Didi, I have not seen my children for so long; you are my only contact with them, you are the one who hugs them tight. I was sending my love to them through your hand.”

The ride back home that day seemed longer than usual: that night while I patted my son to sleep, I realised how blessed I was to be able to do that: how fortunate I was to see my mother every day, how this and how that. Till date, memory of that meeting sends shivers down my spine. Never would have those who planned this project ever thought of the impact this intervention would create.

I was fortunate to be supported by a team of young, trained and motivated colleagues in this project -- Anita, Ajin, Divya, Preeti, Smita, Achyutananda, Sirsendu, Shyam and many more. Together we worked out a plan to help the children forget the harshness they had faced and settle into a family of hope and security. Hats off to these young people - very often we used to have consultation calls way past the bedtime of the children, as that was the only time they got to discuss various matters.

While my colleagues changed jobs, I had the advantage of being a constant fixture in this rehab process until my exit in May, 2013. Once someone told the children that they should call me “Sudha ma'am” (I had become the Executive Director then) – but pat came the retort, 'She may be ma'am to you: for us she will always be didi!' Yes, there were times when they took advantage of this familiarity, but isn't that also the case in our families when we hide behind a more indulgent parent?

The home for boys started first, hence a stronger bond with the 'Bonds'! The girls came in later: all had a grim, heart-wrenching past to narrate. With Deepalaya's help, they have a firm footing in life today and I am happy to have been a part of that process.

This journey has not been about me only giving; I have also learnt lessons of patience, resilience, optimism, brotherhood and much more from the boys. The photograph was taken at the wedding of one of the boys, Kasim: and the entire gang had taken responsibility to see that the event was well organised. Kasim got a degree in social work and while he pursues his post-graduation, he is also employed as a House Father at the same Home in which he grew up. What better way to give back to his alma mater!

Give and take has been a constant during my 15 years at Deepalaya. I was given immense opportunities to learn, grow and lead: from being given responsibilities as a communication executive to a position of taking responsibility and being accountable as executive director. Heartfelt gratitude to the founder, Mr T.K. Mathew, who stood strong as a coach and mentor. Most striking was his challenge to walk the untrodden path. Be it a project decision, a corporate presentation or anchoring Deepalaya's Silver Jubilee celebrations. "Learn from your mistakes, don't ignore them", is a lesson he taught and I imbibed. Not just professional, he was a pillar of strength during various personal exigencies. Deepalaya should once again don the 'Training Hat' and impact many more lives through its teachings.

### **Board that gives sense of belonging**

I came to Deepalaya from an organisation where field staff should not be seen or heard when board members visited from outstation. On joining Deepalaya, I was nervous when a board member, the late Mr. K.V Thomas, walked into our office, pulled up a chair and

started talking to my colleague, Avijit, in a friendly manner. I was tongue-tied, answered Mr. Thomas' questions in monosyllables and was relieved when he went away. I badgered Avijit with a volley of questions on how he could be so casual with a board member. As I settled into the organisation, I learnt that board members are friendly, encouraging people like all of us. Not just them, their families too! I cherish that email I received from a member's wife when I was appointed the Executive Director in which she wrote, "I always said to myself, each time I saw you - this girl will be an achiever, has the mettle and determination" - Betty.

The best part was Christmas time, when Mr Thomas, would come up to my desk, open the first drawer and put the packet of X-mas cake there and walk away, giving me the feeling of being 'special'. Or, Mr. Chackochan calling me to say: "I've sent a packet for you, remember to take it from the driver"! No guesses about what the packet contained!

My memories at Deepalaya would not be complete without mentioning my colleagues: it was a family which worked together. There was bickering, differences of opinion, frayed tempers; I was often labelled 'a hard task master', etc. But that did not stop the warmth and care pouring in when needed: it was a mutually fulfilling relationship I shared with all of them. I was touched when colleagues from Deepalaya came to pay condolences on my mother's demise a few months ago. It has been more than five years since I had exited: but the bond and the connect remain.

Friends and family always teased me, "Deepalaya has become your surname"! Surname or not, Deepalaya will always remain central to my growth, professionally and personally.

*The writer is head, ASED in India*

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Once someone told the children that they should call me “Sudha ma'am” (I had become the Executive Director then) – but pat came the retort, 'She may be ma'am to you: for us she will always be Didi'!



# Helping hand amid havoc



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~ Sudheernath

I had taken a ticket to go to Kochi on August 17, 2018, for several engagements in Kerala, among them attending the Festival at Thrikkakara Temple. But with the unprecedented floods literally swallowing Kerala, the airport was closed. I got my ticket rerouted. Now my plan was to go to Chennai by air. I bought a rail ticket from Chennai to Palakkad, as I had to attend a marriage at Thrissur on August 18. That's when I heard about the huge landslide at Kudhiri. Aneesh, my friend and Minister A.K. Balan's Secretary told me not to come as the situation was tragic. I cancelled my trip.

In the great floods, more than 10 cartoonists were badly affected. As Secretary of the Kerala Cartoon Academy, I visited their houses on September 7 and 8. On September 8, along with cartoonist Suresh Davinchy and friend Joji, I visited Varapuzha, Paravur, Kodungallur, Mala and nearby places.

When we reached the house of cartoonist Murali K Mukundan at Vadakkumbura in Chendamangalam, his wife P.R. Jayasree, who is employed as a Senior Teacher at Chendamangalam Government UP School at Vadakkamparam, told me about the post-flood pathetic condition of the school. The school had been functioning as a flood relief camp till a few days before the flood waters reached the school and caused havoc. We left the place promising to find help for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the school.

Then I returned to Delhi, I had a discussion with Mr. A.J. Philip, Chief Executive of Deepalaya, on this matter. To my utter surprise, he agreed to reconstruct the Government School at Chendamangalam. On September 17, 2018, he reached the school at Vadakapuram.

### **Chendamangalam calling**

What happened afterwards is beyond words. What Murali told me is that the reconstruction, that was done at war footing by Mr Philip and his colleagues, has transformed the school beyond recognition. The whole village joined hands with Deepalaya in this noble task. The Headmaster, the teachers, the non-teaching staff, members of the Parents Teacher Association and the students put in exemplary service to make the task of Deepalaya easier.

The reconstructed school with high-tech facilities was dedicated to the people at an impressive function at Chendamangalam Government School on December 8, 2018, though I was unable to attend.

What Deepalaya did was to fulfill the aspiration of the people of Chendamangalam as there were no benches for the children to sit in the class, there were no books, there was no motor to fill water in the water tank, there were no computer. Everything was taken away by the flood waters.

Everybody in the neighborhood said that the Government School would not have such resurrection in such a short time. One thing that can be said with certainty is that Deepalaya was able to find a place in the hearts of the flood-affected people of the village. Reason for this is that every house had a relationship with the school.

What was done under the leadership of Mr. Philip soon became news. The office-bearers of Kerala Club in New Delhi invited him to hear him and honor him for the good work that Deepalaya had done at Chendamangalam.

I also informed the audience about my plan to go to Kerala and visit this particular school along with other cartoonists to celebrate Christmas and New Year at Chendamangalam on December 21, 2018.

Among those who attended the Christmas-New Year celebrations at the Chendamangalam Government Upper Primary School, which had regained a new lease of life post floods, were many famous cartoonists and Chendamangalam's own storyteller Sethu.

The others who spoke on the occasion were Adv. T. G Anoop, President of the Chendamangalam Gram Panchayat, Leena Viswan, Ward Member, Cartoonists Sere Master, Sivan Paravoor, Murali K., Dr George Mathew, Chairman, Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi, George Abraham, AJ Abraham, Headmaster Santosh, Muthukumar, Murali, Raji Paravoor, Artist Suresh Davinchi, documentary producer Siddique Paravur, Jayasree, Senior Teacher, K.S. Maoj, SMC Convener.

Deepalaya has reconstructed not one but two schools -- the Government Lower Primary School and the Government Upper Primary School at Chendamangalam. The new life the schools had acquired was visible on the faces of the teachers, the students and everyone present there.

*The writer is a renowned cartoonist and columnist*



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One thing that can be said with certainty is that Deepalaya was able to find a place in the hearts of the flood-affected people of the village.



# Dutch and Deepalaya



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~ DikVerboom

On behalf of Edukans, the Netherlands, I congratulate Deepalaya for its 40 years of excellent work in educating and empowering underprivileged children in the poorer areas of Delhi. We share a long history in which Deepalaya not only impacted the lives of children and their families, but Edukans as well.

Our first contact with Deepalaya dates back to the end of the 1980s. It was then known as the 'Deepalaya Education Society' and Edukans was still the 'Foundation for Christian Education' (until 2002, when we broadened our scope as a development organisation for education). The constant and connecting factor was Mr. TK Mathew, its ever-inspiring driving force, excellent networker and innovative fundraiser. Checking the website, I even saw our former queen Beatrix visiting Deepalaya (in 2007)!

Since the 1980s and until 2003-2004, Edukans was supporting Deepalaya with numerous projects: the Sanjay Colony school, Deepalaya Kalkaji School, Deepalaya Gram and others. But the highlight was a cultural exchange we had in 1997. This story is exemplary of how Deepalaya influenced Edukans to start with exchange programmes — nowadays professional internationalisation programmes — as a manifestation of Edukans' vision and expertise on teaching and learning.

It started in 1996, when colleague Kees de Jong and I watched a cultural performance of Deepalaya children in New Delhi. A true manifestation of 'enabling the child look beyond slums', the Deepalaya slogan. On the spot, the idea came up to organise a cultural exchange with our country, the Netherlands..

Cultural exchange calling

For both sides, Edukans and Deepalaya, this was a major logistical challenge and a mega-operation but more than worth the effort. Edukans arranged a programme for three weeks, with 30 secondary schools, lodging, transport, publicity. The performances made a great impression and the interaction was overwhelming. Such creative and professional children!

Dutch schools presented themselves as well, with dances, singing, sports and even cooking of extensive Indian meals (our Dutch menu is horrible for Indians). There were other exposure visits as well, for instance, to the flower gardens, the windmills and the beach. For the first time in their life, the children saw the sea and went completely ecstatic. It was beyond their imagination and certainly beyond the congested Delhi urban environment.

Two years later, in 1999, Edukans started 'Going Global' (GG), an exchange programme for secondary school students that still exists. We also have the 'World Teacher' programme. Of course, the first place to visit with GG was: New Delhi, Deepalaya!

## **Future Forty**

In the ideal world, the day should come when Deepalaya's mission is completed. However, 'enable a child look beyond slums' entails more. It is the metaphor for empowering children and youth worldwide to build their lives to their fullest potential.

For Deepalaya, like-minded organisations and Edukans, there is still a task ahead. Not only in India, but in the Netherlands as well. Education is not only about knowledge and earning a decent income later on, but more than ever it is about learning to be – your identity and integrity - learning to live together, to shape ideals, coping with (media) manipulation and so on.

Today, our concerns as Edukans are with education relevance, gender-sensitive pedagogy, social-emotional learning; life skills. On behalf of Edukans, my wish is that Deepalaya sticks to its mission and role as a change maker. And, yes, for the next 40 years to come and beyond!

*The writer is senior programme adviser at Edukans*



# Breaking barriers and beyond



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~ Pradeep Kumar

In 1990, during my MSW Course at Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidya Peeth, Banaras, I was placed at Deepalaya – Plan project in West Delhi for internship for a period of eight weeks along with five other interns.

During this period, I visited various Deepalaya Plan projects which were being implemented at Raghuv eer Nagar, Khayala, and Meera Bagh. I came face to face with the lives of the poor, and how Deepalaya was changing their destiny. This experience changed my vision of life, as this was the first time ever I had visited or worked with the marginalised sections of the society.

At this time, five trainees and me applied for some posts which Deepalaya had advertised. We were called for a test and interview at Deepalaya's office at Janakpuri. During the interview, I was asked by Mr. T.K. Mathew, the then CEO and Secretary of Deepalaya, about my ambition in life, to which I promptly answered: “To serve for the betterment and empowerment of the underprivileged section of the society till my last breath”.

I was lucky to get shortlisted and was called for the final round of interview with Mr. Mathew. Mrs. Deepali Khanna, Director of Plan, was also present. The interview went on for more than 20

minutes and several questions related to my academic qualification, my family, my future plan and job description were asked.

The interviewers were not convinced of my seriousness about taking up a job in Delhi, since the elders among my relations were in government service, in and around Varanasi. However, I managed to convince them and got selected as 'Development Promoter' and was placed at the Deepalaya Sanjay Colony Project, Okhla Ph-II. At that time, Sanjay Colony was in its initial stage of getting inhabited. My task was to develop and run programmes in Sanjay Colony related to health, education, community organisation, etc, on the pattern of Deepalaya Plans.

During the two years of hard work, we gained the trust of the people of Sanjay Colony, and started running activities like pre-school, non-formal, remedial, vocational education, income generation programme, self-help groups, special education for differently abled, etc. Since we were financially supported by various donor agencies, we used to get visitors from these donors, quite frequently.

During one of such visits by Mr. Narang (who had donated a building to Deepalaya at Khirki village), along with Mr. Mathew, we showed him various ongoing community development activities being conducted at Sanjay Colony. Mr. Narang was very much impressed with the programmes and the several problems and challenges being tackled. He asked Mr. Mathew, "How is it possible to run so many activities in the community with so many challenges". Mr. Mathew pointed at me and replied: "He is the magician of this community development"! This gesture on the part of Mr Mathew motivated me a lot to work with greater dedication.

Considering my commitment and competence, especially with regard to the work at Sanjay Colony, I was promoted as Assistant Program Officer and was asked to develop and implement a Girl Child Project at Gole Kuan, another habitation of the poor, close to Sanjay Colony.

The entire team of Deepalaya was earlier entrusted with the task of making a building for the project at Gole Kuan. But all the efforts went in vain due to various challenges. During my period at Gole Kuan, I focused on involving all the stakeholders of the community. To find out the reason why the community was against Deepalaya making a building for the project, I conducted a series of meetings with the community youth, women, children and local leaders, sometimes at odd hours, visited police stations, government offices, etc and finally motivated them and enlisted their co-operation for the project.

The community was happy at the services Deepalaya was rendering and within a few months, three double-storeyed buildings were erected in the community without much hassle. In a short while, the Deepalaya Gole Kuan Project earned the status of a model project of Deepalaya and was often referred to as the 'Pilgrim Centre of Deepalaya'. I must say that visitors/delegates from many part of the World, who visited Deepalaya, invariably visited the projects of Deepalaya Gole Kuan and I felt privileged to make those visits fruitful and memorable.

### **Over to open schooling**

After seeing the success of Deepalaya Gole Kuan project, I was promoted as 'Program Officer' and given the responsibility to manage all other projects of Deepalaya in South Delhi. I have been often asked to visit other project locations of Deepalaya, besides South Delhi, for providing inputs and guidance. I was also asked to

streamline another programme of Deepalaya - National Institute of Open Schooling - supported by the Ministry of HRD, Government of India, in my role as coordinator-cum-centre superintendent.

Finally, I was given the responsibility to shoulder all the programmes of Deepalaya and promoted as senior manager-cum-head of the programme unit. During this period, I worked to promote sustainability of the self-help group program of Deepalaya.

After serving the cause of people's development for more than two decades at Deepalaya, I voluntarily quit Deepalaya on November 2010 and joined the development wing of the Delhi government, carrying with me the knowledge and experience gained from Deepalaya.

I would like to thank Deepalaya for changing my vision, dreams and life ambition to work with the marginalised sections for their betterment and self-reliance.

*The writer is nodal officer, Mission Convergence, Delhi government*

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“How is it possible to run so many activities in the community with so many challenges”. Mr. Mathew pointed at me and replied: “He is the magician of this community development”!



# Going on Fifty



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~ Dr. Amita V. Joseph

Joining Deeplaya was certainly a turning point in my life! After a very brief stint with a development sector job at Pradan, I was on the verge of rejoining the corporate sector in 1986 when Mr T.K. Mathew, the charismatic founder of Deepalaya, referred me to Plan International – to the late Mr. Vijay Sardana and Ms Alka Pathak, who headed the programmes.

I went on to do a study on their behalf on construction workers, joined Women's Action for Development (WAFD) and finally joined Deepalaya at Kalkaji in 1989, three decades ago.

The school was functioning from a rented premises in C. R. Park and the head had to often sit under a staircase! There was a formidable school team to manage, the doughty Mrs. Sareen, wonderful teachers like Mrs. Sengupta, Gargi, Shampa, Shikha, and others. The medical head, Dr. Maria Filbert, was a great support as was the team of Dangwal, Subhashish, Pervez Ameer, Raju, Murari and Bahadur, to mention a few.

Those were the days, when the team worked 24x7 to ensure that qualitative education reached children from the economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The outreach programme extended to the low-income settlements of Sanjay Colony in Okhla, the resettlement tenements in Govindpuri and the Gole Kuan area. We lacked a permanent building and thereby began our visits to the late Mr Manjit Singh, the remarkable Commissioner of the Slum Wing, Delhi, to request a piece of land for the first school building in Sanjay Colony.

Many visits later, we were elated to be granted land and approached architects for a simple, open school building that would be cheerful. Thus came up the first permanent school in the slum settlement itself, built, we were told, in record time. Efforts to improve teaching/learning pedagogy was initiated with experts from the NCERT, like Dr Daswani, training through experts such as Dr. Vinita Srinivasan, among others.

### **Fellow travellers and Forties**

I look back at my stint at Deepalaya for over a year with happiness and nostalgia. We worked hard as a team, never watching the clock nor bothering about physical comforts. It is significant how Deepalaya has grown – its main school in Kalkaji, its outreach in Delhi/Haryana Gusbethi, its wonderful children's choir, its association with community colleges, etc. It has been an amazing journey all around and I am indeed privileged to have been associated with it in its early days.

I recall with gratitude the support of Mr Mathew and my team then, many of whom are today close friends, having been fellow travellers. Each of them went on to contributing to society in various ways. Deepalaya owes much of its growth to people like Mr Mathew, who stayed with it for almost four decades, building it brick by brick, and to the dedication of its teachers and staff, many of whom continue to this day, leading the work with children and the community.

This country survives because of such organisations and selfless individuals, as non-profitable organisations like Deeplaya contribute to nation building and need to be acknowledged and recognised by the State. I look forward to Deeplaya's golden jubilee and it would be indeed heartwarming if some of the children could come back to work for Deepalaya and lead the organisation on this next milestone.

*The writer is Director, Business and Community Foundation*



# A joint venture

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~ Gitanjali Krishnan

Volunteering and helping to educate the underprivileged children became a passion when Deepalaya crossed my path in 1995.

Ramditi-Deepalaya became my baby. Ours is a phenomenal growth story from a handful of 30 students in three-four dark rooms to growing to teaching 500 slum children from the slums of Sheikh Sarai, a hutment of poor slum dwellers in South Delhi.

We, at Deepalaya, wanted to give the best all-round education to these motivated young children of the community. Armed with committed and talented teachers, who enjoyed working selflessly, Deepalaya grew to a full-fledged school from the LKG to Class 8 in a matter of a few years. The poor community people believed in us and our task became tougher.

## **An amazing growth story**

We constantly kept updating our teaching methods to keep abreast with the latest techniques. We got involved with international schools, too.

The American School, British School, APJ School, Delhi International School, etc were happy to have bright Deepalaya children for interactive sessions and programmes.

We brought out the best talent, be it music, dance, art or craft. Our children were at the forefront, much loved and appreciated by other school students.

The Narang Trust which owned the school building lent a great helping hand to take the project forward.

One of Deepalaya's founding members, Mr T.K. Mathew, was equally supportive and passionate about all the miles we crossed. My generous donors, sponsors and volunteers were the backbone to help take the projects forward. All this would not have been possible without the help received to run four projects from one place. Education, healthcare, adult literacy, tailoring – you name it and the robust Deepalaya staff was ready to participate. It was an exciting time, no doubt, but with immense challenges. I'm positive Deepalaya will continue with its challenging work to empower the underprivileged.

The best is waiting to happen. I am sure that Deepalaya will grow in the years to come. My best wishes.

*The writer played a significant role in the growth of Ramditi-Deepalaya School*

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Education, healthcare, adult literacy, tailoring – you name it and the robust Deepalaya staff was ready to participate. It was an exciting time, no doubt, but with immense challenges.

# Thriving thirteen



~ Rajvinder

I feel proud that I have served with one of the most prestigious NGOs and would like to thank all the members of Deepalaya who allowed me the honour to explore my views and share memorable moments with this organisation. Initially, when I joined Deepalaya as a community-level worker, I was only a Class 12 pass girl. I worked with Deepalaya for more than 13 years and I learnt a lot during my stint.

The staff members of Deepalaya extended their support and full co-operation, as and when I needed. The guidance and motivation from its staff helped me to complete my B.Ed and my Master in Social Work (MSW). During this span, I learnt how to deal with communities, how to conduct awareness sessions and organise camps, as I progressed from being a CLW to Development Associate to Program Executive. I am, perhaps, the only employee who got a promotion within two years.

## **To quit or not to quit**

I want to share one incident when after one year of joining Deepalaya, I wanted to quit my job for some reason. When I submitted my resignation to our Program Officer, Mr A. Bairavan, he told me, “Rajvinder, please don't use resignation as weapon,” I never forgot those words in my life and I had taken back my resignation then.

In those 13 years, I had worked at different locations and projects – pre- school, non-formal education, adult literacy program run by the MCD, IPP VIII project with Mr A. K. Dey, form SHG in community, thrift and credit schemes and many more programs.

The skills gained from Deepalaya have fashioned my later stints with a leading NGO Naz Foundation and my present role as counsellor with CanSupport, a leading NGO in Palliative Care.

I would like to convey my gratitude to all staff members and people who work day and night for the betterment of this splendid and dynamic outfit. I pray to God that He may shower His blessings on Deepalaya to serve the nation for ever.

*The writer is with CanSupport and helps patients of cancer*



# Bond beyond borders



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~ C. G. Daniel

“If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”

— 1 John 3:17

The idea of helping and giving back to the underprivileged existed since Biblical times and this Bible verse might have influenced the founding members of Deepalaya.

During the 1970s, there was a construction boom in Delhi because of the DDA. Workers migrating from neighbouring states stayed in makeshift tents and slums. The children of the workers did not have even the most basic educational opportunities.

The founding members of Deepalaya were driven by their vision and foresight and applied their seed money to work among these children living in slums. One of the members started to teach a few children in his living room. This is the beginning of Deepalaya. No one had imagined then that from such a humble beginning, Deepalaya would reach the status as one of the biggest non-profit organisations in Delhi.

I moved to Delhi from Kerala in 1977 in search of a job. I was a



member of the St.Thomas Marthoma Church, Karol Bagh, where the founding fathers of Deepalaya were active members. I still remember the day when Mr. T.K. Mathew, in his Gandhian attire, and other founding members visited my home in Mayur Vihar Phase-1, Delhi, for fundraising to buy the land for the Gusbethi project in Haryana.

### **Transparency and integrity its core strengths**

Even after I immigrated to the US, I continued getting updates and developments about Deepalaya. In the meantime, Mr A.J. Philip (AJP) and I became Facebook friends. Like many others, I am an ardent reader of his Facebook posts.

A few years ago, I met him for the first time in Delhi and came to know that the misgivings some had about Deepalaya were just misgivings. The organisation has been growing from strength to strength. My later interactions with AJP showed that this may largely be thanks to AJP's transparency and accountability, which he brings to Deepalaya as much to personal dealings.

I am a member of the Indo-American Press Club in Houston, Texas, and every year, we organise an international media conference attended by noted journalists and political leaders. Last year, Mr. Philip was one of the invitees to the conference held at Atlanta, Georgia. AJP took every opportunity to introduce Deepalaya to the guests and to the chief guest, Mr P. Sreeramakrishnan, speaker of the Kerala Legislative Assembly. AJP also apprised Mr. Sreeramakrishnan of the renovation of two government schools at Chendamangalam, Ernakulam, damaged by the severe Kerala floods, undertaken by Deepalaya.

Every non-profit organisation runs with the donations from people and organisations. Why do people donate to charitable organisations? A lot of people donate to organisations where they

have personal ties. Some contribute out of compassion so that others do not suffer the way they have or to make a difference to the lives of the needy. In the US, 55 per cent of the American households give to charity.

The key factor that motivates giving is the power of asking. A recent study shows that more than 85 per cent of charitable donations happen when people gave because someone asked them to. "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." -- Matthew 7:7

Deepalaya is under commendable leadership that displays the highest levels of integrity and transparency. Hence, it has touched the lives of many, and I hope will continue to do so.

*The writer is chairman, Deepalaya Foundation in the US*

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# Artiste meets altruism



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~ Sharon Lowen

**W**armest congratulations to Deepalaya on completing 40 years! I was first introduced to Deepalaya decades ago, through the dedicated and kind efforts of Sudha Parthasarathy, Deepalaya's dynamic liaison for community interface.

Together we collaborated on multifaceted interactions between the American Embassy School (AES), New Delhi's elementary and middle school students and the Deepalaya Learning Centre at Sanjay Colony. Besides my full-time career as a classical performing artiste of Odissi, Manipuri and Chhau, I am also committed to integrating India into the K-12 curriculum of AES where my daughter studied.

## Postcards from another age

The student activities that supported connecting with fun learning between Deepalaya and AES children were so successful that they became part of the regular curriculum for AES for many years. Each class partnership met at least twice a year, once each on each school campus and sometimes on a field trip together. In the early days of digital photography, the AES students would take photos and shared interviews to personalise, record and share with their Deepalaya friends long before the days of smartphones and Instagram.

Besides snacks and games, they also taught each other songs and dances. Deepalaya students also shared their performances at American Embassy School K-12 school assemblies on Indian national holidays.

One collaboration held at AES was almost too successful! Sudha asked me to host a multi-school cultural programme, at a time I seem to recall Dutch students from Holland were visiting Deepalaya. We had a 100 per cent response from all the schools invited, including the British and other international schools. Invitations were sent to half a dozen notables in the hope that one might make time to come and they all turned up. Shabana Azmi and artist-architect Satish Gujral were among them, giving us the wonderful challenge of welcoming each fully as chief guest.

### **Date with Durga**

The students and faculty of Sanjay Colony got together to decide what they needed most as a motivation for an AES service project. The winning suggestion was new blackboards for all the rooms as it was hard to read on the worn-out ones in use. We all know that focused giving brings more happiness and connection, so raising funds for blackboards was a big hit with the students at AES. I think another time, I organised a fund-raising for office equipment as well.

Seeing the talent of the students and my own life-long commitment to classical Indian performing arts, I was happy to offer a scholarship of merit annually to one or two students to encourage them onward.

My mother divided her year between India and the USA and visited Sanjay Colony with me. When she noticed a young girl who was cross-eyed (strabismus), she immediately committed to getting her corrective eye surgery done as she had the same condition as a

child, but couldn't afford surgery until college. I found a great ophthalmologist and Durga's surgery was organised and proved a great success. My mother and I stayed in touch with Durga as we watched her grow into a beautiful, confident young woman.

It was also always a pleasure to visit the Kalkaji Deepalaya School to address students and see programmes such as the excellent Learn English through Modern Dance taught by Tripura Kashyap.

As one of the “Friends of Deepalaya”, a group created to aid the overall strategic planning for Deepalaya, I enjoyed the challenge and opportunity to brainstorm ideas and initiatives to take Deepalaya forward.

On the occasion of the Founder's Day, 2019, I congratulate the Deepalaya family for 40 years of wonderful achievements and warmest best wishes for the next 40 and more.

*The writer is a world renowned classical dancer and philanthropist*



# Vehicle of change in a village



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~ Mathew Jose

As my bus was climbing up the Aravali mountains on a sunny morning, the driver navigated three-four times around the trucks coming against him.

It was my first journey to a sleepy hamlet called Gusbethi, near Sohna, in Haryana. During those days, the Internet and Google maps were not much familiar, hence we never tried finding out the geographical specifications of that place.

At a time when Gusbethi village was nowhere in the World Wide Web, the Deepalaya board decided to purchase 3-4 acres of land there, which was 67 km away from its Head Office at Shivaji Enclave in New Delhi. The management had decided to conduct the annual sports day for all the staff members of the organisation at Gusbethi in 1996 and, therefore, we were travelling in a group of around 100 plus staff to Gusbethi, where Deepalaya had made its first presence outside Delhi by owning a piece of land.

The village was 8 kilometres away from the nearest township and 2 km from the nearest commutable road. Finally, when we reached the place where we decided to conduct the sports meet, we realised that the only source of water was a pump house and a well 5-6 feet below the ground level under a huge banyan tree. It was basically a 'virgin' village.

## Trip to a tehsil that changed life

That was my first-ever visit. Thereafter, I can't recall how many times I have been to that place in the next one and a half decades. The authorities took an informal decision to start an extended programme of rehabilitation for street children from Delhi. It was decided to transfer the shelter home from Sanjay Colony, near Okhla Phase II, to Gusbethi.

Deepalaya had a transit home at Ram Nagar near Paharganj, where we brought children from railway platforms to the transit centre and counselled them for a better future. Deepalaya constructed a temporary two-room shed to accommodate staff and initiated the project, the Deepalaya Rural Development Research Centre (DRDRC), which was later changed to Deepalaya Gram for convenience.

The plan was to develop this place into an institutional hub for all the neglected and abandoned children with special focus on the children of sex workers and life-term convicts. It also became a home for senior citizens, a rehabilitation centre for the mentally retarded and all these neglected stayed together as a family for years to come. A school up to senior secondary, a vocational training centre, a hospital, a post office, agriculture field for cultivation, etc were all set up and built for their daily convenience.

The plan to shift the shelter home from Sanjay Colony to Gusbethi was initiated and the first building constructed as a shelter home was for the runaway children. The architecture of the building, with its curved terrace, was unique and one of its kind in that area. The project started with 33 children and went on to become a big family.

We planned to build a school within the campus to educate these children and thus began the construction of a primary school. The

school gradually became famous among the adjoining villages and children from all villages, even beyond 15 kms, including the nearby tehsil headquarters, started coming by.

To promote girl child education, we decided to provide free education to all the girls, at a time when even the Government of Haryana was not taking any action for the same. Even the transportation of children was free of cost. Deepalaya Gram was growing.

### **Growth of a Gram**

Gradually, we purchased around 25 acres of land from the villagers as well as from the companions of Deepalaya, who had purchased the land from the villagers in the initial days. Once upon a time a village, it was converted into an Institutional area with the approval from the Government of Haryana.

In the nineties, when we started the journey of Deepalaya Gram, there was a progression in community development. When women from the nearby villages complained to us that their condition was worse than buffaloes, who at least got their one-time bath and three-time meals every day, while they were denied even these minimum facilities, we decided to empower them by starting the SHG and Micro-finance programme.

Under these programmes, they began saving their own money and started several small enterprises. Due to these community development programmes, they got aware of their rights and this change translated into a massive movement.

Now, when I look back at all these developments in that formerly 'virgin' village area, it gives me immense pleasure that I too was instrumental in that change and this is one of my most proud achievements to this date.

*The writer is director, finance and administration, Udayan Care*



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The plan was to develop this place into an institutional hub for all the neglected and abandoned children with special focus on the children of sex workers and life-term convicts.



# Synergy in service

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~ Dr. Suman Khanna Aggarwal

Shanti Sahyog - a Gandhian NGO - set up its community service wing in 2004, with the adoption of the Sudhar Camp slum, near Kalkaji General Post Office. Since 2008 to date, Shanti Sahyog has been serving the underprivileged in 17 South Delhi slums in Kalkaji, Govindpuri areas.

Since 2017, Shanti Sahyog included Tughlakabad Village, New Delhi, in its catchment area. The Sahyog team of 35 dedicated workers helps the residents of these slums and villages to strive towards a better quality of life.

The aim is to tackle problems at the grassroots level, find sustainable solutions and provide amenities to the vulnerable - across education, healthcare, skill development, women empowerment, legal aid, shelter for the homeless etc.

Mahatma Gandhi said, "An ounce of practice is better than a ton of theory", and that is the driving force behind the vision of our NGO striving for "a just world free of poverty and violence".

This vision is similar to the Deepalaya vision: A society based on legitimate rights, equity, justice, honesty, social sensitivity and a culture of service in which all are self-reliant.

Our association started more than a decade ago - in 2006 - when we

enrolled our first batch of 25 girls living from Sudhar Camp slum, in Deepalaya. The tuition fees at that time was Rs 50 for the girl child, which was increased to Rs. 200 in subsequent years. Our annual education sponsorship of Rs 10,000 per child, at the time, was adequate to cover the cost of their education, which included books, stationery, transportation, uniforms and remedial classes after school.

However, after Deepalaya got its school recognised by the government and affiliated to the CBSE, it had to increase its tuition fees as the school had to pay government-fixed salaries to its teachers. We wrote to our sponsors that the annual education fees would henceforth be increased to substantially and it is to their credit that they all continued to sponsor their wards! This also reflects their faith in Shanti Sahyog as a transparent NGO that delivers quality education to urban slums through Deepalaya School.

Based on this urgency of the need to provide pre-school education to coach underprivileged children get admission in regular schools, we set up our first Shanti Sahyog play/pre-school in 2008 for slum children, opposite Sudhar Camp slum in Kalkaji, New Delhi.

We began with 20 children, but today our School has grown to its maximum capacity of 130 children. Since we wanted to extend our education project for the underprivileged to villages, we started our third play/pre-school in Tughlaqabad village on July 3, 2017. On completing their kindergarten, we enrol the children in Deepalaya School for primary and secondary education. Several of our students have passed Class 10 and 12 Boards with flying colours.

Over the years, Shanti Sahyog has sponsored the education of over 100 children in Deepalaya School. To begin with, we only sponsored girls, but gradually, due to persistent demand by their parents, we started sponsoring boy siblings, too.

Priority is given to orphans, children of widows or single mothers and keen learners who are unable to afford the cost of education in Deepalaya School. Shanti Sahyog continues to share a very cordial relationship with the management and staff of Deepalaya School. Our board members, education co-ordinator, pre-school and remedial class teachers, who attend PTMs in Deepalaya, find the principal and teachers very cooperative, helpful and eager to assist our students attain their full potential.

I, personally have interacted very closely with the former principal – Mrs Anita Sawhney for many years and found her very quick, sympathetic and wise in solving many problems, faced by our students and their parents during her tenure. I must also mention Mr. Sakhi John (former manager) and Helen for always being there to assist us.

On behalf of Shanti Sahyog, I congratulate the management and staff of Deepalaya School on their 40th anniversary for providing quality-oriented and value-based education to the underprivileged children in their neighbourhood. We wish them more success and achievement in the years to come.

I also take this opportunity to especially thank Mr A. J. Philip, secretary and chief executive, for his empathy and kind consideration through the years, which has enabled Shanti Sahyog community welfare programme, especially the literacy project with emphasis on girl child education, achieve significant landmarks.

*The writer is president and founder of Shanti Sahyog*

# Give from the heart

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~ Sakhi John

If you want happiness for an hour, take a nap  
If you want happiness for a day, go fishing  
If you want happiness for a year, inherit a fortune  
If you want happiness for a lifetime, help others

The thought of helping the needy was instilled in our minds when we were kids. Our parents taught us two things — humanity as a religion and the art of giving. They always used to tell us that “if you give something, give from your heart, not with your hands”.

We were taught to give, rather than to receive. Even in our tough times, we used to practise this, thanks to our parents, teachers and elders.

Both of us are regular visitors to Deepalaya, especially Sanjay Colony and Gusbethi. The children at these locations are very close to our hearts. We remember the days we stayed on the Gusbethi campus with our grandmother. It was to teach music and form a choir for the Children’s Home there. Those days were one of the most memorable days of our life!

We were privileged to receive love and affection from them which motivated us to do something for them. We found true happiness by helping our brothers and sisters!

As Gandhiji said, “Find yourself, dissolve yourself in the service of others”. The idea to generate funds through music was the brainchild of one of us. We had organised several stage shows. The amount we received for our performance from All India Radio, and the prize money we got from competitions like Swaram, Dhwani, YMCA, Harmony etc were contributed to this cause.

We still remember the first appeal message we made to our family friend Ms. Joyce Panicker (Poyce aunty). Within seconds, she responded to our appeal and promised us to give Rs. 20,000 for sponsoring two kids for a year. We are very happy that she has been continuing the sponsorship of two students, even after she immigrated to the US. This gave us a lot of motivation to generate funds for Deepalaya.

Our Facebook and WhatsApp friends and many well-wishers and relatives responded to our request and contributed wholeheartedly. Some of them had sponsored the education of some kids and we are happy that they have been continuing to support those kids. By the joint efforts of all our dear and near ones, we could collect more than Rs. 2 lakh for the noble cause. We are grateful to all our friends and relatives for this.

It has been our experience that when we are focused on giving others, especially the needy, we are less likely to become consumed by our own concerns and challenges. Giving had always provided us an opportunity to look beyond our own world and see the bigger picture.

As Winston Churchill said, “We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give”.

*Noel Sakbi and Joel Suni Sakbi are sons of Dr Sakbi John, Deepalaya board member, who donated a kidney to a poor man*

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# When occupation turns passion



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~ Varsha Narain

**D**eepalaya is not just a home of lights, it is a home of hope, dreams and aspirations for the children of the school. An effort that began in 1979 with five children, blossomed into a full-fledged English medium school up to Class VIII by the end of 1998.

The school grew from strength to strength and reached its pinnacle with 1600 children. The striking feature of the school was its gender parity -- we had equal number of girls and boys -- as a result of the effort which the team took collectively.

Over the years, the school at Sanjay Colony in a way became the emblem of the organisation. The confidence of the children grew by leaps and bounds because of the effort of the entire team and it would be inappropriate to single out anyone for special appreciation. Each one fulfilled his or her assigned role to the hilt.

The school children tirelessly participated in various activities to enhance its visibility in society and media. 'Abhinaya' - an interaction with other public school children through acting or be it 'Maitreeshree' -- to promote art and culture became the hallmark of the institution.

Students of the school also took part in the 'shop and share movement' to make people aware about the concept of



sponsorship. A trip to The Netherlands to raise funds through various performances in a span of three weeks requires a special mention.

The school in many ways became the showcase of Deepalaya and my heartfelt gratitude to each of the teachers and the staff for the relentless effort.

My association with Deepalaya was one of fulfilment and satisfaction. What began as an occupation became my passion and nothing satisfied me more than seeing a bright smile on the face of every child when they trooped in or left for the day. Their first and last words every day conveyed the joy they experienced every hour that they spent in the bustling school premises.

The school also took the initiative to bring in differently abled children from the underprivileged slums into the mainstream. Teacher training became an important component of the school activities and gradually, each one of the team members shared the same dream.

Today, I take immense pleasure when I meet the school children and see how much they have accomplished. I am given to understand that some of the students who grew under my guidance have come back to serve their alma mater. A proud moment for me indeed!

My desire to give, more than what I received reached a high point with the choice I made to become part of Deepalaya and transform the lives of children who joined the school. My best wishes to Deepalaya. I remain a friend forever.

*The writer is a former principal and administrator, Deepalaya School*

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What began as an occupation became my passion and nothing satisfied me more than seeing a bright smile on the face of every child when they trooped in or left for the day.



# Sense of synonymity

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~ Rajshree Thakur

It's only in Deepalaya's records that I'm known by my name, otherwise in the Mewat area of Haryana, where I worked more than 12 years, I was better known as "Deepalaya Madam."

What better identity and sense of belonging than for one to find such a platform for community and social work, where one can translate experience and creative ideas into practice to transform society!

What better identity and sense of belonging than for one to find such a platform for community and social work, where one can translate experience and creative ideas into practice to transform society!

It was in 1999 that I joined Deepalaya at Gusbethi, where there were hardly any facilities in any field, just two or three rooms on the verge of collapsing, a heavy hand pump, no connectivity and high commuting costs. It was virtually an island and the biggest challenge was -- where to start and how?

## **Mind the mindsets**

The mindset of the Mewat community is such that if you ask their

total number of family members, they do not even count the female children!

When we brought a gynaecologist at Bhutlaka village and asked the menfolk to inform the women to come for check-up, the male response was that the women were fine and that it would be better if the gynaecologist checked their buffaloes!

Gender taboos were another challenge. When we persuaded adolescent girls to take bath to promote health and hygiene/sanitation, a group of such girls informed us that they were not allowed to take bath with soap due to traditional taboos, which also barred them from watching television etc. Women in the community were also not supposed to attend open meetings to avoid them getting exposure. Nor were they allowed to take loans. So, it was a great challenge to change their regressive mindsets.

### **Challenges calling**

It was a great challenge that workers had to be got from outside as it was difficult to find them from within the area due to lack of education, especially of the females. The threats from Maulvis, who did not want awareness to spread in the community, was another big challenge.

The first step to meet these challenges was to visit and mix with them to share their problems, to know their needs and priorities and start thinking from the level of knowledge where they stood. With the help of institutions like Ghamroz Hospital and their chairperson, a lot of work in health could be done. It led us to form self-help groups with the help of the Mewat Development Agency. Today the SHGs formed and supported by Deepalaya are known for their uniqueness all over the state and even beyond.

The process of meeting challenges was a learning experience for the insights gained during empowering people in health/education/dairy farming/agriculture/child and women development etc.

We are very happy to see the impact of the Deepalaya work in Mewat, specially in our block Tauru, where intensive work was done. Not a single household in this block has been left untouched by one or the other programme. Awareness among the community on education can be seen in our own Deepalaya school, Gusbethi, which is the best in the area. The impact of Deepalaya training can be seen in the Mahila Federation, Kisan/Farmers group, Bankers Mitra etc. Deepalaya is one of the leading members of the NGO Federation.

The relationship between the staff, community and seniors is very strong and they share with me about the progress from time to time. Social workers, whom I particularly nurtured from the level of community workers, are still working as managers and are the strong pillars of Deepalaya.

We are always with Deepalaya, emotionally and mentally, if not physically.

*The writer played a pioneering role in starting Deepalaya's programmes in Nuh district of Haryana*

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# The driving force called Deepalaya



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~ Dhan Bahadur as told to Madhulika Singh

I was born in a remote village at the footsteps of the Himalayas in Nepal. My mother passed away when I was barely five or six years old. I don't remember her face but have faded memories with her.

I was a school dropout, never liked books and could never imagine myself to be a well read man. In search of better job opportunities during my early teenage years I came along with a friend to India. It was somewhere in the year 1985.

The friend was already working in India and his contacts helped me get a job as a domestic help. I still remember, it was at Thakurji's place that I started working. Gradually, I pulled off working in a few more houses. Y. Chakochan Sir was also one of them I was working for. After a year or two, Sir offered me a job in Deepalaya; he, I think, really liked my work.

I joined Deepalaya as a conductor/helper of the school van. Three years went by and I started developing an interest for driving. It took me no time to start learning it. With the help of my peers, I learnt driving and managed to get a driving licence.

CR Park was the first school of Deepalaya I started working with. Thereafter, I was shifted to Sanjay Colony School. After the advent

of CNG, all the diesel vehicles were required to be put to stop in the Delhi region. As the van I used to drive was a diesel one, it was sent to Gusbethi in Haryana district.

This even made me shift to Gusbethi where I worked for around one and a half years. During those years, my wife was pregnant and she had to be taken to Safdarjung hospital for periodic check-ups. Gusbethi is a village where there were no health facilities, which is why I and my wife decided to leave Gusbethi and shift to Sanjay colony. Again, in the year 2015, I came from Sanjay colony to Kalkaji School to serve, as the manger's driver had left.

I have been lucky to have two children – one elder daughter and one younger son. My wife also works; she is a beautician and has her small salon at home itself. She's utilising time well and also makes some money out of it. After her household chores were done, she used to be completely free before. Thus, I advised her to do something of her own as I feel staying idle is one of the worst things that can happen to someone.

Both of our kids study in Deepalaya School at Kalkaji. The school has the same set of facilities like other private schools. It has well developed infrastructure – sound school buildings, good desks and benches, regular water and power supply and beautiful greenery at the backyard. The best part about the school is that it is meant especially for low income families. This definitely is phenomenal to see. What more could I have asked for!

It has been quite easy for me to pay the fees of my kids, whereas I used to see people struggling to get their kids in a good school.

Working with Deepalaya, I also learnt about acquiring a house from the provident fund generated after working for five years here. So, about 20 years back, I decided to buy a house. I applied for a Delhi Development Authority house. The provident fund money was



directly transferred from Deepalaya to the DDA. By the year 2020, the whole instalments would have been paid. I believe this was possible only due to the support from Deepalaya. Of course, I might have had something of my own but not that soon.

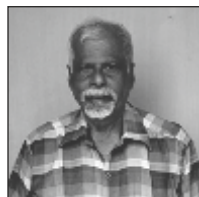
Deepalaya has always guided me through thick and thin. We both have seen each other growing. It has not only shown me the way, but my entire family. I never imagined my kids will ever attain quality education and aspire to do something big.

I will always cherish the memories made in Deepalaya after I quit from here, only when I'm too old to work. Haha! Not so soon.

*The writer is the single longest-serving employee of Deepalaya*



# Of sarkaari speedbreakers



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~ George Abraham as told to Madhulika Singh

I came to Deepalaya in 2003 with the reference of Mr T.M. Abraham. I joined the organisation as an administrative officer at the Sanjay Colony School, where I worked for four years and soon was transferred to Deepalaya School, Kalkaji, where I was promoted as a senior in administration.

My next journey in Deepalaya started at its head office at Janakpuri, HRC, as a liaison officer from August 2009 to March 2019, where I had been liaising with government offices. I was essentially entrusted with looking after all the government matters like properties, taxes, and negotiations to get affiliations.

## **Of zero bribes and transparency**

Working with Deepalaya had been a bumpy ride for me as there had been times I had struggled with attaining projects, projects which require government intervention. One of the most amazing aspects of Deepalaya is that it has never encouraged the concept of bribe and always maintained transparency, which is why my path to achieving goals for the organisation had always been difficult.

It is wisely said, “The path of truth is usually back-breaking” and it truly applies to Deepalaya. Without bribing, it became like a day

and night work for me, toiling for the negotiations to materialise, but the toil seemed worth it when the work was done in a fair manner.

After a chequered career that took me across the country, from Srinagar to Bhutan to Pune, and abroad for a stint with the Royal Oman Police for 10 years, I came back to India to start some new business venture, which was not much of a success. Looking at this state, Mr Abraham, who is himself one of its board members, had referred me to Deepalaya.

### **Of one step at a time**

While working with Deepalaya, there had been many such instances wherein I had taken opportunities to pitch in and we had gotten one step closer to our goal, but I would like to mention especially about the Deepalaya School at Kalkaji. The school was recognised up to Class 10 and later to Class 12 when it was upgraded. The school also got affiliated to the CBSE. Last year, in 2018, the government granted permission to the school to start the science stream.

Another milestone was achieved when Deepalaya got converted into a national NGO, which means it was just not limited to working in Delhi but all over India. It was followed by recognition of the Gusbethi School in Haryana, which was working till Class 8 before. It took about 7-8 years to get the educational institution recognised. Later on, recognition was received again within a short span of a year after the upgradation of the school till Class 10.

Milestones didn't stop here; we have had in our journey some big stepping stones. One of them is undoubtedly the completion certificate given from the DDA to Deepalaya School Kalkaji Extension (DSKE) and the Human Resource Centre at Janakpuri.

It had been wonderful to work with Deepalaya. I had had my own set of challenges and hurdles which never shook me and I had been honest to my work and persistently working to get things on track for the organisation. Surely, a sense of belongingness had been existing between me and Deepalaya

*The writer has been Deepalaya's interface with government authorities.  
Madhulika Singh is communication officer with Deepalaya*



# Revolution called Ramditi School



~ Anjali Ghatge

Deepalaya education projects start in inconspicuous ways, locating themselves in areas where there is poverty, squalor and filth, the target population usually being slum-dwellers. Ramditi J.R. Narang-Deepalaya School was one such project.

The catchment area was the Jagdamba slum camp and the illegal pucca colony of Panchsheel Vihar, near Malaviya Nagar, New Delhi. However, the school was most fortunate to have a significant benefactor in Mr. S.P. Narang, whose father was a freedom fighter. Mr. Narang had a newly constructed double-storied building in Panchsheel Vihar in the name of his mother, Ramditi, which he wished to donate for a worthy cause. Hence the name of the school — Ramditi J.R. Narang School. Deepalaya was the oblivious choice.

This brand new building for the poorest of the poor, located in an area which was a dust bowl, came to be totally transformative for the children. Deepalaya, on its part, undertook the onerous task of bearing the running cost of the programme and the cost of the furniture and maintenance.

The first two recruits on the staff were me as the principal and Laxman, the helper and my right-hand man. To build confidence in our school, Laxman and I started doing daily rounds of the slum

community. We started out with just two children. Over time, more children came and teachers were appointed. It was a milestone for us when we touched the figure of 120 children.

### **Balsabha as a bedrock**

I came to Deepalaya bringing two concepts -- value-based education and Balsabha. Value-based education involved teaching children truthfulness, cleanliness, accountability, sharing and caring and leadership. Balsabha provided a forum for children to speak their minds freely. This remarkable practice was conducted daily during the assembly.

To give an example, one day a child came running to school to say that his father had pinned his mother down on the table and was holding a knife to her neck. I sent Laxman immediately. He caught the man in the act and threatened him with police action. That helped matters settle down.

The school enrolment grew steadily and it started running in two shifts. There were hardly any dropouts.

### **Era of expansion**

As the form and substance of the school grew, so did the name. Volunteers from India and abroad came to teach science and English. Famous artistes like Madhumita Ray taught vocal music, and Rasika Mohan taught Bharatanatyam pro bono; and Mr. Sharma taught tabla. Visitors came from Modern School and American School, Delhi.

Delhi University acknowledged the merit of our school-cum-community project and sent M.A-Part I students for their statutory field work every year. I took our meritorious students to

public schools, where several were admitted, and later went on to join Delhi University, Miranda House, NIIT etc. Some of them continue to be in touch with me.

## **Outreach programme**

In concept and practice, this was an integral part of the programme and started shortly after the school began. A community project worker, Manjulata, was chosen for the purpose. Her job was to interact with the members of the community, base herself in a stable open area where she would play games with the children, teach them songs, tell them stories, thereby enticing them to come to school. She made daily rounds of the community and visited every home. To create a semblance of a library, boxes were installed with books. Joy Cyriac was appointed to monitor the education programme.

Despite our efforts, volatile elements would raise their heads from time to time. One day, an angry Maulvi barged into my office, accusing me of upsetting his madrassa by taking away his children. I welcomed him most warmly and courteously explained that I had no intention of upsetting his programme, but children needed to attend school in the morning, and those meant for the maulvi could go to him in the afternoon. He seemed satisfied and left. A year or so later he appeared again saying, “Madam ji, aap humari ladkiyon ko dakhil kar lo.”

“Zarur, Maulvi ji,” I said, “Yeh aap hi ka toh programme hai.” That was my moment of crowning glory.

I loved every moment of my stay with Deepalaya till June 2006, when I was diagnosed with tubercular meningitis.

*The writer is the first principal of Ramditi-Deepalaya School*

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One day a child came running to school to say that his father had pinned his mother down on the table and was holding a knife to her neck. I sent Laxman immediately. He caught the man in the act and threatened him with police action.





# Tale of two cities

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~ Jaswant Kaur

It was just another Saturday morning in September, 2014. Along with my husband, I arrived in the national Capital, to pursue my dream of working in Delhi. Chandigarh had its own advantages, but the popular perception is that the city is more suited for leading a happy retired life, considering the limited scope for professional growth.

As we reached the Deepalaya office for the interview, my heart beat faster. The “All-is-well” formula that Aamir Khan espoused in film “3 Idiots” didn’t seem to work for me. It was not a small interview after all, considering the presence of all Deepalaya board members on the panel.

I had prepared my first presentation, that too about an organisation I had no clue about. I had tried to use whatever information I could gather from the website and the annual reports, to draw up its roadmap for the next five years. I remember making a comment that the more I read about Deepalaya, the more I wanted to work with it.

The exciting story of a school in Khirki village, a moving classroom (Education on Wheels programme) and the story of Mariam, an SHG member that I read about in the annual report, had actually transported me to a fantasy world.

Back then, I was as naïve about the social sector, as a newborn is about this materialistic world. I was fascinated but at the same time, I was full of fear and anxiety. Would it be correct to leave the City Beautiful, where I grew up? What if it did not work out? It was certainly a huge risk. My husband stood by me like a rock as our new journey started.

### **Small town to bigger roles**

I had to join the organization just the day after we had reached Delhi. My husband was smart enough to choose a place just three kilometres from my office. Yet, the serpentine roads of Delhi, which Delhiites even today call “straight”, with topsy-turvy flyovers, confused us. And we were late by around half an hour.

I was struggling with Delhi roads in my initial days, when one day a colleague commented, “She is not serious”. That was a big blow for me.

There was a huge turmoil of emotions. I was happy, (as I got what I wanted), but scared and worried at the same time. Joining Deepalaya was a great learning experience. For me, it was a journey of self-realisation and exploration. What boosted my confidence was the note that I received from Mr T. K. Mathew, the then Secretary and Chief Executive, on one of the proposals that I had prepared. “Well done,” it said in green ink. It spurred my confidence. I had started making tiny strides in what, in another few months, became my passion.

### **Lessons well learnt**

There were ups and downs, but all that came with a great sense of learning. I remember my first visit to the Deepalaya School at Gusbethi. People found me quiet and observant, someone who won't react or respond to their queries easily, without knowing

things in detail. My thumb rule has always been to take informed decisions.

My visits to the microfinance project during the initial years, meeting women who had set up their own micro-enterprises, proved to be an icing on the cake. The way these women spoke and the kind of acceptance they got from their family members after joining the programme, motivated me to stick to my plans.

To get a feel of the grassroots work, Mr. Mathew asked me to conduct a reconnaissance survey in Noida slums, where we wanted to start a new project. It gave me a sense of how difficult it actually is to start a new project. We found it extremely difficult to find a suitable place for taking on rent. It was not easy to gain the confidence of people, who looked at us in a skeptical manner.

I was so excited I used to ask Mr. MJ Alam, the project coordinator, almost every day about the progress on the project. Every day was a new day. New challenges and new solutions were devised. The lessons that I learnt from the Noida project helped me in transitioning from a core fundraising person to a programmes' person.

One of the biggest lessons that I learnt while preparing project proposals or designs was to consult and involve people who have to work at the grassroots. Whatever I am today, I owe a lot to my colleagues and seniors.

The initial grooming, including Deepalaya's history, work culture, values, various concepts like planning-cum-micro-realisation (PCMR), helped me in facing one of the biggest changes Deepalaya had ever gone through. And, in transitioning from the corporate world to the development world. The monthly staff

meeting helped me in overcoming my hesitation to speak and in coming out of my comfort zone.

Deepalaya, too, has gone through different phases over these 40 years. When I joined, it was the beginning of a transition from a founder-led organization. I got an opportunity of working under the guidance of a founder-turned-CEO.

To propel the transition, the Deepalaya board took an informed decision and asked Mr A. J. Philip, who served as President for more than 18 years, to take over. The kind of decisions that were taken during that time made me a much stronger person.

Mr. Philip gave me a plethora of opportunities. A meek girl, who came from Chandigarh and would think several times before uttering a word, represented Deepalaya on several platforms. He once said, “You are very friendly with people. Maintain some distance, they should not take you for granted.”

To Deepalaya, I owe several firsts – Be it a presentation, a public speech, a roundtable conference, a public meeting, a pitch, several visits to the NCR, inner regions of Haryana or UP (I would have certainly not travelled to that extent), my first flight to Mumbai, Kerala etc, first leadership workshop, or the highly acclaimed Dasra Social Impact Leadership programme... the list seems to be endless. I

Be that as it may, one thing that would remain the same – a small-town Chandigarh girl, whose world comprised her husband, son, and a nine-to-six job, had changed entirely. Even 360 degrees would be an under-estimation for describing the change that happened to me. Thank you, Deepalaya!

*The writer is Executive Director, Deepalaya*

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## Deepalaya Milestones

Educated **339681** children

Given institutional care to **1561** children

**16882** women associated with us

Provided healthcare benefits to **804455**  
people

Given vocational training to **14261**

Rehabilitated **4341** children with  
special needs



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