

Sister Lucy Kurien



The founder and director of Maher, a community and interfaith organization for abused and destitute women and children, headquartered in Pune, India. The city's slums were her first introduction to the conditions of the poor. At the age of nineteen, she decided she wanted to become a nun and joined the Holy Cross order, which focused on teaching and nursing.

However, she was inspired by Mother Teresa's work and felt called to be closer to the people she wanted to help, directly touching the lives of the poor. In 1989 she joined the HOPE organization, founded by the Holy Cross Convent to help abused women. In 1991, while she was there, she had an encounter that would inspire her life's work. A pregnant woman came to her asking for shelter from her alcoholic husband whom she thought would beat her. Sister Lucy did not know where to send her since the convent did not take laypeople. She had to send her away but promised to help the following day. That evening, the woman's husband had doused her in alcohol and set her fire. Both the woman and baby died.

This incident inspired Sister Lucy to found Maher to help women like the one she was not able to save. After this traumatic incident, Sister Lucy established Maher, to help destitute women regardless of caste, creed, or religion. It took almost seven years to get the needed support, but in 1997, the first Maher house opened in the small village of Vadhu Budruk, on the outskirts of Pune. Currently Maher has 38 short-stay and long-stay homes in the Indian states of Jharkhand, Kerala, and Maharashtra. In total they house over 860 street children and more than 320 destitute women. In the short-term, Maher provides immediate shelter and interventions. In the long-term, the community focuses on upending India's systemic violence, exploitation, and segregation—of men and women, but also of rich and poor. She was felicitated with Nari Shakti Award in 2016.

Dr. Mandakini Amte



Mandakini Amte popularly known as Manda Amte is a medical doctor and social worker from Maharashtra, India. She along with her husband, Dr. Prakash Amte were awarded the Magsaysay Award for 'Community Leadership in 2008 for their philanthropic work in the form of the Lok BiradariPrakalp amongst the Madia Gonds in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra and the neighbouring states of Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. She is the daughter-in-law of Baba Amte.

She is not a millionaire but has treated a million. She is not a high profile socialite, yet when anyone falls ill in an area of 200 square kilometre that covers over 5 lakh people, the first two people they are likely to think of is her and her husband. She may not have the world at her feet, but she is the world to the lives she has saved in over three decades. That is Dr. Manda for you who never weighs her sacrifice or her achievements.

For over 20 years, theirs remained the only medical facility for over 100 square mile area that today covers the states of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Chattisgarh. Even today, despite many government healthcare centres the tribals trust them so much that they still come from as far as 200 kms for treatment.

It has not been easy for either Dr. Manda, her husband or the scores of volunteers who began or later joined them to work tirelessly without either financial help from the government or patients (the tribals had no concept of money). Yet they have carried on and inspired by their work, many strangers have come forward to help. Today their little community centre called 'Lok BiradariPrakalp' houses a Residential School providing education up to 12th standard (managed by her son Aniket), an animal rescue centre and orphanage (perhaps the only one of its kind for animals in the world), a vocational training centre and a bank. All of these were made possible by individual philanthropists or organisations who came, saw and were so moved, they promised to help and did. Ironically, the bulk of the financial help in the initial few decades of their work, came from foreign institutions and charities. In India most of the help has trickled through from individuals (many of them doctors who set up early camps or send medical supplies) across the country.

Dr. Girish Kulkarni



A professor in a local college, Girish had grown up seeing mushrooming brothels across Ahmednagar. He set up Senahalaya 23 years ago and started visiting the brothels and counseling women, trying to spread awareness about sexually transmitted diseases and also trying to build confidence in the women that they could lead a new life in the mainstream. His tireless efforts has ensured that no minor girls are bought and sold in Ahmednagar. Today he runs a hostel for the children of sex workers, a hospital for HIV positive women and vocational training center. Girish's actions almost two decades ago are proof that small actions can have a large impact. Today, Snehalaya works across 17 projects, that over 100,000 people have benefitted from, saving countless lives and giving dignity back to those marginalised by society. Snehalaya means 'Home of Love', and was founded in 1989 to provide support for women, children and LGBT communities, who have been affected by HIV and AIDS, trafficking, sexual violence, and poverty. It operates in Ahmednagar, a town and district in the agricultural region of Maharashtra, India, and provide services to over 15,000 beneficiaries.

Sumita Ghose



Sumita Ghose is the founder and managing director of Rangсутra, a social enterprise which seeks to bring about socio economic development and inclusive growth in rural India by engaging both: the community and the market. Rangсутra is owned by 1800 rural artisans- most of whom are women. Other owners are like minded organizations and people committed to ensuring sustainable livelihoods for rural artisans in India. Rangсутra provides design, marketing, technical and organizational support needed to make crafts and allied rural industries into viable enterprises, so that they provide regular home / village based employment to 3500 rural artisans. Rangсутra is a company of the people, for the people, by the people. Rangсутra was created to ensure regular work and market access to artisans. Artisans are co owners and shareholders in the enterprise. They are part of board of directors and have a say in costing, planning, production and wages. The framed company share certificate prominently displayed on the wall of an artisan's hut in rural Rajasthan signifies a small but important transformation in many lives. For over 3000 weavers, embroiderers and artisans who have formed the company, Shares are their new savings, as valuable as the chunky silver they have invested in for centuries.

70% of Rangсутra's artisan owner-workers are women. The work and money they earn through this work have given these women more say at home. These women now want to send their daughters to school and some have become group leaders in their villages, motivating other women to follow in their footsteps.

Dr. Radhike Khanna



A National Award winner who has helped many specially-abled girls live a life of dignity for over 20 years, is the owner of Om Creations Trust. Started 25 years ago, the trust helps special people chase their dreams and become independent.

Radhike, during her college days, was inspired by the principal of a special school, who could very easily connect with the students. She then pursued her doctorate in special education during which, she put all her heart and soul into learning about the differently-abled. She then started Om Creations in 1991.

She wanted to provide a life of dignity to her students and planned a five-year long diploma course which included painting, sculpting, baking, cooking, chocolate making, etc. All this is taught at SPJ Sadhana School where students above three years of age are enrolled. After the course is completed, the girls come to Om Creations where they get to work in their area of interest. Om Creations has three centers across Mumbai.

She had to face a lot of challenges initially as she had to deal with the stereotype that girls could do nothing. But Dr Khanna stands proud today as her organization has a success rate of 93 per cent. Radhike's main aim is to also make sure that her girls are paid well and are not considered a burden in their families. The best part is that the girls joining Om Creations are mostly from a low-income background. After completing their course, they earn and help their family live a life of dignity.