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Ma Amritanandamayi leads the way for disaster relief

By Bindu Balakrishnan

So much has happened since the tsunami hit the South East Asian coasts three years ago. Most of us have moved on, but for tens of thousands of people whose lives were affected by the killer waves, the word normalcy is nothing but a distant dream.

And yet not every one has forgotten the plight of these victims. An organization that is still involved in rehabilitating tsunami victims and rebuilding communities in India and Sri Lanka, is the Mata Amritanandamayi Center (M.A. Math). Even today it is working tirelessly to help people back on their feet.

One of M.A. Math's several skills is in the area of swift and efficient response to disasters, both in the form of recovery as well as relief operations. In India alone, M.A. Math has worked with victims following the earthquakes in Gujarat and in Jammu and Kashmir, the fire at a school in Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu that took the lives of more than a 100 children, the floods in Mumbai and needless to say, the tsunami disaster. In each of these cases, the M.A. Math came swiftly to start relief work. Its selfless workers have almost always been stationed in the devastated places till relief and rehabilitation work has been completed.

With tsunami alone, an amazing amount of work has been done so far. Till today, M. A. Math's institutions have spent many hours each day in rebuilding homes and rehabilitating affected villagers. Over 6,200 homes are being built across Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry, Andra Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Sri Lanka. In several of these areas, the organization is also involved in rebuilding roads, schools, community halls and healthcare centers. Jobs have been created for the villagers and new skills taught to them, so as to help them in their rehabilitation process. More than 1,000 people have availed of the vocational training that is being provided in several areas. Many sewing machines, nets and boats have been given to people to restart their lives, along with the necessary investment to start their trade. An orphanage was specially built to house children affected by tsunami and the organization is taking responsibility for their education and their future. And this is just the tip of the iceberg.

To date, M.A. Math is the single largest contributor towards tsunami relief, pledging 23 million US dollars, I was tempted to take a closer look at some of the community service work that is going on and here is what I found.

M. A. Math was formed only two decades ago with the objective of selflessly serving the community around them. In a short time, it has grown to become one of the most active and prominent NGOs in India. It is also one of the few non-profits in India that is recognized by the U.N.

Inspired by Mata Amritanandamayi Devi; or Amma as she is more commonly known, the M.A. Math has started innumerable humanitarian services. There are free food and clothing programs, charitable hospitals, medical camps, hospices, disaster relief programs, free homes for the poor and the needy, orphanage, schools, educational institutions, widows' pension scheme, free legal advice, preservation of nature.....the list goes on.

The first educational facility started by the organization is the Amrita Vidyalayam primary school in Kodungallur, Kerala which was inaugurated in 1987. More than 60 education facilities have been established throughout India since then, including engineering, management, IT and medical schools.

These institutions are now part of Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, or Amrita University, recognized as a Deemed University. It has attracted the attention of the President of India and is in partnership with the Indian Science Research Organization, the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre and international companies such as Cognizant Technology Solutions and Cadence Design Systems.

In order to encourage talented but financially poor students to take up higher studies, the M.A. Math has instituted the Amrita Scholarships. In addition, volunteers also create endowments, the interest from which is utilized for scholarships.

Significant strides have been made in the area of healthcare too. Every branch ashram across India has a free medical dispensary! The main ashram in Amritapuri, Kerala houses a charitable hospital which treats thousands every week. A cancer hospice near Mumbai and an AIDS care centre is now fully functional in Trivandrum. Community outreach programs range from house calls for the terminally ill, to neurological care camps and free treatment for epilepsy and diabetes.

The crowning glory amongst all healthcare facilities is AIMS, a 1300-bed super specialty hospital in Kochi, Kerala which is dedicated to providing quality care to all, regardless of their ability to pay. Started in 1998, this facility has already grown to become one of the most exhaustive and complete healthcare centers in the country. Complex life-saving surgeries are done free of cost by the most capable doctors for patients coming from the underprivileged sections of the society. Post surgical care and medicines are also provided free of cost. By 2005, the number of cardiovascular patients being treated by this center was more than that of any other center in the world.



Another area where the organization is keenly focused on is in securing the future of the girl child and for nurturing and empowering women. There is emphasis on giving girls all necessary educational and recreational inputs that put them on equal platform with the boys. They gain tremendous self esteem through the organization's school system and the recreational centers and become equipped to compete and excel in every area of education, arts and sports.

Mass marriages are conducted by the organization, to help poor women start their married life with dignity and respect.

More than 100,000 pension plans have been given to the old and the handicapped. These people will receive a monthly pension every month for as long as they live.

Orphanages run by the M. A. Center are also unique. Amrita Niketan for e.g., is dedicated to caring for approximately 700 children from the most disadvantaged sections of society, mainly from tribal villages.

These children receive an excellent education along with other children in the community at M.A. Center's Sanskrit Secondary School. The school is the largest school in Kerala that teaches Sanskrit as the first language, and is considered one of the best schools in its district.

The children here excel in music, sports and dance. Extracurricular activities at the school now include classical dance and music, panchavadyam, tabla lessons, and computers. These children receive free coaching in all these areas from experts. One innovation is that there is a group of girls studying panchavadyam. Actually, girls playing panchavadyam is unheard of elsewhere—traditionally, only boys play it. This is a live example of how every girl child is encouraged to redefine boundaries and explore new avenues.

Who is this woman behind such a gigantic humanitarian effort? Who is this person who is known across the world as Amma or as the hugging saint?

Amma was born on the 27th of September 1953, in a small poor fishing village in the Kollam district of Kerala. Her parents gave her the name Sudhamani.

Sudhamani spent the years of her childhood and teens immersed in intense spiritual practices in order to present a living example for the world. Even as a small child, she could often be found absorbed in deep meditation, totally oblivious of her surroundings. By the age of five, she had already begun composing devotional songs laden with deep mystical insight.

For the past 35 years, 'Amma' as she is known all over the world, has dedicated her life to uplifting human suffering through the simplest of gestures – an embrace. In this intimate manner, Amma had blessed and consoled more than 25 million people throughout the world.

When someone asked Amma why she receives every person who comes to her in a loving embrace Amma replied, "If you ask the river, 'why do you flow?' what can it say?"

Amma spends most of her waking hours receiving the distressed and all who come to her for comfort, day after day without a break.

Amma has earned international recognition for her outstanding contribution to the world community. She is recognized as an extraordinary spiritual leader by the United Nations and by the people all over the world. She has graced the Parliament of World Religions and has won several accolades from several countries for the work done by her, in addition to the 2002 Gandhi-King Award and the interfaith award at NY in 2006.

Once a press reporter asked Amma how it was possible for her to embrace each and every one in the same loving way, even if they were unpleasant or beset with diseases. Amma replied, "When a bee hovers over a garden of varied flowers, what it beholds is not the difference between the flowers but the honey within them. Similarly Amma sees the same Supreme Self in each and every one."

As Dr. Jane Goodall, while presenting Amma with the 2002 Gandhi-King Award for Non-violence said, "She stands here in front of us. God's love in a human body."

For more information on Amma and her humanitarian activities, please visit <http://www.amritapuri.org>. The link to the U.S. website is <http://www.amma.org>.

MATA AMRITANANDAMAYI CENTER PRESENTS AN EVENING WITH HARIHARAN LIVE IN CONCERT

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[Hear what people have to say about Hariharan's concert tour so far, and the making of the Atlanta concert on podioindia.com a premium podcast heard worldwide by Piya and Deb.](#)



By Jeeva Krishnasamy

If you light a lamp for somebody, it will also brighten your path-Buddhist saying.

"India Sudar" Educational and Charitable Trust, is a social welfare organization established by IT Professionals. It is dedicated to educating poor and orphan children. "India Sudar" believes education is a critical requisite for a better and powerful India.

It all started with six friends who wanted to make a difference in the world, but by giving something back to India, their

beloved country. They founded "India Sudar" in 2004 February and after three successful years; it has around 240 active members now.

The trust is helping the cause of primary education in Tamilnadu, Pondicherry, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, by partnering with nine other organizations. At any given time, around 1100 children are the beneficiaries of these initiatives. Educating these children is done by deploying teachers for selected orphanages to provide educational training continuously, providing books, fees and stationeries for every academic year for selected schools. Some of our members provide direct teaching services, and we also adopt a child every year and help him/her with all the academic needs.

The organization offers basic computer education free of cost and also conducts seminars, self development programs and technical training.

We have an internal team for every state involved in the endeavor and these teams takes care of identifying sites like children's homes, orphanages, schools in rural villages etc. Members study their needs, plan and execute activities and visit the existing sites to monitor the progress in the corresponding States.

We have a global "INVENTOR" team which takes care of creating awareness in the Public about the necessity of education, designs new projects based on local requirement, and creates presentations/articles about our Organization. The team also works continuously on adding new members and on fund raising.

Our Trustees meet once in two months to finalize the Projects for the subsequent months.

The organization hopes to expand its services to North India, set up a digital Library for the benefit of rural children, along with a permanent Centre to educate the children of "Brick Chamber" workers in Tamilnadu.

To know more about our organization, please Visit www.indiasudar.org, <http://indiasudar.wordpress.com>

Our Founder Mr. Udhaya Kumar can be reached at admin@indiasudar.org

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